

Ryan thinks Jake Mauer could manage Twins

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 07 August 2013 20:01 - Last Updated Thursday, 08 August 2013 20:04

The general manager of the Minnesota Twins thinks Cedar Rapids Kernels skipper Jake Mauer has the right stuff to manage the Twins someday.

Terry Ryan, who began his second stint as Minnesota's G.M. in 2011, has known Mauer since he was a young college player at St. Thomas University 15 years ago and likes what Mauer has accomplished as a manager in the Twins' minor league system the past six years.

Ryan spent time in Cedar Rapids earlier this week, inspecting the Kernels during their series against the Quad Cities River Bandits and getting a feel for the organization.

He's been a big fan of Mauer's for a long time, both as a minor league player in the Minnesota system and now as a skipper. Mauer played pro ball for the Twins for five years (2001-2005), reaching as high as Double-A before an arm injury forced him to retire.

"It's unfortunate that Jake got hurt, because I think he probably could have surfaced at the Major Leagues, certainly as a utility-type player," Ryan said Tuesday. "He had a little bit more ability than people give him credit for. It's a shame, but he had a sore elbow and just couldn't throw enough to be able to go out there."

Mauer had a career batting average of .256 in the minor leagues.

"He was a good, reliable guy," said Ryan. "You put him at shortstop, he makes the play. You put him at third, he'd make the play. You put him at second, he'd make the play."

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"He wasn't gifted with great range or great arm strength or even great speed. All he did was play the game. And that's how he kind of manages, I believe."

The Twins hired Mauer as a minor league coach as soon as his playing dates were over.

"When you recognize that a guy is a 'baseball guy,' and he's got passion and he's got a work ethic ... He does the right things and he's a good teammate and all that stuff, you start thinking, 'We certainly should find a place for him,'" said Ryan.

The Twins selected Mauer in the 23rd round of the 2001 draft. That same year, the Twins made Joe Mauer -- Jake's younger brother -- the No.1 overall pick in the draft, but Ryan strongly denied Minnesota picked Jake to keep an eye on Joe in the low minors when they were teammates.

"That is not accurate," said Ryan. "We did not take Jake just because we took Joe. Jake came in on his ability. Jake was not taken just because of Joe. Jake was taken because he was a pretty good player."

Ryan is impressed with Mauer's even-keeled, level-headed temperament as a manager.

"Jake has the same temperament as his brother Joe," said Ryan. "They are very similar in how they go about their business, whether it's as a baseball manager or a player. They have their heads screwed on right. They have confidence in what they're doing and trying to accomplish."

"Jake is a very good teacher," said Ryan. "He's got a little bit of a feel for the things that need to be said at the right time. You don't see him get out of whack too often. I've never seen him lose his temper. I don't think you'll ever see him kicking his hat down the base line or anything like that."

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Mauer has compiled a 323-312 record in six years in the Minnesota organization, with three winning seasons and three losing seasons. He spent two years as a skipper in the Rookie Gulf Coast League and three years with the Fort Myers Miracle in the High-A Florida State League before coming to Cedar Rapids in the Low-A Midwest League this season.

Ryan said Mauer's switch from the Florida State League to the Midwest League was based on several factors and certainly not a demotion. Rather, the Twins thought Mauer was the right man for the job in Cedar Rapids, based on his Midwest roots (born and raised in Minnesota and still lives there) and the fact that he played in the Midwest League.

In addition, new Fort Myers skipper Doug Mentkiewicz has Florida ties and had never been a minor league manager before. The Twins approached Mauer about moving to Cedar Rapids and he was receptive in Year 1 of the new affiliation.

"One of the things we tried to accomplish when we got this affiliation was to get off on the right foot," said Ryan. "We wanted to do well out of the chute here, and we thought it was the right thing."

In terms of reaching Minnesota as a Major League coach, Ryan said the Twins have hired people from Rookie Ball to Triple-A. "It doesn't matter," said Ryan. "I don't think that's a barometer of who goes to Minnesota."

Ryan thinks Mauer, 34, could make a fine skipper in Minnesota someday.

"Why not?," said Ryan. "He's got a good work ethic. He runs a good ship. He's got discipline. His players play the game the right way. He handles media quite well."

"I haven't heard a negative word about him here, so as soon as I do I'll let you know," said Ryan. "I haven't even had a player say anything about Jake, and that's a rarity when you have 25 guys in there with a different agenda."

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Ryan said he holds all his minor league managers accountable for dealing with star players, travel, hotels, the players' private lives and everything else.

"If they want to learn to take responsibility in Minnesota, they better learn it here in Cedar Rapids," said Ryan, "because it all falls on the manager's head in Minnesota."