

Baseball runs in Mauer family's blood

Written by Jim Ecker

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The games of "pickle" in the Mauer family's basement in St. Paul, Minn., got a little rough at times when Jake, Billy and Joe were kids.

They called it "hot box," where there's two fielders and one runner, and Joe - the youngest of the three boys - took a pounding at times.

"Yeah, Joe took the brunt of all that," Jake said with a smile Wednesday, remembering the good old days in the Mauer household.

All three boys turned out to be professional baseball players in the Minnesota Twins organization, but Jake ran into elbow problems and Billy had a shoulder injury that ended their minor league careers.

Little Joe, the kid who tagged along with his older brothers, hit the jackpot and is working on a \$184 million contract that pays him \$23 million a year as Minnesota's all-star catcher.

Jake Mauer, 34, is the new skipper of the Cedar Rapids Kernels, who open the 2013 Midwest League season Thursday night at 6:35 against Beloit at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Billy Mauer, 32, runs the Mauer Chevrolet dealership in Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

Joe Mauer, 29, is a career .323 hitter with three American League batting titles, a Gold Glove and an MVP award in his trophy case.

But make no mistake, Joe had to hustle to keep up with his older brothers when they were kids playing baseball, basketball, football or hockey.

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"We'd play whiffle ball and it would be me against Billy," Jake said. "Joe would catch.

"But he'd always get right in there with us. My buddies always liked having him around. He really followed us around and got to play.

"I don't know if that helped him or not."

There is a long tradition of baseball in the Mauer family, starting with their grandfather and his three older brothers, all of whom played pro ball.

Their grandfather was the first Jake Mauer in the family. His son became Jake Mauer Jr., and the Kernels skipper is Jake Mauer III.

The legal first name of all three Jakes is actually Donald, but they go by Jake. The family nickname began when Grandfather Mauer was taking boxing lessons from his older brother John, a Golden Gloves boxer who pulled no punches.

"He'd hit him a couple of times, and my Grandpa would go upstairs crying," said Jake III, imparting family lore. "And I guess there was a term that 'He's just a Jaker.' "

You know, he was faking.

"So that stuck and that's kind of how it all happened."

Grandpa Jake, who turns 84 this month, plans to attend a few Kernels games this season.

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"You'll see him. He'll be down," Jake III said. "You'll hear him when he comes down here. He's a big personality, a lot of fun. He's the life of the party wherever he goes."

Grandpa Jake has been a professional handicapper at a race track in the Twin Cities, with a love for horses and baseball.

"Both of my parents worked, so Grandpa was kind of our day care in the morning," said Mauer. "He had a big influence on all of our lives growing up."

There are athletes on both sides of Jake Mauer's family. A cousin, Nate Mauer, played minor league hockey for six years and plans to be at the ballpark Thursday to watch the Kernels.

The Mauers were always involved with sports.

"We grew up around it," the Kernels skipper said. "We didn't own a Nintendo until I was probably 15 years old. So it was always go out and play, and we all liked to do it."

"You learn how to compete and kind of how to stay alive," he said. "It was all in good fun."