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Here's what happened in Monday's AFL action

MLB.com | MLB.com | November 13, 2018

Twins (Salt River)

Jaylin Davis went 1-for-4 with a double and a run scored. It was a challenging day for Twins relievers, starting with Devin Smeltzer, who allowed two earned runs on three hits and one walk in one-third of an inning. Hector Lujan gave up two unearned runs on two hits in two-thirds of an inning, taking the loss.

Cooper calls Mauer best lefty hitter he's seen

Scott Merkin | MLB.com | November 13, 2018

CHICAGO -- When the White Sox dropped a 5-4 decision to the Twins at Target Field during the 2018 season finale, Don Cooper wasn't sure whether Minnesota first baseman Joe Mauer had played the final game of his illustrious career.

The White Sox pitching coach had a feeling Mauer was retiring after 15 years and three batting titles, with Mauer making a brief but surprise appearance behind the plate in the ninth and receiving a handful of standing ovations from the appreciative crowd recognizing their hometown sensation. So just to be sure, Cooper sent a message to Mauer during the game through White Sox first-base coach Daryl Boston.

"What I said when I sent the message was 'Tell him he's the best left-handed hitter I've seen in my time here,'" said Cooper during a recent interview. "Over the years, since 2002 basically (when Cooper became pitching coach), I've seen a lot of players and I've seen a lot of players' whole careers. I've seen their first and their last moments.

"Maybe it's because we play Minnesota 18 games. You see these guys in our division a lot, and he got my full attention when he was at the plate. This guy is a tremendous hitter. He always wanted to hit for average and doubles. Home runs didn't seem to interest him.

"Made him a very, very tough out, along with he could lay wood on a bullet. There's no fastball he couldn't catch up to," Cooper said. "He did it in a very sound mechanical way, staying inside the ball so much."

Mauer, 35, held his official retirement press conference Monday. He was a six-time All-Star, five-time Silver Slugger and three-time Gold Glove

winner at catcher. Mauer captured 2009 American League Most Valuable Player honors and finished with a .306 career average and .388 on-base percentage.

Against the White Sox, Mauer hit .298 with an .822 OPS, 18 home runs, 53 doubles, 109 walks and 105 RBIs over 911 plate appearances and 212 games.

"He became a pain in the ass," Cooper said. "Seeing him 18 times [per season], the guy could flat out hit."

Frank Thomas rates as the best right-handed hitter Cooper ever watched, while a player such as Miguel Cabrera holds a place in Cooper's best hitter team photo. But Mauer exacted some serious career-wide damage against the White Sox, a point Cooper wanted to acknowledge and a gesture Mauer appreciated according to his postgame comments back on Sept. 30.

"I had heard that he said that and I'm glad because I meant it," said Cooper of Mauer's gratitude. "That day I was watching him, I was thinking, 'I've seen this guy's first game and last game in the big leagues.' I became grateful to be able to see people's entire careers."

"There are others, and we talked about Miguel and guys now that are starting to climb being great players and great hitters, a guy like [Francisco Lindor] and [Jose Ramirez]. Those guys are very good young talents, guys coming up. As I say that, I laugh to myself, I hope I can see the end of their career."

Emotional Mauer officially retires at Target Field **Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | November 13, 2018**

MINNEAPOLIS -- In typical Joe Mauer fashion, he began his retirement press conference at Target Field by spending more than 10 minutes thanking those who helped him along the way instead of talking about himself and his illustrious 15-year career with the Twins.

Mauer, 35, fought back tears as he thanked family members, high school coaches, Twins executives, including Terry Ryan, Bill Smith, Derek Falvey and Thad Levine, former Twins managers Paul Molitor, Ron Gardenhire and Tom Kelly and teammates such as Justin Morneau, Corey Koskie and Glen Perkins. It was an emotional day for Mauer, but he made sure to point out it's not a goodbye, as the St. Paul native plans to remain in the Twins' organization in some capacity.

"Oftentimes, retirement press conferences can feel like a farewell, but for me this one doesn't," Mauer said. "I may not be suiting up to play any more ballgames, but the beauty of being from Minnesota is that I don't have to say goodbye to all the people today with whom I've become family. You'll always be a part of me, and I can't thank you enough for supporting me. My career wouldn't be what it was without you guys."

Mauer said he wasn't most proud of his unprecedented three batting titles as a catcher, his 2009 American League Most Valuable Player Award, his six All-Star appearances, five Silver Sluggers and three Gold Gloves, but of the relationships he was able to build along the way.

Mauer, the No. 1 overall pick in the 2001 Draft, lived up to the expectations and more, according to those who knew him best, including owner Jim Pohl, president Dave St. Peter and Ryan.

St. Peter said four words come to mind when it comes to Mauer -- respect, history, class and family.

"To say the least, the Minnesota Twins have been incredibly blessed to have Joe Mauer as part of the franchise for 18 years," St. Peter said. "I think his longtime teammate Michael Cuddyer said it best last week when he couldn't think of a single person who represented an organization, a city, a community and a state better than Joe Mauer."

Mauer was a local legend growing at Cretin-Durham High School, as Ryan and Molitor said they first saw Mauer play as a 13-year old and he struck out just once in his high school career. Mauer thanked Ryan for taking a chance on him in the 2001 Draft that also featured Mark Prior, Mark Teixeira, among others, but Ryan said it was Mauer who deserves the credit.

"He's a tremendous human being," Ryan said. "He checked every box you'd ever want to check."

And while Mauer was more of a quiet leader and didn't show much emotion on the field, he still had a deep passion for the game and for winning.

"Joe's fire was as deep and burned as furiously as any athlete I ever played with," Molitor said. "He just had a way to be able to protect it outwardly for the most part because he knew consistency was a big part of our game in terms of how you handle yourself. Don't ever doubt for a second that Joe wanted to win more than any other player out there."

Mauer won batting titles in 2006, '08 and '09, winning the MVP Award in '09, when he led the AL in batting average, on-base percentage and slugging percentage. Morneau, who also won an MVP Award with the Twins in '06, said it was incredible to hit after him in the lineup.

"He was as special of a hitter as there ever was," Morneau said. "He didn't chase pitches. He didn't swing at a pitch he didn't like. He seemed to find the barrel every time he swung. And as good as he was, he did it as a catcher. And that's why I think he should be in the Hall of Fame."

After his MVP season, Mauer signed an eight-year, \$184 million contract that kept him in Minnesota for his entire career. He sustained a career-altering concussion in 2013 that forced him to move to first base and after enduring another concussion this May, Mauer decided to retire to spend more time with his family. Mauer and his wife, Maddie, have twin daughters and another child on the way in the next few days.

"It's a day of mixed emotions, for sure, for our family, the Twins organization and Twins fans, but it's obviously it's a day that had to come," Pohlad said. "I'll never forget the spring of 2010. My family and I were in Cambodia, and there were discussions about Joe's contract. When I came back, Joe shook my hand and told us he would always give us his best. I never doubted him. I'm sad for the organization, but I'm happy for Joe, Maddie and his entire family. It's a new era, and I wish him all the best."

