

Sweeneys meet in spring training game

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 30 March 2012 21:36 - Last Updated Friday, 30 March 2012 21:47



The Sweeney brothers of Cedar Rapids would love to face each other in a Major League baseball game that means something one day, but for now they'll have to settle for an exhibition game in spring training.

It happened for the first time in their professional careers Thursday when Ryan Sweeney and the Boston Red Sox faced Kellen Sweeney and the Toronto Blue Jays at JetBlue Park in Lee County, Fla.

Ryan Sweeney was playing right field for the Red Sox when Kellen Sweeney entered the game as a pinch-runner for the Jays in the top of the seventh inning. Kellen took a brief look at Ryan in right field, but he had other things on his mind when he reached first base.

"I was just trying not to get picked off," he told the Metro Sports Report in a telephone interview Friday.

Kellen made a quick guesture at Ryan, but he doesn't think Ryan noticed. "I kind of told him I was going to go to third if the ball was hit to him," Kellen said, laughing, knowing full well there was little chance he'd test Ryan's strong left arm.

Kellen remained in the game for Toronto at third base and later came up to hit, but Ryan left the game after the bottom of the seventh inning.

"At least they got to play one inning together," said Gary Sweeney, their father. "Ryan actually introduced him to some of the guys like Big Papi (David Ortiz), so Kellen was pretty excited about that."

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Ortiz made a big impression on Kellen. "He said 'So, you're Ryan's little brother, nice to meet you,'" Kellen relayed. "That was pretty cool. He's a good guy."

Ryan Sweeney, 27, went 1-for-3 with a double and an RBI. Kellen Sweeney, 20, went 0-for-1. Their names are both right there in the official boxscore, with R. Sweeney playing for Boston and K. Sweeney playing for Toronto.

Toronto won, 3-2.

"It was really fun," Kellen said.

Ryan Sweeney told his father Wednesday night that he and Kellen might face each other on Thursday, then Ryan confirmed it Thursday morning. Toronto Manager John Farrell told Kellen that the Blue Jays look for chances to let brothers play against each other, whenever possible.

The Sweeney family greatly appreciates it.

"Oh my god. It was pretty cool," said Gary Sweeney, who monitored events as best he could from Cedar Rapids. "It was pretty exciting.

"I texted them both last night: It made your dad really, really proud knowing you were both out there. Hopefully it will be in a real game some day."

Ryan Sweeney, 6-4, 225, is a member of Boston's Major League team after being obtained from Oakland in a trade this winter. He was hitting .219 with five RBIs in 11 games through Thursday and apparently will be platooned in right field or serve as Boston's fourth outfielder.

Carl Crawford, Boston's starting left fielder, is injured and will not play when the regular season

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begins, which could lead to more playing time for Sweeney in Boston. Sweeney tweaked a quad muscle this spring, missed some time and got off to a slow start, but is playing more regularly now.

"He's starting to pick it up a little bit," Gary Sweeney said.

Kellen Sweeney, 6-0, 180, is not a member of Toronto's Major League club. He will be assigned to a minor league team this weekend, but doesn't know where he's headed. "I think he's a little nervous," his father said.

Kellen has appeared in four spring training games for the Blue Jays and is 1-for-4 with a .250 average. He also played for Toronto's Major League team in an exhibition game against Team Canada and got a hit, but it did not count in his statistics.

Kellen said playing with the Major League team should help him during the minor league campaign. "After being up there against big-league pitching, I'll be more confident that I can hit these guys," he said.

Kellen said he's been impressed with the atmosphere at Major League spring training games and it's made him even more determined to get there on a full-time basis.

This will be Ryan Sweeney's seventh year in the major leagues with the Chicago White Sox, Oakland and now Boston. He is a career .283 hitter.

Kellen Sweeney was selected in the second round of the 2010 draft by Toronto, but he's played in only 25 minor league games in two years. He got a late start after signing in 2010 and hit .267 in 16 games in the Florida Gulf Coast League, then battled a wrist injury last season and hit .114 in nine games for Bluefield in the Appalachian League.

He said his wrist feels "great" and he's looking forward to a productive year.