

Twins GM Ryan bouncing back from cancer

Written by S.D. Buhr

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During a routine physical exam early this year, Minnesota Twins General Manager Terry Ryan asked his doctor to take a look at a lump on his neck. Testing found Ryan to have squamous cell carcinoma.

Ryan had surgery in February and has undergone radiation treatment as well. In the meantime, Assistant General Manager Rob Antony has filled in as the interim GM for the Twins, though Ryan has been in regular contact with Antony and others in the Twins front office.

During a recent Cedar Rapids Kernels homestand, Ryan was in town observing Minnesota's young Class A prospects and sat down for an interview that covered a range of topics.

Usually a regular presence at spring training and all around the Twins' minor league affiliates, Ryan has understandably not been making those trips this year.

"I'm feeling OK. This is my first trip. I wanted to come here so just in case I couldn't handle it, I could just get in my vehicle and come back, but I can handle it," he said.

"I've got a lot of physical therapy and a lot of rehab to go still. I'm doing that. But I'm OK, I'm fine, I'm fortunate actually."

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Ryan indicated there still is no specific timetable for his return to full-time duties.

"I haven't taken any road trips but that's about all. And when we're home, I'm usually at a game up there. So it's not like I haven't been involved," he said.

"(Antony) has done a nice job. He certainly knows what he's doing, he's been around it. He's been around Gardy (Manager Ron Gardenhire) a lot and he's been around the team a lot. We're in good hands.

"Ultimately when the time is right, I'll take a road trip and we'll kind of make a seamless transition again. I'm not sure when that's going to be, but it shouldn't be down in the future too far."

Asked if that meant he could be back in the GM chair before the end of the current season, Ryan responded, "Yeah, no question."

While his trip to Cedar Rapids was his first road trip of the season, Ryan has seen a lot of the parent club's home games in Minneapolis. The Twins have hovered near the .500 mark through most of the season.

"We're better. It didn't help us when (Josh) Willingham and (Oswaldo) Arcia both went down at the same time," he said. "Although at that time, we were scoring runs. (Chris) Colabello carried us for a month, maybe more. We've had trouble offensively again this past month.

"Our pitching is improved, our hitting went the other way. It was directly opposite in April. We're a better club. We've got more depth.

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"We've had a couple of pleasant surprises, particularly (Eduardo) Escobar. He's kind of emerged and looks like he might want to take that shortstop job," said Ryan.

"I think (Trevor) Plouffe has improved. (Kurt) Suzuki has been a good addition. (Phil) Hughes has been a good addition. Unfortunately, we lost (Mike) Pelfrey, again. But we're better.

"We're competitive. We have not embarrassed ourselves, maybe a game here or there, but not too much. Unlike last year when we were out of games in the fifth (inning) a lot.

"We do have some chemistry and character on this club that seems to mesh pretty well. When you go to the park, you feel pretty good. At least we're going to be a competitive team in this game. That's a big difference," he said.

"The one constant, our bullpen has been pretty good over the last number of years. (Glen) Perkins in the back side of that thing has solidified that.

"We've got a handful of guys up there that people didn't see last year, which is kind of neat. Between (Josmil) Pinto and Escobar and (Danny) Santana and (Caleb) Theilbar and Arcia, all those guys are 20-25 or so.

"We're getting there. We've got a ways to go. What we've done the last three years has not been good at all, but we are getting there. It's going to take a little bit more."

Like their parent club, the Kernels have hovered near the .500 mark most of the season before tapering off. That's been no small achievement given the number of injuries that Manager Jake Mauer's club has sustained.

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The Kernels are a very different club than what local fans saw a year ago when top prospects like Byron Buxton, Jorge Polanco, Adam Brett Walker and Trevor Harrison were wearing Kernels colors.

"We had a very talented club here last year, you'd like to think we could supply this affiliate with that kind of talent every year, but it's not going to happen. We've got a different looking club this year," said Ryan.

"We've got some pitching here. Don't have the thump. Don't have the type of lineup we had last year, which was a very dangerous lineup. We don't have that type of size. We had monstrous guys here, so yeah it's different.

"But every year is going to be different no matter what you try to do or accomplish at a minor league affiliate. You're looking for players, you're trying to develop players. This is a little different lot.

"So you adjust," he said. "Jake and Tommy (Watkins, the hitting coach) and Ivan (Arteaga, the pitching coach) are going about their business. It's a little bigger challenge this year because you don't have a Buxton here, you don't have a Walker. You don't have a Polanco.

"But that comes with the territory. When you're running a Class A club, you're going to have different personnel every year. You'll have a few repeats, but for the most part it's a different club and a different atmosphere and different results."