Mauer retires as Minnesota's all-time leader in doubles and is second in hits behind Hall of Famer Kirby Puckett. Mauer is also second all-time among Twins players in Wins Above Replacement, only trailing Hall of Famer Rod Carew, per Baseball Reference. He's also one of only 22 players to ever win an MVP while playing an entire career of at least 15 years with one team and every other player on that list is in the Hall of Fame.

"It means everything," Mauer said. "I never wavered where I wanted to be. This is where I wanted to be. My grandparents got to come to every home game. I can't think of any big leaguer who ever had that with their grandparents at every home game. Think about that, with 81 home games every year. They missed a dozen home games over 15 years. I don't know if you guys caught on, but one thing that was always special was I would tip my cap and that was for my grandparents. It was a little thing to show them how much it meant to be there every game. This is a special place for me and I'm proud to wear just one uniform."

Five myths about Joe Mauer's career

Michael Rand | Star Tribune | November 13, 2018

Joe Mauer officially retired from baseball Monday after 15 MLB seasons — all with the Twins, of course. The debate over Mauer's legacy, and particularly his Hall of Fame credentials, will play out over the course of the next several years.

For now, let's use the opportunity to examine and hopefully dispel some myths about Mauer's career (most stats via Baseball Reference)

Myth 1: Target Field contributed to Mauer's demise.

A popular narrative is that Mauer's career decline was due in part to the Twins changing home ballparks from the Metrodome to Target Field between 2009 and 2010.

But while the contrast between those two specific seasons can't be ignored, the overall picture suggests the ballpark wasn't much of a factor.

OK, first the obvious: Mauer was an MVP with a career-high 28 home runs in 2009, the Twins' final year in the Dome. He hit 16 of those home runs at home, and fans remember every one of them barely clearing the wall in left field.

In 2010, he dropped to nine homers – with just one coming at seemingly pitcher-friendly Target Field.

But his home run rate at Target Field in his two other healthy seasons there – 2012 and 2013, after “bilateral leg weakness” and before his first concussion – was one every 57 home at bats. From 2004-08, he hit one home run every 52 at bats at the Metrodome.

And his home OPS in 2012 and 2013 was only about 10 points lower than his .882 career mark at the Metrodome, including the 2009 season.

Mauer might have benefited slightly by playing his whole career at the Metrodome, where he was obviously comfortable and used the faster turf to his advantage on ground balls. But in reality concussions, defensive adjustments and eventually age were bigger contributors to his reduced production at Target Field.

Myth 2: Mauer wasn't clutch

Pick a stat, any stat. Pretty much all of them dispel this popular notion espoused by fans who expected perfection from Mauer.

He was a career .334 hitter with runners in scoring position, including .378 with the bases loaded. With two outs and runners in scoring position, Mauer hit .321 with a .943 OPS. Mauer was plenty clutch.

Myth 3: Mauer was just as good against lefties as righties

While it's true that Mauer, a left-handed hitter, was pretty good against lefties, there was still a pretty sharp lefty-righty split in his career.

That showed up mainly with power, as he posted a .466 slugging percentage against righties compared to .381 against left-handed pitchers. Mauer had roughly twice as many at bats against righties as lefties and hit more than three times as many homers against righties (110 to 33) in his career.

Myth 4: He never swung at the first pitch

Mauer even joked during Monday's news conference about this (in)famous quality. But for his career in 6,930 at bats, Mauer put the ball in play on the first pitch 384 times — with a swing and miss or foul coming on countless other occasions.

Mauer was pretty successful when he did, by the way: He had a .396 career average when he put the ball in play on the first pitch.

Myth 5: Mauer was a postseason failure

There are some hard facts to ignore here. The Twins never won a playoff game (0-10) in which Mauer played. And he finished with a career .641 OPS in 44 postseason plate appearances.

But guess what? Kirby Puckett had an even worse OPS in his first 10 postseason games. He simply got more chances and was bailed out early by teammates.

Mauer contributed to anemic offenses in playoff losses, but he was far from the sole culprit. He finished his career as a .275 postseason hitter, with at least one hit in each of his last nine playoff games.

Former manager Paul Molitor still pondering staying with Twins

La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | November 13, 2018

Joe Mauer's news conference on Monday brought out a who's who of the local baseball community, and a rare moment in which three former Twins managers were in the same room.

And, yes, that meant Paul Molitor, recently replaced as manager, was in attendance. Molitor sat in the same section as former skippers Ron Gardenhire and Tom Kelly as Mauer choked up a handful of times while formerly announcing his retirement after 15 seasons with the Twins.

Following the news conference, Molitor chatted with a number of Twins officials, including Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey and General Manager Thad Levine — the pair who sought a different direction after Molitor went 78-84 in 2018. Molitor has been offered another role within the organization and, on Monday, it didn't seem far-fetched to think it could happen.

With six managerial openings and, consequently, several coaching spots available around the league, Molitor had a chance to hook on with another club. But Molitor said on Monday that he didn't actively look for another job.

"I didn't really have any desire to do that," Molitor said. "I've had a few conversations here, but nothing very substantive as of yet. I don't think anyone feels any urgency, me or them. We'll keep talking and see if something makes sense."

Meanwhile, Falvey, Levine and new manager Rocco Baldelli have been working on assembling a coaching staff after several positions were created following Molitor's removal. Bench coach Derek Shelton has agreed to return in the same role next season. He joins hitting coach James Rowson and assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez as holdovers from last year's staff.

In addition to hiring new coaches, some of whom may be announced over the next few days, the Twins have 40-man roster decisions to make and have holes to fill on the 25-man roster. With the winter meetings scheduled for Dec. 9-12 in Las Vegas, it's possible that the Twins will not get to Molitor's future until early next year.

"We'll let the calendar turn and see what January brings" said Molitor, who didn't rule out taking a year off. "I'm enjoying some downtime."

It would seem strange that a recently fired manager would continue to work for the people who sacked him. But Molitor is a local icon, having starred at Cretin-Derham Hall and the Gophers before embarking on a Hall of Fame career. He spent 17 seasons in various roles within the organization, finally getting a chance to manage when Gardenhire was let go following the 2014 season.

That might be reflective of how the Twins operate. Molitor and Gardenhire were both at the news conference, and were dismissed as managers.

Terry Ryan and Bill Smith, who each had runs as general managers, also attended.

It also could have been because — it was Joe.

"I'm glad it worked out," said Molitor, who made his first comments since being removed as manager. "I wanted the chance to be one of the many who acknowledge Joe and his contribution. Obviously to the community, the organization and the effect he's had on me."

Molitor remembers watching a young Mauer blast home runs in St. Paul, then tracking his development after the Twins selected him with the first overall pick of the 2001 draft. He's admired Mauer through all his batting titles, the 2009 MVP award and how Mauer adapted after suffering a concussion later in his career.

