

Hoffmann looks to take bite out of Big Apple; New Ulm native has chance to make Yankees roster

By Jim Rueda

Free Press Sports Editor Published Dec. 27, 2009

NEW ULM — Jamie Hoffmann may not know what the long-range future holds for him, but he's pretty sure he knows where he'll be come February.

He'll be taking cuts and chasing down fly balls in sunny Tampa Bay, Fla., as one of the newest members of the New York Yankees.

"I'm pretty excited about this opportunity," Hoffmann said earlier this week. "The Yankees have a great tradition, and now I'm getting a chance to be part of it."

Hoffmann, 25, a New Ulm native who helped lead his high school team to the program's only state title in 2002, has been in the Los Angeles Dodgers organization for the past six years. He made his major league debut with the Dodgers last season, hitting .182 with a home run, two doubles and seven RBIs in 14 games.

At the conclusion of the season, Hoffmann was eligible for the Rule 5 Draft and, on Dec. 10, was selected by the Washington Nationals. Before he could even pack his bags, however, the Nationals traded Hoffmann to the Yankees to complete a deal that sent right-handed pitcher Brian Bruney to Washington a few days earlier.

"I had been talking to my agent and based on the contract I had, we knew the Rule 5 thing could happen," Hoffmann said. "I was just sitting at home and got the phone call and found out I had been traded to the Yankees. It all happened pretty fast."

Although the right-handed hitting outfielder enjoyed his time in the Dodger organization, he's looking forward to a fresh start.

"I look at this as a good thing. Any time a team trades for you, it shows they have some interest.

"It's a great sign. It's an opportunity I'm looking forward to."

The Yankees also are looking forward to having Hoffmann in spring training.

"We feel Hoffmann's got great makeup," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said on the yankees.com Web site following the trade. "He's got ability and we project him in the future as an everyday type of player. It will be interesting to see how he mixes in."

Hoffmann split most of last season between Triple-A Albuquerque and Double-A Chattanooga. In the minors he batted .291 with 10 homers, five triples, 23 doubles, 64 RBIs, 15 stolen bases and a .390 on-base percentage.

Hoffmann played some junior hockey out of high school and was set to join the Colorado College team in the fall of 2003. Despite being an eighth-round pick of the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes, he signed with the Dodgers in summer 2003 to embark on a professional baseball career.

For the past four seasons he has been rated by Baseball America as the Best Defensive Outfielder in the Dodgers' minor league system. Hoffmann says he's willing to play any position the Yankees want.

"I've never been to New York, so it will be different," he said. "It's a big market team, but L.A. is a big market team as well." As a Rule 5 selection, the Yankees must keep Hoffmann on the 25-man major league roster all season or return him to the Dodgers for half of the \$50,000 selection fee. Whether he sticks with the Yankees or goes back to L.A., Hoffmann said he plans to keep on playing as long as they'll let him.

"I don't have any time table. I'm just going year by year.

"It's fun every day going to work — if you can call it work. I'm happy playing baseball."

