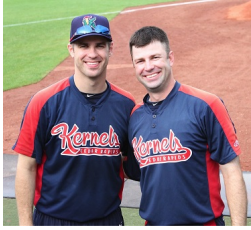


Mauer could return to Kernels in 2015

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jake Mauer is a loyal member of the Minnesota Twins organization and will happily return to Cedar Rapids as manager of the Kernels again next season if that's what the Twins want.

"There's a chance," he said. "Without a doubt."

He'd also like to reach the Major Leagues as a coach or manager of the Twins some day, ideally while his brother Joe is still playing for Minnesota.

Mauer, 35, has no control over the situation, other than to handle each assignment to the best of his ability and remain patient. The Minnesota organization thinks highly of him, but so far he's spent nine years in the low minors as a coach and manager.

He's considered an excellent teacher and has done a terrific job with the Kernels the past two years with a 161-117 overall record and two straight trips to the Midwest League playoffs.

Mauer expects the Twins to finalize plans for all their managers and coaches for 2015 at an organizational meeting in Fort Myers, Fla., in October. As of now, he has no idea where he'll be next season.

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"They tend to have us in place by the end of October," he said. "They don't really tip their hands. Everything is in flux."

Mauer said he's enjoyed his two years in Cedar Rapids, which is just a four-hour drive from his home in Minnesota. He and his wife, Rachel, have two young children and they spend the season together here.

"This is a great place to be for me," he said. "It's close to home, with a young family. Everybody here has been great.

"The time will come where it's time to move on. Maybe it's next year, or maybe it's not. We'll just take the challenges they keep putting in front."

Mauer got to spend an enjoyable week with his brother when Joe Mauer, an all-star and three-time American League batting champion, did a rehab assignment with the Kernels this month. The two brothers are close and Jake would love to spend an entire season with Joe and the Twins in Minnesota.

"That would be pretty neat, obviously, being up there and being around him every day and see how he goes about his business," said Mauer. "The atmosphere is a little different, obviously, up there. The games are a little more intense, but they're fun, too.

"Hopefully I get up there while he's still playing. That would be nice. Time will tell, as far as what the outlook is."

The Mauer brothers spent time together as players in the minor leagues, but Joe was on the fast track to the Major Leagues and Jake had to retire due to an elbow injury after reaching Double-A in 2005.

The Twins felt so highly about Jake Mauer's ability that they immediately made him a coach

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following his retirement as a player. He spent two years as a coach in the minor leagues, then was named manager of the Gulf Coast League Twins in 2008.

He spent two years as a skipper in the Gulf Coast League and three years as the manager at Fort Meyers in the High-A Florida State League before being assignment to Cedar Rapids and the Low-A Midwest League last season.

His switch from the Florida State League to the Midwest League was not a demotion, even though he went to a lower rung in the organization. The Twins put Mauer in Cedar Rapids because they knew he would be a good ambassador for Minnesota in the first year of its new agreement with the Kernels and knew he'd do a good job with the club.

Cedar Rapids finished 88-50 last year with a talented team that featured Byron Buxton. Mauer has led a vastly different team to the playoffs again this year with a 73-67 mark.

Mauer does not know if the Twins will assign him to Cedar Rapids again in 2015. He's already spent three years in Fort Myers and the next steps in the organization are Double-A in New Britain, Conn., and Triple-A in Rochester, N.Y., or the Twins themselves in Minneapolis.

"Whatever level they put in front of you is a challenge," he said. "Obviously I'd like to continue to move up. There's no doubt about it."

Mauer grew up in Minnesota and has been a member of the Twins organization since 2001 as a player, coach and manager. He clearly wants to stay with the organization as long as possible.

However, Mauer indicated he might listen to feelers from other teams if he ever felt like he'd hit a dead-end with the Twins "if they don't view me as being able to work up there or have a chance up there." That's unlikely, at least for now.

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Minnesota Twins General Manager Terry Ryan told the Metro Sports Report last year he thinks Mauer has a good chance to become the manager of the Twins some day. Mauer is more than 20 years younger than Ron Gardenhire, the current Twins manager who is held in high esteem in the organization.

"It's so in flux," said Mauer. "It's hard to predict what they're going to do, it's hard to predict who's going to be our manager in a couple of years up there, too (in Minnesota). It could all change pretty rapidly."

Mauer is not worried about that now. He's focused on leading the Kernels into the Midwest League playoffs, which begin Wednesday night against Burlington at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

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