

## Joe Mauer ready to help Jake's Kernels

Written by Jim Ecker

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Joe Mauer arrived in Cedar Rapids Monday and found himself in the thick of a pennant race with the Kernels.

The 2009 American League MVP and six-time all-star is not here to help his older brother's team make the Midwest League playoffs, but he'll do what he can during his injury rehab assignment from the Minnesota Twins.

Mauer, 31, came here to get healthy and return to the Major Leagues as soon as possible. He could spend the entire week with the Kernels, giving him a chance to revitalize his body under the watchful eye of Kernels Manager Jake Mauer.

"So far, so good," Joe Mauer said Monday after pre-game practice with the Kernels. "Every day is feeling better with the swing and getting back into baseball shape."

Mauer has not played since July 1 due to a strained oblique muscle on his right side.

This is the third time Joe Mauer has played for his brother on a rehab assignment in the minor leagues, but it's the first time in Cedar Rapids. They know the drill: Business comes first, because both men have jobs to do.

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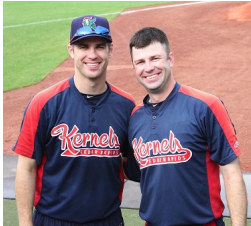
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"You never hope that anyone gets hurt and comes down on a rehab assignment," said Jake Mauer, who is four years older than Joe. "But we're pretty excited to have him here."

"It's exciting to see him and see him play, because I don't get to see him too often. I know it's a big kick for our kids to see him."



Joe Mauer was not scheduled to play Monday night, but Jake Mauer plans to use him as the designated hitter Tuesday night and as the starting first baseman Wednesday night. They'll take it day-by-day from there.

Jake Mauer said the goal is simple for his brother. "Just to get him out of here healthy," said Jake. "That's about it."

"The biggest thing is that he feels OK and he's able to do the things he needs to do."

Joe Mauer knows what he needs to accomplish in Cedar Rapids, but he likes having his "big brother" keeping a watchful eye on things.

"He always plays big brother. It doesn't matter what's going on," Joe said, laughing. "It's nice to see him this time of year, because obviously we don't get to catch up a whole lot until the offseason."

"It's good to see him," Joe said, "but hopefully I can move up soon."

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Joe Mauer has been an all-star catcher during his career with the Twins, but he moved to first base this season after getting hit by a foul tip and suffering a concussion last year.

Jake Mauer and their middle brother, Billy, were partly responsible for Joe becoming a catcher when they were kids. Nobody else wanted to catch in their pickup games because it was a dirty, thankless job, so Jake and Billy would make their little brother get behind the plate.

"Yeah, and I thank them every day for it," said Joe, who has a contract that pays him \$23 million per year through 2018. "We had some epic battles in our back yard.

"It seems like Jake and Bill would always get in an argument. And when it came time for my time to play, the game was over."

Mauer knew he was hurt when he swung a bat in a Minnesota Twins game and felt a sharp pain.

"It felt like somebody shot me right in the side," he said. "I've never been shot before, but I imagine that's what it feels like."

He hit a double with that swing July 1, but has not played in a game since then.

"it's been real tough, just not being able to play," he said. "It's been about a month. It seems like it's been a lot longer than that."

The Kernels are scheduled for seven straight home games from Monday through Sunday, which made it convenient for Mauer to drive down from the Twin Cities, play for the Kernels and get the rust off his game.

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"That's why I'm down here. Timing and all that," he said. "It's going to be a process. I'm thankful to get out here and get some at-bats before I get back to the big leagues.

"I'm down here to get my work in and that's No. 1," he said.

Billy Mauer plans to join his brothers at Veterans Memorial Stadium Tuesday night. Their parents also plan to make the trip from Minnesota, along (possibly) with Joe's family, so there could be a big Mauer reunion in Cedar Rapids.

By coincidence, Jake Mauer and Joe Mauer played in the first game at Veterans Memorial Stadium when the new ballpark opened in 2002. They were teammates with the Midwest League team in Davenport at the time and opened the season in Cedar Rapids.

Joe Mauer appreciated being able to make the four-hour drive from the Twin Cities and play in a first-class minor league ballpark here.

"That's what I was telling Jake," he said. "They've got it pretty good here in Cedar Rapids. For an A-Ball facility, this is about as good as it gets.

"You've got everything you need here (with medical facilities) to get back on the field. These guys are pretty lucky. Twelve years ago we were in Quad Cities and it wasn't even close to this.

"This is a nice place and a nice place to get your work in."

Mauer mingled with the Kernels Monday afternoon during batting practice and infield drills, chatting amiably and talking baseball.

His best advice to a young player is to relax and enjoy the sport.

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"Just remember how fun the game is," he said. "As you get up higher and higher, there's a lot more pressure but it's still the same game. These guys are just as talented as guys in the big leagues. It's all about being consistent.

"If I'm down here and I can help some of these guys out, that's going to help me out too in the near future. That's always fun to talk baseball and share that love of the game, especially with younger baseball players."

Mauer will wear No. 16 during his stay with the Kernels, not the No. 7 he famously wears in Minnesota. Tanner Vavra wears No. 7 for the Kernels and was willing to let Mauer use it, but the big leaguer politely declined the offer.

"He was going to give it up," said Mauer. "But these guys have been playing well. I don't want to mess anything up. I told him to stick with it."

Mauer will do his best to help the Kernels win games this week, but he's not being paid \$23 million to help Cedar Rapids make the Midwest League playoffs.

"You always want to do well when you get out there, but for me I have to get ready to help the big club out," he said. "If I can help these guys out in any way, I'm going to do that.

"I have to make sure I get myself ready to help the big club."

Mauer is a full-time first baseman now after 10 years of being a major league catcher.

"It's good. I've learned a lot," he said. "The more and more you get over there, the more comfortable you feel. It's definitely a new thing for me.

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"I don't miss the foul tips or anything like that," he said. "I do miss calling the game with the pitcher and things like that."