"To watch what he was able to do here," Molitor said, "year after year, and have a chance to manage him those last few years, it was very meaningful."

Three batting titles guarantee a historic standing for Mauer's career

Patrick Reusse | Star Tribune | November 13, 2018

There were three players in contention for the 2006 American League batting title entering the final day of the regular season on Oct. 1: Joe Mauer with the Twins and Derek Jeter and Robinson Cano with the Yankees.

The Twins were playing the White Sox at the Metrodome and the Yankees were playing Toronto in the Bronx. Mauer was batting .346, Jeter .345 and Cano was at .341, and needed hits and help on that last day to win a batting title in his second season.

Mauer was attempting to become the first catcher in American League history to claim a batting title. A pair of Cincinnati Reds catchers had won batting titles in the National League: Bubbles Hargrave in 1926, and Ernie Lombardi in 1938 and 1942.

The Twins had a more intriguing drama taking place: They had been on a long run to catch Detroit at the top of the AL Central and finally equaled the Tigers' 95 victories on the Saturday before the season-closer.

The Twins had Carlos Silva facing Chicago's Javier Vazquez, making his 32nd start as part of an outstanding White Sox rotation. The Mighty Whiteys ended up winning 90 games, good for only third place in the always-rugged AL Central.

OK, not always, but in 2006 for sure.

The Tigers were at home with Kansas City, which came to Detroit with 100 losses and had won the first two games of the series. The Twins and the Tigers were both in the playoffs, but the winner would open at home vs. Oakland and the loser would be on the road vs. the Yankees.

Silva allowed a run in the first and Mauer struck out in the bottom of the inning. Mauer's double to deep left triggered a three-run rally vs. Vazquez in the fourth. Mauer also singled (to left) off Vazquez as the Twins added a run in the fifth.

Silva turned the 4-1 lead over the Twins' bullpen in the sixth, and quite a bullpen it was with lefty Dennys Reyes, Juan Rincon, Jesse Crain and Joe Nathan nailing down what became a 5-1 victory.

On Monday, there was a formal announcement of Mauer's retirement held at Target Field, and the historic nature of the batting titles was mentioned to him.

Mauer talked about Joe Vavra, the hitting coach, being in the space in the back of the Twins' dugout between innings in '06, monitoring Cano and Jeter, and checking what his man Mauer needed to stay ahead of the Yankees.

Jeter went 1 for 5 and finished at .343. Cano went 2 for 4 and finished at .342. And the American League finally had a catcher win a batting title in its 106th year of existence. It has had two more in the 12 years since, and both came from Mauer – back-to-back in 2008 (.328) and 2009 (.365).

The Tigers wound up losing in 12 innings to K.C. to give the AL Central title to the Twins. Then, the Twins were swept by Oakland and the Tigers upset the Yankees and wound up going to the World Series.

The Twins had a hat trick that season: Justin Morneau, MVP; Johan Santana, Cy Young Award; and Mauer, the first of three batting titles in four seasons.

Tim Lincecum, never a threat for a batting title but a World Series champion as a catcher, was among the former Twins attending Mauer's

announcement. Laudner was asked if the wear-and-tear a catcher endures in a season explains the dearth of batting titles.

“I don’t think that’s it,” Laudner said. “I think as a season progresses, you have to spend so much time working with pitchers – before the game, this is how we want this pitcher to work to this hitter; during the game, trying to get the right pitch to the right place – that it can overwhelm your own preparation as a hitter.

“You have to be as good a hitter as Joe Mauer to overcome that, and if you’re as good a hitter as Joe was coming into the game, there’s a strong possibility that they are going move you to another position.

“Justin Morneau was a catcher and they moved him early in his career. Good decision.

“The guy Joe mentioned today – Cano. Look it up. He was playing 158 games a year as a second baseman. With a catcher, he’s behind the plate 110, and maybe 15 more as a DH. Would you rather have a great hitter in the lineup 150-plus games or 125?”

Laudner took a ride with General Manager Terry Ryan for a Twins’ event in Mason City, Iowa in the winter before the Twins would make Mauer the No. 1 overall draft choice in June 2001.

“I told Terry, ‘I don’t think he’s going to catch’ – meaning, he was too good a hitter,” Laudner said. “And Terry said, ‘He has the skills to do both, to catch and still hit.’

The Twins didn’t see catching as a burden for Mauer. They saw it as an enhancement to his greatness as a hitter. And it was that, for seven-plus seasons, and the first major league batting titles for a catcher since 1942.

Ryan has been gone from the Twins for two years, but he was among those in attendance at Mauer’s walkoff from 15 years with his home-state organization. Ryan was asked if baseball will ever see another catcher win a batting title, in his opinion?

“History tells us no,” Ryan said. “But I wouldn’t say that for sure. There’s a kid out there now ...”

Someone else in the group said: “Yeah, the catcher at Oregon State. We better watch him for a few more years before we say never.”

Adley Rutchman is a 6-foot-2, 215-pound switch hitter entering his junior season at Oregon State. He had 17 hits in the College World Series as the Beavers came out of the losers bracket to win it last season. He batted .408 for the season, with nine home runs and 83 RBI in 68 games.

“He can’t run like this guy could,” said Ryan, nodding across the room to Mauer, “so he’s going to keep catching. And he can hit.”

Memories begin and end with Joe Mauer the three-sport prep star

Chip Scoggings | Star Tribune | November 13, 2018

Joe Mauer had a major announcement to make in the morning. Rumors were circulating that he would pick Florida State as his college choice. So I called his home number for an interview.

In his typical Gentleman Joe tone, Mauer apologized and asked if we could talk later. He was studying for a test.

True to his word, he called back later that night after finishing his homework.

That was 17½ years ago, and that memory remains fresh because that’s how I will remember Joe Mauer’s athletic career. Not the middle or the end, but its beginning stages.

I was hired by this newspaper in early January 2000 to cover high school sports. I learned during my interview about a talented multisport athlete at Cretin-Derham Hall. You’ll probably write a lot about him, someone mentioned.

Yeah, just a little.

Being assigned to chronicle Mauer’s high school athletic career still stands as one of the highlights of my writing career. Minnesotans love to debate whether Mauer ranks as the state’s best athlete ever. My slightly different view: He is the best all-around athlete that I’ve witnessed in nearly three decades of covering sports for newspapers in six different states.

And it’s not close.

As a senior, he was named Gatorade National Player of the Year in football. He was chosen all-state in basketball. And he was the No. 1 overall

pick in the Major League Baseball amateur draft.

In an era of sports specialization, Mauer didn't just play three sports. Some viewed him as the best player nationally in two sports and he could've played Division I basketball in his "third" sport.

"I loved every minute of it," he said Monday at his retirement news conference.

He loved to reminisce about those days, too. Over the years, our conversations at spring training or in the Twins clubhouse often veered back to his high school career, specific games and players that he competed with and against.

In an interview seven years after he graduated, Mauer hadn't forgotten that former Wayzata star Marion Barber III intercepted him three times in high school. Not just remembered, Mauer dissected each interception in specific detail.

