

Twins, Kernels eye 4-year extension

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Minnesota Twins and Cedar Rapids Kernels have been delighted with their partnership the past two years since signing a Player Development Contract in September of 2012.

Now it appears both sides have agreed to a four-year extension of their original four-year deal, which would push the arrangement through the 2020 season.

Brad Steil, Minnesota's director of minor league operations, met Tuesday afternoon with Kernels officials and the Kernels' Board of Directors at Veterans Memorial Stadium. Neither side would publicly confirm an agreement had been reached, but one board member said a "positive" announcement could be made Wednesday.

"The bottom line is, we're both very happy with the agreement after almost two years together now," said Kernels Board President Gary Keoppel. "Both of our goals is to make it a long-term relationship."

Keoppel stopped short of confirming an agreement had been reached.

The Twins and Kernels are currently in Year 2 of a four-year agreement that lasts through the 2016 season. A four-year extension would push the deal through the 2020, which is the longest time frame currently allowed under Major League rules.

The current agreement between the Major Leagues and Minor Leagues expires after the 2020 season and no teams are allowed to have agreements that extend beyond then.

Cedar Rapids had an agreement with the Los Angeles Angels from 1993 through 2012 before joining forces with Minnesota.

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Under terms of the agreement, the Twins supply Cedar Rapids with players, managers and coaches. The Kernels supply the Twins with the stadium and game management, led by Kernels General Manager Doug Nelson.

Both sides like being a four-hour drive apart, in terms of fan interest and the ability for Minnesota players to make their rehab assignments in Cedar Rapids. Minnesota all-star Joe Mauer and pitcher Ricky Nolasco are making rehab assignments with the Kernels this week and were scheduled to play Tuesday night.

Keoppel said there's a high "comfort level" between the two organizations.

"We're both cut out of the same cloth," said Keoppel. "You've got good midwest people. They've been great for Doug and the front-office people to work with, they've been great as a board to work with. And vice versa.

"I think the Twins have been very happy with what Doug and his staff have provided, with what the host family has provided and with the facility in particular. And Brad (Steil) highlighted that. That's why they feel comfortable with Joe (Mauer) and Ricky Nolasco coming down here because of the quality of the field."

Keoppel said they had a "good discussion" at Tuesday's meeting. "The Twins are very happy here and expressed that openly," he said.

The owners of an independent league team in St. Paul, Minn., have expressed interest in being affiliated with the Twins, but apparently that will not happen now at the Class A level until at least 2021.

Steil declined comment.

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