

Twins' GM likes what he sees in CR

Written by S.D. Buhr

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With the Minnesota Twins fighting for one of the American League wild card spots and playing a critical series in Minneapolis against the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, another of the wild card contenders, you might think Twins General Manager Terry Ryan would be at Target Field watching those games with considerable interest.

You would be wrong, however.

Early Saturday afternoon, as the Twins and Angels were playing the first game of a day-night doubleheader in the Twin Cities, Ryan was studiously watching the Cedar Rapids Kernels and West Michigan Whitecaps take batting practice on Perfect Game Field at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Ryan indicated it wasn't an easy decision to make, but he felt coming to Cedar Rapids was the right choice.

"I was kind of debating on which way I should go," Ryan said. "I take a lot of pride in making sure that I give the attention to the affiliates that they deserve. And there's nothing more important than this final series for this club and I wanted to make sure they knew that we cared. So I decided to come here.

"This is going to be possibly the last two games these guys play, maybe three, and I'm hoping

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that coming down here means something. I think it does. I think they know how important we believe that our affiliates and our development is and the people in our system. It's not just the Major League team."

There aren't a lot of players on the current Kernels roster to be found among the top rated minor league prospects. In fact, only shortstop Nick Gordon, at No. 5, is among mlb.com's current list of top Twins prospects. That hasn't kept the Kernels from reaching the MWL Championship Series, and the Twins GM has been impressed with the job this relatively unheralded roster of Kernels has done all season.

"I know this affiliate hasn't been in the finals for a number of years and they've had better clubs, talent-wise," Ryan said. "We have some pitching and arms here that catch your eye. When it comes to overall team, I think we've done a wonderful job of getting to this point because we've got a nice club here, but we might not see a ton of Major League talent. Although a few of these guys will always surprise you, you never know.

"But that's a testament to the club, the staff and everybody else that's affiliated with Cedar Rapids. It's just a nice story right now. We've got a lot of good things going that are positive, and ultimately some of these guys will find their way. I'm not so sure you've got many Mike Trouts on this ballclub; that's not anything to be taken lightly. I just saw him the other day and he took care of our Major League team."

Trout, the reigning American League MVP and 2010 Cedar Rapids Kernels outfielder, hit two home runs and prevented a couple of Twins runs from scoring Thursday night in the Angels' 11-8 win over Ryan's Twins.

The GM was particularly complementary of the job Kernels manager Jake Mauer and his coaches, Tommy Watkins and Henry Bonilla, have done this season.

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"They've got enough experience now," Ryan said of the Cedar Rapids field staff. "They know what it takes to prepare these players to get to the next level. They've sent a number of guys to Fort Myers.

"I've always felt when a family turns their son over to us, we've got to take it upon ourselves to make sure we do right by the player and the family," Ryan said. "I don't have any qualms about when we turn players over to Jake and to Tommy and Henry and the staff here. You know they do the right thing. It's not just about winning baseball games, it's about developing on the field and off the field.

"I don't know if you could trust a player to any better group than the staff members down here in Cedar Rapids."