"[One] was an out pattern to Tony Leseman," Mauer recalled. "I was on the fifth step of my drop. I saw Barber make a break, so I tried to throw it low and away. He dove for it and was parallel to the ground. It was a pretty impressive play."

Again, seven years after the fact.

Mauer's laid-back, humble personality masked a fiercely competitive streak. His mom, Teresa, found him lounging on the couch at home the day of the football state championship game. She checked his pulse.

"I had to make sure he was still breathing," she joked. "There were a lot of days like that."

And a lot of memorable performances. Too many to list. He threw game-winning touchdowns, made game-winning shots and struck out only once in 222 career high school at-bats.

A few of my personal favorites:

Mauer passed for 327 yards and four touchdowns in a win over Wayzata in the big-school state semifinals as a senior.

In the semifinals of the state basketball tournament that year, he posted 25 points, eight rebounds and five assists in a loss to Osseo.

His finest baseball moment came in the state semifinals against Brainerd that year. He hit a game-tying three-run homer in the fifth inning, then pitched the final five innings to earn the win. He struck out nine, only allowed one hit and reached 91 miles per hour on the radar gun.

"That was the moment where I was like, 'Wow, we're watching someone develop into a pretty special deal,' " said Leseman, who remains Mauer's closest friend.

Everyone knew it, especially watching him glide from one sport to the next. Football season would conclude and boom, he's scoring 25 points in a basketball game. Basketball finished and boom, he's hitting rockets to the gap in baseball.

He made everything look effortless. And he displayed no ego doing it. Just the opposite. His personality was so unassuming as a teenage prodigy that you'd have thought he was a backup on the JV team.

Mauer laid bare his soul at Monday's retirement news conference in a way the public rarely, if ever, witnessed throughout his Twins career. Normally stoic, his emotions and tears came pouring out.

His legacy will be a matter of personal perspective. For some, the focus might be his MVP season. Or that sweet, perfect swing. Or his contract. Or his unfortunate injuries. Or that he was a genuinely nice and classy guy.

Me? I'll always reflect back on the beginning, when I took a new job in a new state and had the good fortune to write about a kid who could do anything.

Emotional Joe Mauer bids adieu to Twins: 'I made the right decision'

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | November 13, 2018

There were tears, and there were hugs. There were tributes and thank yous. There were reminiscences and what-ifs and wisecracks. But as Joe Mauer, surrounded by family, friends and an impressive cross-section of the Twins' recent history, formally announced Monday that his playing career has ended, there were absolutely zero farewells.

“The beauty of being from Minnesota,” Mauer said, “is I don’t have to say goodbye.”

That’s because Mauer, a son of St. Paul who until this month had been an employee of the Minnesota Twins for his entire adult life, intends to remain in Minnesota, and perhaps even at Target Field. Though presumably not quite as frequently as his grandparents, Michael and Phyllis Tierney, who he said missed seeing him play at home perhaps a dozen times over his 15-year major-league career.

“I’m going to raise my kids here. My family is here, born and raised. I was a Twins fan before I was a Twin,” Mauer said, daubing his eyes with tissue occasionally as he contemplated the people who helped him achieve more than all but a glorified handful of Twins before him. “I don’t plan on going anywhere unless you guys don’t want me. I’m here.”

Whether that means coaching catchers or evaluating prospects or simply joining Tony Oliva as public goodwill ambassadors, well, that hasn’t been decided.

“I definitely want to be connected,” he said, but Mauer’s third child — he and wife Maddie don’t know whether it’s a third daughter or a first son — is due in the next week or two, “so we’ll be all-hands-on-deck for that,” he said. And then he’ll take some time to adjust to setting his own schedule, and not following one mandated by Major League Baseball.

That will take some getting used to, Mauer admitted, and though he left his touchingly sentimental final game knowing he probably wouldn’t be back, he wasn’t certain about that until getting away from the ballpark for awhile.

“I still feel like I can compete at this level, so [retirement] is a tough thing to swallow,” Mauer said candidly. “But I know it’s the right decision for me, and I made it. I’m excited and I’m happy for that.”

Still, he admitted, he would have kept wearing the uniform if it didn’t mean wondering about whether he might suffer another concussion, about whether he was risking more bouts of nausea and light-sensitivity and worse side effects of a brain injury. When he suffered another one in May, one caused without any serious head impact but that affected him for a month anyway, “it made me think. When it happened, it made me a little more aware,” Mauer said. He even feared his career was over, midseason.

“It brought me back to 2013 and a lot of the struggles I faced back then,” he said. “So I feel this is the best plan not only for me, but my family.”

Mauer downplayed how difficult it might be to watch, not lead, the Twins next year, but it’ll hit him soon enough, said someone who can relate to his condition and his decision. Justin Morneau, who also won a Most Valuable Player Award as a Twin but whose career was abruptly damaged by a concussion, said his former teammate will now go through the withdrawals that all former players do.

“When you were a good hitter at one time, you always believe you can hit. You can watch a game 10 years from now and still believe you could be out there,” Morneau said. “How he hit in big moments [this season] showed that he could still play. But the mind and the body are two different things. So if you don’t feel like you can physically make it through that grind, you’re really doing a disservice to yourself and your teammates if you don’t feel you can do that. Unfortunately, that’s where he’s at, but we got to see greatness for a long time.”

A crowd of VIPs testified to that. Four Twins managers — Tom Kelly, Ron Gardenhire, Paul Molitor and newly hired Rocco Baldelli — were in the room, a testament to Mauer’s respect among his bosses. Ex-general managers Terry Ryan and Bill Smith were there, and Mauer choked up briefly when he thanked Ryan “for taking a chance on a kid from St. Paul” in the 2001 draft.

One of the best decisions he ever made, Ryan said. “When you draft a guy, especially in the first round, you’re looking for talent and character. And he had plenty of both,” Ryan said. “Joe carried himself about as well as any player I was ever around. He had the respect of everyone in the game — the opposition, opposing managers, umpires, teammates and the total respect of our fan base.”

Wild winger Zach Parise, another hometown professional and a close friend, was present, too. Oliva and Morneau were in the crowd, along with Corey Koskie, Glen Perkins, Jack Morris and Tim Laudner.

And there were a roomful of Mauers, too, with his parents, Jake and Teresa, sitting in the front row. “You know, the thing I’m most proud of is that he kept his nose clean all these years. I don’t think you can find somebody who says a bad word about that kid,” Mauer’s father said. “We’re very proud of that.”

Mauer is a free agent, and could have looked for a job with a playoff team, in hopes of experiencing the championship that eluded him here before he quit the game. But Morneau, who did reach the playoffs with Pittsburgh after being dealt away by the Twins, said it’s a quest that’s probably not worth the effort.

“You can’t just pick a situation and assume it’s going to work out and you’ll win a World Series,” Morneau said. “So for him to disrupt his family, and for the risk of injury, deal with concussion stuff, to chase something that isn’t guaranteed, it’s hard to win that argument when you

have a 1-in-30 chance to do it.”

