

Chris Hammond

Contributed by Chris Yandek
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The San Diego Padres came off the 2004-2005 season just missing the playoffs through the National League wildcard. The National League West is always a very tough division with the San Francisco Giants, Los Angeles Dodgers, and Arizona Diamondbacks. The San Diego Padres added relief pitcher Chris Hammond to their bullpen and rotation with a one year contract. At the age of 39 he has a lot of experience and a lot to prove.

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{audio}http://thesportsinterview.com/mp3/ChrisHammond.mp3{/audio}

First off how are you?

"Not bad."

What are your thoughts on joining the San Diego Padres for this season being a relief pitcher in their bullpen and any idea what your role will be?

"Well, I am excited to be with the San Diego Padres this year. Especially coming into a bullpen like they had last year. Pitching in a bullpen like that makes myself pitch even better. I don't want to be the pitcher that's like our bad apple. I talked with manager Bruce Bochy and I told him I will pitch whenever you want. If you don't pitch me I am not going to complain and when you do I will be ready from the first to the ninth. I am not the pitcher that expects to be the setup guy or the long man. Whatever is needed from me in that game I will be ready."

What guy has come to camp and surprised everyone with how well he is performing? Maybe someone that might surprise the public in 2005?

"I haven't seen any real surprises. I think everyone is pretty much coming into camp and getting ready for the season. That's what spring training is for most people. I think everyone is just tuning themselves to get ready for the season."

It's been two seasons since you had your spectacular 0.95 ERA season for the Atlanta Braves. Do you remember most of the National League hitters?

"No. Not really. I am not the type of pitcher that looks at a lot of films and tries to figure out how to get guys out. I think most guys know that my best pitch is my change up. I throw it as many times as I can if it works and if it doesn't I am going to get beat with my change up. I pretty much am going to go at every batter the same way. I am going to get ahead and throw lots of change ups. I don't think it's that important to remember who is in the National League and who is in the American League. Hopefully it continues to work out."

After coming off the Disabled list last season, you didn't allow a home run in the second half of the season. What do you attribute that to? Was it the rest, did you develop a new pitch, or was it something else?

"It really was being used more than once a week. I started pitching more and well. When you are pitching three times a week you aren't getting much rest. I told Bruce Bochy if you want me to pitch to the best of my ability you got to let me pitch. I would pitch one game a week and then pitch four games another. That is what really put a strain on my arm. Just pitch me in as much as you can without overusing me."

What are your thoughts on San Diego Padres manager Bruce Bochy thus far and what you have learned from him?

"I have always heard he was a players' manager. Sterling Hitchcock told me you are going to like him. He manages his pitchers really well. That's what I am looking forward to. In the American League I guess it's harder to manage the pitching. Hopefully I will get a few more opportunities to pitch. It's spring training and I haven't seen him that much. Once the season starts we'll communicate a little more than we are now. I pitch once every four days. I am looking forward to seeing a lot of him this season."

Being in the National League West you are going to face the San Francisco Giants a lot. Do you think you can get Barry Bonds out with runners on late in the eighth inning?

"Yeah. Just like anything you make your pitches and keep them off balance. He's the most outstanding hitter I have ever seen. People do get him out. I don't want to face him, but if I have to I am going to have to try and stay away from him, come back inside, and keep him off balance. Hopefully my game is better than his on a particular day."

What are some of the differences between the National League and American League from a pitcher's standpoint?

"I think the biggest difference from the American League and National League is that in the American League throughout the whole line up everyone can hit. In the National League I have seen in the eight and ninth hitter who isn't a strong hitter in your lineup and the pitcher as well. It's usually not that strong. You can take away two batters in your lineup. You can easily pitch around a couple of guys to get to the bottom of the lineup. You really can't do that in the American League."

You have been in the major leagues for 12 years with the Cincinnati Reds from 1990-1992, Florida Marlins from 1993-1996, Boston Red Sox in 1997, Florida Marlins again in 1998, Atlanta Braves in 2002, New York Yankees in 2003, and last year Oakland in 2004. What's it like to play for so many teams in only a dozen years and move from place to place as a pitcher?

"When I was younger you kind of get discouraged going from team to team and not staying in one particular spot. What I have come to is a conclusion now through my Christian faith and living my life through Jesus that I have had three pretty good years in the past few years. People have asked me why I didn't stay with the same team. I started thinking and I don't know that answer. Me and my wife were praying about it and we had a bible study, and came up with the answer that God doesn't want me on the same team. He wants me to keep moving on year after year and help the people who need to get to heaven. I finally understood the truth on how to live a Christian life. That's all I really care about, to live the Christian life. Every year I go out to help people live the Christian life. I am one of the hardest workers on the team, and every time I am called upon I am going to give it my best. I am going to play out the rest of my career, but that's all I think about is who on my team needs help in his Christian walking."

I think in general you can also give a lot to younger pitchers also since you have been around for a while as a pitcher.

"Yeah. Once the season starts and we find out who is in the bullpen and whose going to be starting. They can come to me anytime because I have seen everything pretty much in baseball. I don't like to preach to them about baseball, but I throw out a comment here and there. If they want to know anything more or anymore help they can come to me after I make the comment on the game. I am not one of those guys where the younger guys run when the older guys are coming around the corner. I have a lot of fun and am not a loud talker. I look forward to every year meeting new guys and hopefully learn something from the new guys."

Just an opinion. What are your thoughts on all the latest steroid talk in baseball and as a player do you think the drug testing in baseball is where it needs to be?

"I think the drug testing is right where it needs to be if not harsher. I think the penalty for the minimum harshness should be more stern than they are. Nobody wants this to get back to where it was. I think they should put their foot down and the first punishment should be really harsher in baseball."

What do you think about congressman Tom Davis calling the players before Congress in this trial going on this week of mid March 2005?

"I don't think that will do anything to help the cause. I think everybody knows whose pretty much done it and bringing them to court. I don't think it's good, but if any more good can come out of it hopefully it does come out because they have to do all the court hearings. I really don't have a good or bad thought until it's all over and I see the results."

Finally, what's the most important goal you think for this team's season?

"I think to score runs. I think our starting pitching is as good as you can get. If you score a lot of runs you got to use your pitching to keep the other team from scoring. I think if we stay healthy we'll have the pitching. Looking at our lineup it's positive all around our team. I think we have home run hitters and guys who can get on base. Hope we get off to a good start, stay healthy, and have some fun."