

Mauer, Nolasco give Kernels a boost

Written by Jim Ecker

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Joe Mauer has scored 726 runs during his all-star career with the Minnesota Twins, but he got an extra jolt of adrenaline Tuesday night when his brother asked him to score a run for the Cedar Rapids Kernels.

Mauer was perched on second base in the third inning when Bryan Haar hit a single to left field. Mauer got a good jump and looked at the third-base coach to see what he wanted him to do.

The coach was none other than Jake Mauer, Joe's protective older brother. Jake gave Joe the signal to score even though Joe had not played in a game since July 1 and is recovering from a strained oblique muscle.

"I kind of had a feeling off the bat that, knowing Jake, I'd be going home," Joe Mauer said with a smile, acknowledging Jake's competitive nature and good judgment.

Mauer slid home safely to give Cedar Rapids a 2-0 lead en route to its 9-0 stroll past Wisconsin before a lively crowd of 4,401 fans that came primarily to see the 2009 American League MVP make his first appearance with the Kernels on an injury rehab assignment.

Minnesota pitcher Ricky Nolasco, also making a rehab appearance with the Kernels, pitched the first 3.2 innings and did not allow a run.

The Mauer boys shared a laugh about Joe scoring from second base on that play. Jake Mauer

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knows how fast his brother can run, but he may have over-estimated Joe's speed a little on that play.

"That's what I was telling him," joked Joe Mauer. "I'm not 18 anymore, but I can still move. It was good to start that rally there."

Joe Mauer is 31 years old and makes \$23 million per year, but Jake Mauer was not calculating any of that when he steered his brother toward home plate. He was simply trying to get his team a run in the thick of a pennant race.

"I thought he had a pretty good jump and the ball wasn't hit very hard," Jake Mauer said. "He (the left fielder) didn't have a very



good angle."

Wisconsin left fielder Omar Garcia made a strong one-hop throw to the plate, but Mauer was able to slide across safely without incident.

"It was a little closer than I'd like it to be," Jake Mauer allowed.

"He's not the fastest guy by any stretch of the matter, but he's a pretty good baserunner," Jake said. "He just kind of has a feel for things."

Joe Mauer was glad he had to push himself on the play.

"It was good," he said. "It's another thing to check off the list. Like I said, you can't simulate those things when you come back. You just have to get out there and do it."

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Jake Mauer enjoyed watching his kid brother play Tuesday and run the bases. "It was fun to see him run around out there. He felt real good after the game, so that was good," Mauer said.

The Twins are being extra-careful with both Mauer and Nolasco during their rehab assignments in Cedar Rapids. Mauer sat down after going 1-for-3 in the first four innings as the designated hitter, not wanting to rush things.

"You have to be especially careful with these obliques," he said. "I think we've been smart and also pushing the envelope, trying to get out there as soon as I can."

Mauer knows he has to be patient.

"It's kind of hard for me sometimes," he said. "I want to get out there and test it out even more."

"Tonight went well. I was able to get over a couple of things. Hopefully there will be more to come. It felt good today and hopefully it will feel good tomorrow."

Nolasco retired after throwing 51 pitches in 3.2 shutout innings. He threw 30 strikes and showed a sharp curveball with a low-90's fastball.

Mauer is scheduled to play first base for the Kernels Wednesday night and Nolasco is scheduled to pitch again Sunday afternoon against Kane County.

Mauer, a six-time all-star, grounded into a 4-6-3 double play in his first at-bat in the first inning.

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~~Went on to lead the team in strikeouts with 10. He also pitched a perfect game on August 14, 2014, against the Chicago Cubs, becoming the first pitcher in the history of the franchise to do so. The Kernels finished the season with a record of 71-65, and Mauer was named the National League Pitcher of the Year.~~