He’s glad to retire as a Twin, Mauer said, the 22nd MVP ever to spend his entire 15-year-career with one team. The other 21 are all in the Hall of Fame, and Mauer will see if he keeps the record perfect, beginning in five years when his name first appears on the ballot.

Twins owner Jim Pohlad is glad he stayed, too. On the day in 2010 that Mauer signed his eight-year, \$184 million contract, Pohlad shook hands with the six-time All-Star.

“He told me that he would always give us his best. And I have never forgotten that. And I have always believed it,” Pohlad said. “There have been some down times, but mostly great times. But I never doubted him, and I always believed he delivered.”

Twins greets, former teammates on hand for Mauer’s farewell

Associated Press | Fox Sports North | November 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Yes, the narrative of Joe Mauer’s career was missing a championship chapter. That plotline stalled for a few years while the star was set back by injuries.

Still, this story of the Minnesota native with the smooth left-handed swing who played for the Twins the entire time sure was made for a movie.

Six weeks after Mauer symbolically donned his catcher’s gear for one last crouch behind the plate in the final inning of the season, Mauer formalized his goodbye to the game at a tear-filled-yet-cheerful news conference to wrap up a 15-year major league career at age 35.

“I’ve been fortunate enough to have the personal accolades, and I really do believe that’s a byproduct of how the team does, and those things just come along with it,” Mauer said. “But I’d want to be known as a great teammate, a great person, and a guy who gave it everything he had.”

Even the closing credits were memorable.

Mauer carefully flipped through a stack of note cards over a 15-minute thank-you on Monday to the people he’s closest to with a stack of tissues in front of him on the podium. He needed them immediately, when the mention of his parents, Jake and Teresa, caused his eyes to water and his voice to waver.

“You helped keep me grounded and never let me forget my roots,” said Mauer, who began honing his skills at the sandlots and rec centers of St. Paul, less than 10 miles from the big league ballparks in Minneapolis he first began playing in at age 20 to open the 2004 seasons.

That’s the same city where Hall of Fame members Jack Morris, Paul Molitor and Dave Winfield were raised. Mauer’s final tally of 2,123 hits might ultimately leave him short of the call to Cooperstown, but he was clearly on that track over the first 10 years of his career considering he hit .323 with an .873 on-base-plus-slugging percentage until a concussion in 2013 forced him to move out from behind the plate and become a first baseman. Mauer is the only American League catcher to win a batting title, a feat he accomplished three times: 2006, 2008 and 2009.

The six-time All-Star finished with a .306 lifetime average

“The naysayers will talk about maybe not enough career numbers, a little decline at the end ... but there’s going to be a lot of numbers that put him right in the mix with some of the Hall of Famers,” Molitor said. “So I’m obviously a little bit biased. I’d love to see it happen.”

The latest concussion in May that kept him out for a month, Mauer said, caused him to seriously consider retiring for the first time. The expiration of his eight-year, \$184 million contract in October created a natural parting, but the long-term effect of head injuries and his dedication to family weighed much heavier than an MLB-best .407 batting average this year with runners in scoring position.

The respect for Mauer was evident with the appearance of former Twins managers Molitor, Ron Gardenhire and Tom Kelly and ex-general managers Terry Ryan and Bill Smith. Molitor was fired last month and replaced by Rocco Baldelli, who also showed up.

So did Mauer’s former teammates Glen Perkins, Justin Morneau and Corey Koskie. His coach at Cretin-Derham Hall High School, Jim O’Neill, who taught him to never swing at the first pitch, was there. His maternal grandparents, who attended all but about a dozen of his home games with the Twins, a staggering total of approximately 1,200, attended as well.

With his wife, Maddie, due any day with the couple’s third child, Mauer’s focus for now will be on husband and father rather than fielding and hitting. He said he’ll stay connected to his hometown team in some capacity and will, in case there were any question, raise his kids in Minnesota.

Ryan sat in the front row of the packed room in the basement of Target Field as Mauer expressed his gratitude for the decision to draft him in 2001 with the first overall pick instead of Mark Prior or Mark Teixeira.

“There were a lot of great options out there, but I’m so thankful you had the confidence in me, and it means more to me than you’ll ever know,” Mauer said.

Making so much money and missing so many games soured the cynical portions of the fan base on Mauer, but even if he had stayed healthy like Cal Ripken Jr. and hit home runs like Harmon Killebrew he would have carried immense pressure playing in his home territory.

“I knew what it was like for me, and it was times 100 for him,” said Perkins, another Minnesota native who spent his whole career with the Twins.

In the end, Mauer’s maturity and poise stuck with his admirers as much as his keen eye and textbook swing.

Morneau, who was Mauer’s closest friend on the Twins during the 10 seasons they played together, recalled hitting a home run during an afternoon game in 2006 while playing with a bit of a hangover from an outing at a St. Paul bar the night before. Mauer wasn’t so impressed.

“I said, ‘How can you argue with that?’” Morneau said, smiling. “And he said, ‘How do you know if you weren’t hung over you wouldn’t have hit two homers?’ And I said, ‘You know what? He’s got a point.’”

Morneau went on to the AL MVP award that year. Mauer won it three seasons later.

“He was as special a hitter as you could watch,” Morneau said, “and I had the best seat in the house for a long time.”

Joe Mauer’s difficult concussion battle made it the right time to walk away

Dan Hayes | The Athletic | November 13, 2018

Before last season began, Joe Mauer had every intention of returning to the Twins in 2019.

During spring training, the Twins star had already made the determination that if it were possible to return, he still had enough ability to play on, the desire to win and the drive to put in the work necessary. Mauer reiterated those beliefs at a Monday morning press conference in which he announced his retirement from baseball after 15 seasons with the Twins.

But as the year played out, the grind of a 162-game schedule, the disappointment of a rough season for the Twins and the daily preparation added up and Mauer began thinking about spending more time with family.

And of course, there was the concussion.

During a May contest in Anaheim, Calif., life away from the ballpark interceded with his playing career and changed it all. In the week after he jarred his neck laying out for a foul ball, Mauer began to experience concussion-like symptoms that ultimately would force him to miss 25 games.

The first reoccurrence of a concussion since a foul tip off the catcher’s mask had drastically altered his career in August 2013 left Mauer frustrated, uncertain if he ever might play again and with plenty of questions about his health. It also forced a man who is the baseball version of a gym rat to stay away from Target Field for several days to allow his brain to heal.

But life at home with two young daughters wasn’t all that much easier as Mauer experienced balance issues and sensitivity to light among other symptoms. Along with other factors, seeing how much his life off the field was impacted by the concussion forced the St. Paul native to re-evaluate his priorities. With another baby due soon, Mauer retired, citing health concerns and family in a letter he penned to Twins fans on Friday.

