



NEWS RELEASE

EASTERN LEAGUE AFFILIATE OF THE NEW YORK METS SINCE 1992

Conforto's Journey: One Step at a Time

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." –Lao Tzu, Chinese philosopher

The commute to work for a St. Lucie Met left-fielder is far from taxing. Less than 250 feet separates the third-base dugout at Tradition Field from the corner outfield spot.

On April 9, 2015, those in the crowd of just over 2,000 are still finding their seats as the public address announcer runs through the New York Mets Single-A affiliate's Opening Night lineup.

Michael Conforto adjusts his cap and takes a breath. With his metal cleats scraping the wooden floor beneath him, he makes his way to the top of the dugout steps. The crunching sound of metal-on-gravel as he crosses the warning track segues to the serene, nearly inaudible, soundtrack of a nimble athlete striding on a luscious expanse of grass.

The trot for Conforto takes less than 10 seconds.

The journey that will take the 22-year-old to the World Series has begun.

Starting in the Sunshine State

The Mets made Conforto their first pick in the 2014 draft following his stellar collegiate career at Oregon State University. The smooth-swinging outfielder was named the Pac-12 Player of the Year twice and led OSU to the College World Series in 2013. Conforto dove into the draft pool as arguably the highest-ranked collegiate position player after hitting .354 with the Beavers.

After being selected 10th overall, Conforto joined the Brooklyn Cyclones in the New York-Penn League and opened his professional career on a ten-game hitting streak. In 42 games that season, the Washington native hit .331 over 42 games.

With his comfort level in the pro ranks set, Conforto settled in for his first Spring Training in March 2015. The young outfielder got his first chance to impress when the Mets summoned him from the Minor League side of camp for a Grapefruit League game on March 7. Thrust into the starting lineup against Major League competition, Conforto went 3-for-4 with three RBI.

"I felt very comfortable. My goal was to just come over here and have fun and embrace the moment," said Conforto.



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He worked his way into four more Big League games and compiled a .364 batting average in eleven at-bats.

For most players, the next stop after Brooklyn in the Mets' Minor League system is Savannah, Georgia. Conforto proved that he was not like most players. When camp broke, the Mets decided that Conforto was ready for High-A, and added him to the St. Lucie roster.

He wasted little time proving the Mets were right to have him skip Low-A. In his first 21 games, he hit .313, belted six home runs, including a grand slam, and collected 19 RBI. By late May, the Mets knew he was ready.

Next Stop: Binghamton

Of all the towns in the Eastern League, Altoona, Pennsylvania proved to be the most fitting place for Conforto to join the B-Mets. Conforto's father, Mike, grew up in Altoona before becoming a star linebacker at Penn State University. Nearly a hundred relatives still call the area home.

After waiting patiently for two months, B-Mets manager Pedro Lopez finally got to pencil Conforto's name into his starting lineup on May 30 for the middle contest of a three-game series against the Curve at Peoples Natural Gas Field.

Conforto went hitless in his Double-A debut, but worked out three walks, showing off the patient eye that made him so attractive to the Mets. His first hit as a B-Met came the next night as he yanked a game-tying triple down the right-field line in the eighth inning of Binghamton's 5-3 win over the Curve in the finale.

"I'm looking forward to our next trip to Altoona in August. My family is planning a big reunion the next time we're in town," said Conforto.

As is turned out, Conforto would not get the chance to be with his family in August. Fate would have other plans.

The Clamor Begins

Just over one year removed from the collegiate ranks, Conforto got comfortable at Double-A in a hurry. He hit safely in 16 of his first 18 games and owned a .400 batting average in his first three weeks in the Eastern League.

With Conforto leading the B-Mets' lineup and the New York Mets offense spinning its wheels, the murmurs of a possible promotion began to materialize among the fan base. Mets first-round picks playing for the B-Mets have always received plenty of attention. No one received more than Conforto.

By late June, interview requests for the B-Mets star left fielder arrived on a near-daily basis. It seemed like every New York City paper wanted to know when



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Conforto would be a New York Met. Even SportsNet New York, the cable home of the Mets, sent a crew up to Binghamton to shoot a story on Conforto for *Mets Insider*.

"In college we had a saying, '200 Feet'. Just keep your focus on what's 200 feet in front of you...It was a metaphor for driving a car at night," said Conforto in early July as he tried to block out the noise.

A Taste of the National Stage

While Conforto became a well-known name among Mets fans, the outfielder put himself onto the national stage with his performance in the MLB Futures Game in Cincinnati on July 12. Conforto collected a pair of singles and scored a run as the starting left-fielder for the US Team.

While his offensive work was strong, it was his defensive play that stole the show. With the World Team leading in the third, Ketel Marte attempted to score from second on a single to left. Conforto fired a perfect strike to nab Marte at the plate. The inning-ending play became one of the defensive highlights of the prospect-studded event.

In his first five games back with the B-Mets, he went 8-for-19 with two doubles, a triple, two homers and five RBI. The Eastern League recognized him as their player of the week.

Meanwhile, the Big League Mets seemed overmatched. By late July, the team had scored the second fewest runs in the Majors for the month.

It was time.

The Big Show

The promotion that so many expected came at the most unexpected time.

It was July 24. The B-Mets were in Trenton for a weekend series against the Thunder. That Friday morning Conforto and a collection of his teammates were working out at the New Jersey Athletic Club.

Manager Pedro Lopez's phone rang during his personal workout. After a few quick exchanges a smile spread across Lopez's face. With his phone still pressed against his ear, he made his way over to Conforto who was in the midst of a hamstringing stretch.

