

Mauer embraces Year 2 with Kernels

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jake Mauer is not entirely different from the young ballplayers he had with the Cedar Rapids Kernels last season.

Just like them, he's chasing his dream of reaching the Major Leagues and appearing with the Minnesota Twins at Target Field. But unlike them, he's now hoping to reach the big leagues as a Twins coach or manager some day.

Mauer, 35, will be the Kernels' manager again this season in the Class A Midwest League. This will be his seventh year as a skipper for Minnesota in the low minors and like anybody else, he'd like to climb the ladder some day.

Mauer originally hoped to reach the major leagues with the Twins as a player, but an injury ended that dream. Now he'd like to make it another way.

Some of Mauer's peers have climbed the coaching ranks from Class A to Double-A to Triple-A and even the Major Leagues, but he's still paying his dues despite an overall record of 344-317 record in six years in the Rookie Gulf Coast League, Low-A Midwest League and High-A Florida State League.

"You would like to have a natural progression," Mauer said Monday night at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel at the Kernels Hot Stove Banquet. "It's probably more difficult to put a time frame on it as far as coaching.

"Players you kind of see move up through the ranks and they have an idea of when they think

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they will be there. That's the frustrating side for my wife more than anything, is just the unknown. There are several guys that I've been around at the rookie level that have gone right up to the big leagues."

The Mauers are expecting their third child in early February. They live in Shoreview, Minn., so one of the benefits of spending the spring and summer in Cedar Rapids is being fairly close to their extended families in Minnesota.

On the other hand, Mauer might welcome a promotion to the Double-A team in New Britain, Conn. or the Triple-A club in Rochester, N.Y. if it would accelerate his path to the big leagues. He'd love to become the manager of the Minnesota Twins some day, but knows he has to earn it.

"It's kind of a thing where you pay your dues and hopefully when they think you're ready to be the manager they'll ask you," he said.

Twins executives have said they think highly of Mauer and think he has a bright future with the organization, including a potential spot in Minneapolis. For the time being, however, they value his ability to help mold promising young players in the minors.

"I look at it this way: It's great to work in baseball," said Mauer. "It's something where you get up every morning and like to go do.

"When you're at the lower levels, you really get to teach more than anything. That's what energizes you and that's what makes you come back."

Mauer said he had a good conversation this winter with Brad Steil, the Twins' farm director, about the 2013 campaign and what's coming up this year, but said they did not discuss his own future with the organization.

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"No, there haven't been any discussions like that," he said. "I'd like to think when they think I'm ready, I'll get a chance. As far as the coaching side, I'm still pretty young.

"They know my goal is to be in the big leagues. Whatever path is laid before me, wherever they put me, I'm going to do the best job that I can and hopefully keep doing that at whatever level and hopefully, eventually, get an opportunity."

Mauer appreciates the support he's gotten from his wife, Rachel, as he follows his passion for the game he loves.

"My wife is outstanding," he said. "She's got everything under control (with the young family). I don't think I could do what she does, there's no doubt about that.

"She knows this is a dream of mine, and as long as everything is good at home and she feels confident and everything is under control, she'll allow me to chase that dream."

Kernels General Manager Doug Nelson is delighted to have Mauer as the team's manager for another season.

"Jake's definitely going to be in the big leagues at some point in the future," said Nelson. "I can't tell you how thrilled we are that he's coming back for another year.

"He's so supportive of all of our community activities, as well as being very approachable and just a great guy to keep the team focused on the task at hand. It makes life so much easier as the general manager, because I know we have a true partner down in the clubhouse to help us put on the game."

The Kernels inducted Mike Trout, Chris Sabo, Tom Barbee, Verna Nance and Ron Gonder into their Hall of Fame Monday night.

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Minnesota Twins pitchers Brian Duensing and Ryan Pressly, Twins coach Paul Molitor and Twins broadcaster Dick Bremer participated in the Hot Stove Banquet as part of the Twins Winter Caravan.