“It definitely opened my eyes a little bit,” Mauer said. “Brought me back to 2013 and a lot of the struggles I had faced back then. And that’s one thing, I worked so hard to get back to playing and finishing this year out, and I’m thankful I was able to do that. And that play wasn’t the end, but it made me think. My doctors made me aware of the risk, but when it happened, it made me a little more aware.

“In spring training, I told all you guys I hope I’m here next year, doing this all over again. And that really was my mindset. (But) over the course of a major-league season, things happen and you make adjustments and I feel this is the best plan not only for me, but for my family. I’m happy about that.”

Initially, a moment that had an influential role on Mauer’s decision to retire wasn’t very noteworthy.

Though he laid out with a full-body dive for a foul ball and jarred his neck, Mauer remained in the May 11 game. He would later report neck stiffness, but Mauer still managed to play all 12 innings of the next day’s game. Mauer didn’t start the day after that, but he had a pinch-hit RBI single late before playing the final three innings at first base.

It wasn't until several days later that concussion-like symptoms kicked in. While the Twins talked about the light sensitivity and balance issues and how it could slow him on the field, life off it was just as difficult.

"I experienced a different version of it at home," Maddie Mauer, Joe's wife, said. "And for us with kids, those things are serious. A lot of times when he talks about those symptoms, people equate it to baseball and the lights of the stadium, and I get that. That's a big part of him being able to go out and do his job. But at home we have two 5-year-olds. It's not quiet at our house and they don't understand why dad wants it to be quiet or be in a different room or have the lights off.

"Our girls had been born about a month prior (to the 2013 concussion). Both of these times it does put things into perspective that you're dealing with these symptoms at work, but you're dealing with them at home just as much. I think that's something he may not have talked about as much publicly, but it was a difficult challenge to be going through concussion-like symptoms with children."

Another difficulty for players dealing with concussions is the up-and-down nature of the process. Mauer described it as the "unknown" and former teammate Justin Morneau, one of many Twins dignitaries who was on hand for Monday's press conference, knew exactly what he meant.

"Unless you've been through it, to go through a situation where you don't know when you're going to be better, if you're going to be better, what day you're going to feel better — sometimes you'll have two good days and then all of a sudden a bad day creeps in — it's such a frustrating process," said Morneau, who suffered two concussions in his career, including one that ended his 2010 season in July.

"I think that probably was tough. He'd seen me go through the long rehab process. He'd been through a long rehab process. When you have a reoccurrence of something like that, you don't know if you're going to be better in a week or a year, it really affects you."

If it had just been a neck injury, Twins trainer Tony Leo would have had Mauer up and running in a few days' time. But once the other symptoms kicked in, Leo understood Mauer could be in for a frustrating period no matter if he were at home or at the ballpark.

"The neck is an easy one to take care of," Leo said. "We can fix that. But the concussion had all these ebbs and flows going up and down.

"I think people don't appreciate how much it impacts you on a day-to-day basis with just simple things like getting out of bed. Am I going to feel OK? Am I going to have a headache? Am I going to have ringing in my ears? Am I going to feel nauseous? Am I going to be able to see all right? When I turn on the lamp next to my bed, is that light going to cause me to start having a headache? Am I going to be too agitated and upset at my kids when it's not their fault, but just because of all the sensations going on.

"Everything starts compounding and adding to the anxiety you're going through when you're trying to minimize all these distractions and trying to allow the brain to heal. Little things trigger big symptoms, which cause you to doubt whether you're healing or not. It's really hard to remove yourself from everything let alone when you're in the clubhouse with music, all the lights we have, TVs, people. You have the same thing at home with the day-to-day living that. ... We get focused on the baseball. I get focused on getting them back on the field for the game. But how do you start minimizing everything else in life that's bothering you, especially with kids who just want to be around dad?"

The situation forced the Mauers to re-evaluate their future. With the third child due any day now — the couple doesn't know the baby's sex — Joe Mauer wants to be there for his wife and family. During his opening remarks, Mauer told Maddie, who was seated in the front row of a packed conference room, about his excitement to begin this "new chapter with you and our family."

"There's so much uncertainty with any type of concussion, and everyone deals with these things differently," Maddie Mauer said. "Especially if you've had more than one, it can be different, too. I feel like he had to sit back and think about not only the baseball piece of it, but if this were ever to happen again, how greatly it affects our home life as well."

At the time, Mauer wasn't sure if he'd be able to return to the field. He wanted to get back to his teammates and help the Twins, who were beset with injuries and struggling players. A team that began the season with postseason aspirations was 22-30 heading into June and Mauer hoped to help.

As much as he wanted Mauer's assistance, former Twins manager Paul Molitor knew nothing was certain. It was a unique experience even to Molitor, and that fact wasn't lost on him on Monday.

"I hadn't really had to deal with any player that the symptoms were potentially as severe in terms of the limitations when it first occurred," Molitor said. "The fact that it went backwards. The first day or two we were encouraged and then it got worse.

"Like Joe alluded to, there's so much unpredictability with case-to-case with those situations. I didn't know where it was going. I just really tried to allow Joe, as well as our medical staff, to let him be the guide about coming back. Then we started to see a little bit of signs that it might be headed in the right direction and thankfully once he did get back, we didn't have to take a step back. (It was) kind of meant to be that he got back out there those last few months."

Once he was cleared for action, Mauer's final months were full of milestones and highlights. He set a team record for doubles in a career. He blasted a pinch-hit, game-winning home run in mid-August. He hit a grand slam off the Yankees in September.

No moment, however, was bigger than Sept. 30, when Mauer was given the opportunity to crouch behind the plate one last time. Two innings after he doubled in the final at-bat of his career, Mauer caught what amounted to be a ceremonial pitch from Matt Belisle to start the ninth inning of the regular-season finale and then rode off into the sunset.

Aside from a postseason appearance, the ending was exactly the way Mauer wanted to end a brilliant career that saw him become the only catcher to ever win three batting titles, take home the 2009 AL MVP award, earn three Gold Gloves at catcher and make six All-Star teams while hitting .306 lifetime and being at or near the top of the Twins' all-time list in just about every major statistical category. Going from being unsure he might not play again in May because of a concussion to catching one last pitch at the position where he saw so much of that success made everything add up.

"Not knowing if when you try to ride a bike that everything is going to be OK, that's what's so difficult with concussions," he said. "It's different with everyone. From my experience, at that time, I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to come back and do what I loved. Like I said, I was thankful I was able to do that and finish the season out on a strong note."

Tribute to No. 7: Things to know about Joe Mauer **Pioneer Press | Pioneer Press | November 13, 2018**

Joe Mauer wore No. 7 for the Twins for 15 seasons and likely will have that uniform number retired by the club. Here are seven things to know about Joe as a pro, and seven things to know about him as a St. Paulite.