"You're going up to the Big Leagues," Lopez said.

"I was just in disbelief. It's just one of those moments that I will never forget," said Conforto.



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Within a few hours, Conforto was in the Mets clubhouse in Queens set to make his Major League debut against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Sporting the number 30, Conforto took the field that night as the 1,000th player to appear for the Mets in the team's 54-year history. He went 0-for-3 with an RBI groundout.

He was a Major Leaguer.

The following day, Conforto picked up his first Big League hit by ricocheting an infield single off the glove of Dodgers pitcher Zach Lee. The bouncer was part of Conforto's sparkling four-hit night.

Ups and (Almost) Downs in the Big Leagues

Despite a banner opening weekend in the Majors, Conforto cooled off with four straight hitless games.

On July 31, Mets General Manager Sandy Alderson made the trade that changed the team's entire season, acquiring Yoenis Cespedes from the Tigers. With a glut of outfielders, the Mets optioned Conforto back to the minors on August 1. Conforto's brief taste of the Big Leagues had come to an end after just one week.

Or so it seemed.

After dealing with neck discomfort, Kirk Nieuwenhuis landed on the disabled list on August 2. Michael Conforto, just a few hours away from flying out west to join the Triple-A 51's, was recalled to the Big League roster.

In his first at-bat back to action on August 3, Conforto belted a three-run homer against the Marlins in Miami. His first Major League homer set the tone for a 12-1 win that pushed the Mets into first place in the division.

The Mets would never look back. With the addition of Cespedes, New York went 31-11 from July 31 to September 4. They clinched their first regular season division crown since 2006 with a win in Cincinnati on September 26.

Through the incredible stretch, Conforto developed a knack for staying on the Major League roster despite perpetually being on the bubble.

In late August, a disabled list visit by Lucas Duda saved Conforto from a demotion to Las Vegas. Just a few days later when David Wright returned from a lengthy absence, the Mets chose to option reliever Dario Alvarez over Conforto.

"It's crazy the way it's been happening," said Conforto after dodging another demotion. "The fact that I'm still here, I just want to help the team win."



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With most of his at-bats coming against right-handers, Conforto did help the team win. In just 56 games, he compiled a .270 batting average, homered nine times and collected 26 RBI. His efforts in a small sample size convinced the Mets to keep him on the roster for the postseason.

The Journey Reaches October

Exactly six months after trotting onto the field as a St. Lucie Met on Opening Night, Conforto jogged onto the field as a New York Met at Dodger Stadium for team introductions before Game 1 of the National League Division Series.

Conforto was in the starting lineup for his postseason debut the next night against All-Star Zack Greinke.

In the top of the second inning of Game 2, Conforto dug in against Greinke for his first postseason at-bat. He turned on a 2-1 fastball and pelted the right-field foul pole, putting New York up by two. It was the Mets' second home run of the inning off the NL ERA leader. Conforto joined Edgardo Alfonzo as the only Mets to homer in their first career postseason plate appearances.

"I just treated like it was another at-bat in another big game," Conforto said after Game 2.

The homer was Conforto's only hit of the series. In fact, it was his only hit until the World Series. The Mets steamrolled the Cubs in four games in the Championship Series to capture the National League pennant, but Conforto went 0-for-10 and didn't play much of a role.

That changed in the World Series.

The Biggest Stage of them All

The left fielder became the first player ever to play with the Binghamton Mets, make his Major League debut with the New York Mets and play in the World Series all in the same season.

He had to wait until Game 4 to have his defining moment. Moments, really.

The Mets trailed the Royals 2-1 in the series and Conforto limped into the Halloween game with a .091 postseason batting average. With the game scoreless, Conforto belted Chris Young's first pitch of the third inning deep down the right-field line. The crowd of nearly 45,000 leaped to their feet, collectively willing the ball to stay fair.

If there was one flaw in Conforto's swing during the summer, it was the amount of hook he was putting on fly balls he pulled down the line. During his time with the B-Mets, he spent hours working with hitting coach Luis Natera to correct it.



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The extra work paid off. The ball stayed fair, landing in section 303 of the Pepsi Porch, just inside the foul pole. Citi Field erupted.

Just two innings later, he struck again.

Left-handed reliever Danny Duffy tried to get Conforto to chase a low slider. The outfielder golfed the offering to right field. Alex Rios backtracked to the fence, pulled himself to the top of the wall, but could not bring back Conforto's drive.

The young outfielder's second homer of the game ignited Citi Field yet again. The normally stoic athlete couldn't contain his emotion any more. As he rounded first base he allowed himself a slight pump of the right arm and a primal scream.

Michael Conforto, who just six months prior was toiling in the Florida State League, had just hit two homers in a World Series game.

"It's humbling, and it's exciting. I'll definitely remember those moments," said Conforto after the game. "The feelings I got on those two home runs were indescribable."

He joined the company of Hall of Famer Gary Carter as the only Mets player to go deep twice in a Fall Classic game.

Despite Conforto's twin bombs, the Mets lost Game 4.

Every Journey Has an End

Game 5 also slips away.

After the Royals score five times in the top of the twelfth, the Mets need a miracle.

With two outs Conforto singles to left field and takes second on defensive indifference. It will be the Mets' last hit of the season. Wilmer Flores takes a called third strike and the Royals spill out of the dugout to celebrate their championship.

Conforto begins to trot. His season is over.

His commute from second base to the New York Mets dugout at Citi Field is not long. It's shorter than the jog he took back in April with the St. Lucie Mets.

The trot for Conforto takes less than 10 seconds.

The journey is complete.



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