AS A PRO

1. Twins minor league teams featured three Mauer boys in 2003: Joe, the first pick of the 2001 draft; Jake, an infielder picked in the 23rd round of the 2001 draft; and Billy, a pitcher who signed in 2003 as an undrafted free agent. Joe went to the major leagues in 2004; Jake and Billy retired in 2005 as minor leaguers.
2. Joe spent his first three professional seasons in the minors, where he hit .400 for Elizabethton, .302 for Quad Cities, .341 for New Britain and .335 for Fort Myers.
3. Joe and Justin Morneau — the M&M boys — played 10 seasons together, from 2004-13, leading the Twins to four division titles. Justin was AL MVP in 2006, Joe in 2009.
4. Joe's 2010 contract for \$184 million over eight seasons was the fourth-biggest in major league history at the time, for total value and average salary.
5. Injuries plagued Joe's career. He played his most games, 158, in 2015 and his fewest, 35, in 2004.
6. Joe's career batting average is .306, ranking No. 138 all time. He is in an exact statistical tie (.3063) with baseball hall of famer, fellow St. Paul native and Cretin grad Paul Molitor.
7. Here's the stat that should get Joe into the Hall of Fame: He is the only American League catcher to win a batting title, and he did it three times, hitting .347 in 2006, .328 in 2008 and .365 in 2009. Two NL catchers won, Eugene Hargrave in 1926 and Ernie Lombardi in 1938 and 1942.

Twins' Joe Mauer is one of us, and we'll miss him playing ball **John Shipley | Pioneer Press | November 13, 2018**

After the unofficial sendoff the Twins gave Joe Mauer during the season finale, it was easy to believe the final news conference would be a formality; that all the emotion was used up when the local lad put on the catcher's gear one last time during that 5-4 victory over the Chicago White Sox on Sept. 30.

How could anything top Mauer emerging from the Twins dugout wearing the tools of a trade he had to give up for health reasons after the 2013 season?

ends and tears begin in emotional farewell
St. Paul hit-and-run driver violates parole, asks judge for another chance

After the unofficial sendoff the Twins gave Joe Mauer during the season finale, it was easy to believe the final news conference would be a formality; that all the emotion was used up when the local lad put on the catcher's gear one last time during that 5-4 victory over the Chicago White Sox on Sept. 30.

How could anything top Mauer emerging from the Twins dugout wearing the tools of a trade he had to give up for health reasons after the 2013 season?

What could be more bittersweet than Mauer alone on the Target Field diamond, waving his trademark red-white-and-blue helmet slowly to the faithful before receiving one last pitch from teammate Matt Belisle?

What could be more heartwarming than Mauer's 5-year-old twin daughters greeting him as he took his position at first base to start the game?

It was mentioned to a Twins front officer member a few weeks ago that Mauer pretty much had to retire after a sendoff like that. "Yeah," he joked. "We may have overdone it."

But Mauer was not pushed out the door, and he was not enticed to retire by anything more than the chance to leave with his health intact and a young family waiting for a full-time husband and father. And as the end officially set in Monday, there was emotion to spare, if only because this time there was no hedging.

"I'm not going to lie," he said, choking up as he started his prepared statement. "I'm pretty overwhelmed by emotion right now."

It was a great day for Mauer, his friends and his family, but it was a sad day for the Twins and their fans — even those magnanimous enough to share a piece of the local hero's good fortune. Joe Mauer is done playing baseball, and even after a nearly season-long farewell, it remains difficult to fathom.

Joe Mauer said goodbye Monday, tears welling in his eyes and a frog in his throat. He'll be around. The St. Paul native will remain in the Twin Cities, and at some point join the Twins in an official capacity, but he'll never wear the home pinstripes in a game again. Never take the first pitch or double to the gap, never line out to left-center or keep an inning alive with a two-out walk. Never block a runner at the plate or dive for a grounder at first. Never ground out to second or throw out a runner at second.

It's no tragedy, and of no great concern for most of the world. But for those of us in Minnesota who watch baseball, it's another trenchant reminder of time's immutable march. Mauer has been a household name here since he became a three-sport star at Cretin-Derham Hall in the late 1990s, all smiles and promise and humility. We watched him grow up.

Whether you loved him or were one of the vocal minority that thought his contract was ruining the franchise, Mauer was there for 15 years for you to praise or criticize. He embodied our most confident aspirations, becoming for a time one of the greatest catchers in major league history, and our perpetual anxieties, that achievement ultimately taken by inescapable human frailty in the form of the August 2013 concussion that nearly ended his career.

He hit .365 with 28 homers and 96 RBIs to win the 2009 American League MVP Award. He won three Gold Gloves and four Silver Slugger Awards. He was a six-time all-star and a member of four Central Division winners. He might one day join fellow St. Paul natives Dave Winfield, Paul Molitor and Jack Morris in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

And he was ours, one of us — bigger than life but never bigger than his britches.

"I looked up," Steve Forbert once sang, "and it was gone."

The Boy Wonder is no longer a boy and no longer a baseball player. Whether you know it or not, in one way or another, you will miss him.

Without most recent concussion, Joe Mauer might still be playing for Twins
Dane Mizutani | Pioneer Press | November 13, 2018

On more than a few occasions during his teary-eyed farewell news conference Monday at Target Field, hometown boy Joe Mauer doubled down, insisting that he feels good about his decision to retire after 15 seasons with his hometown team.

While the competitive fire no doubt still burns inside of the 35-year-old St. Paul native, he made it clear that he knows it's time to move on to the next chapter in his life.

There was a hypothetical question, though, that seemed to make Mauer at least a little contemplative: If he hadn't suffered a concussion in mid-May, would he still be playing for the Minnesota Twins?

"The decision came down to my health and my family," Mauer wrote in a letter to Twins fans released Friday. "The risk of concussion is always there, and I was reminded of that this season after missing over 30 games as a result of diving for a foul ball."

His well-documented history with concussions started on Aug. 19 2013 when a foul tip banged off Mauer's mask and triggered a concussion that forced him to move from catcher to first base the following season. He said giving up catching was "one of the toughest decisions" he had to make in his career. But it was one that fit his life off the field.

He and his wife Madde welcomed twin daughters, Emily and Maren, into the world on July 24, 2013, less than a month before his career-altering concussion.

That forced Mauer to think about the long-term effects of playing the position he loved, thoughts that came rushing back in mid-May when he suffered a concussion while diving for a foul ball.

"That definitely opened my eyes a little bit," Mauer said. "It brought me back to a lot of the struggles that I faced back then. It made me think. Obviously my doctors made me aware of the risks (before that) and then when it happened it made me a little more aware."

"I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to come back and do what I love. I was thankful that I was able to do that and finish this season out on a strong note."

Mauer said that mid-May concussion was the first time he seriously considered retirement. He talked candidly about how becoming a parent put things in perspective, and with a third child on the way any day now, he knew it was time to move on.

"I have reached a point where my desire to play is outweighed by the possibility of another injury," Mauer wrote in his letter to Twins fans. "My personal experience forced me to look beyond baseball."

Throughout the recovery process, Mauer leaned heavily on manager Paul Molitor and former teammate Justin Morneau, who also has a well-documented history with concussions.

"We really tried to allow Joe to be the leader about when he came back," said Molitor, a fellow Cretin star who was fired as Twins manager the day after the 2018 season concluded. "We started to see some signs that it was going in the right direction, and thankfully, once he got back we didn't have to take a step back. It was kind of meant to be that he got back out there the last few months."

Still, the fact that it happened in any capacity no doubt had a lingering affect on Mauer.

That's something Morneau understands, especially when the injury occurred on something as simple as diving for a foul ball.

"It's hard to play with fear," Morneau said, emphasizing that he wasn't speaking for Mauer on the matter. "As a young player we're fearless and don't always think about the consequence. You dive for every ball. You run into every wall. Ask Torii Hunter about it. He ran into every pole in that outfield fence in the Metrodome."

"You kind of go through that and then all of a sudden reality kicks in. You look up and have kids at home. You want to be able to enjoy that, too. You work so hard to live this dream, and that's great. If we can't remember anything that's going on when it's done, though, then what was the point of it? You want to be able to have those memories and be able to spend that quality time with family and stuff like that. That helps make the decision a lot easier."

That proved to be the case for Mauer, and after taking a couple of months to think about it, he knows he's making the right call.

"I wanted to let things calm a little bit and make sure the daily grind wasn't making my decision for me," Mauer said. "I've done that. I've taken the time I needed to take and I feel 100 percent about my decision."

Joe Mauer's Twins career ends and tears begin in emotional farewell

Brian Murphy | Pioneer Press | November 13, 2018

It took Joe Mauer 18 years to draw the curtain on his professional baseball career but only seconds for the waterworks to spring Monday during his emotional farewell to the Minnesota Twins and the game he loved playing.

Maddie saw it coming, however. Mauer's wife was more nervous about how the St. Paul kid who played 15 seasons for his hometown team

would stay composed walking away with every seminal person in his life staring him down on the dais.

“There was so much emotion and history,” Maddie Mauer said. “I think I slept less than he did because I felt that for him. I knew he was going to get through it. He means what he says when he says these people are like family.”

Mauer’s vanilla affability belied a fierce competitor who respected baseball’s nuances, who hated losing and maintained a stiff upper lip against critics who bemoaned his waning production after concussions ended his hall of fame-ready catching career in 2013.

Rarely did Mauer show emotion on the field or off it. But the moment had been building momentum since his ceremonial send-off in catcher’s gear during the Twins’ Sept. 30 season finale at Target Field.

Monday he fought back tears and paused several times to compose himself as he glanced at index cards to recite the names on his personal murderer’s row, from his grandparents, parents and two older brothers to former Twins teammates, managers, executives and staff who shepherded his career in Minnesota from 2004-18.

He saved the most tears for Maddie.

“I’m not sure I have the right words to express my gratitude, my admiration or my love for you,” he said. “You’ve been my biggest supporter, biggest fan, and my rock. You made everything happen at home so I could go out there and play a game that I love. I know it wasn’t easy on you three when I’d leave. But you sure made it look like it.”

Maddie is due with Mauer child No. 3 on Nov. 22, but plans to be induced no later than Wednesday. Whether a brother or sister will join twins Maren and Emily remains a mystery.

“That was Joe’s big thing,” she said. “He wanted that surprise element again.”

Mauer’s news conference felt like a giant family reunion, with distant cousins and friends of the family invited to the party. Twins royalty was everywhere.

There were former teammates Corey Koskie, Justin Morneau and Glen Perkins; former Twins managers Tom Kelly, Ron Gardenhire and Paul Molitor; Wild winger and close friend Zach Parise; recently inducted hall of famer Jack Morris. along with team ambassadors Tony Oliva, Kent Hrbek and Tim Laudner.

Twins president Dave St. Peter could barely keep it together talking about Mauer’s body of work as a player and generous philanthropist. His popular Mauer and Friends Kid Classic allows parents and children with serious medical issues to play games on the outfield grass at Target Field. It raised \$1 million this year for research and capital projects.

“Few, if any, players in our game had more respect on the diamond than Joe Mauer,” St. Peter said.

Twins owner Jim Pohlad recalled greeting Mauer at the Twins’ spring training complex in Fort Myers, Fla., in March 2010, after they had brokered the record eight-year, \$184 million contract that ultimately kept Mauer in Minnesota for his entire career.

“He shook my hand and told me he would always give us his best; I have never forgotten it,” Pohlad said. “There have been some down times but mostly great times. I never doubted what he said to me and I always believed he delivered on that.”

Mauer’s legacy is well-chronicled, and it figures to take broader shape as the great debate about his hall of fame bona fides intensifies when he becomes eligible for Cooperstown in 2023.

Baseball’s No. 1 overall draft choice in 2001 left a football scholarship to Florida State on the table to sign with the Twins. He made his major-league debut in 2004, became a six-time all-star, three-time Gold Glove winner and was named 2009 American League most valuable player and finished with a .306 career batting average, plus an OPS of .827.

The sweet-swinging left hander is the only American League catcher to win a batting title, let alone three.

“If you’re the first to do anything in this game with the rich history this game has, it’s pretty special in itself,” he said.

Mauer credited his paternal grandfather, Jake, for that.

“Thanks for keeping me in that left-handed batter’s box,” he said.

He was on a hall-of-fame trajectory as a catcher before concussions forced him to shelve his mask, shin guards and chest protector for a first baseman's glove, a position that saved his career but could not salvage several injury-marred and unproductive seasons that followed.

Molitor, his last big-league manager, a fellow Cretin-Derham Hall alumnus and a 2001 Hall of Fame inductee, acknowledged Mauer's numbers will sour him in the eyes of many voters. But, Molitor said, Mauer's career should be judged more generally.

"There's the impact of that player's particular generation of players, where they fit it. I think that side of the debate will favor him more than the numbers," Molitor said. "They might be career-short but there have been exceptions for people that had maybe less career numbers but have been hall of famers, (Kirby) Puckett being one of those people."

Mauer could become the fourth player from St. Paul to be enshrined.

"The debate will be ongoing for the next handful of years, but it would be nice to add a fourth to the east side of the river," Molitor said.

Mauer said the concussion he suffered in May diving for a ground ball was a blunt reminder that his career could end at any moment. He was able to return following a three-week absence but admitted Monday that was when he seriously started considering retirement.

"It definitely opened my eyes a little bit," he said. "Brought me back to 2013 and a lot of the struggles I had faced back then. Not knowing when you try to ride a bike that everything is going to be OK. That's what's so difficult with concussions. It's different for everyone. I feel 100 percent behind my decision. I know the right decision for me and I made it."

Meanwhile, Mauer is excited to be a stay-at-home dad while discussing a possible future in the Twins organization, which he is no hurry to try.

Maddie promised her honey-do list will not be too long.

"This will be new for both of us," she said. "He really likes the dad role. He's ready to do it, the field trips. He made some apple pies with the girls at school last week. He missed being home with the kids. I think he's ready for the next chapter."

Retired Joe Mauer 'ready to help Twins win in the future' **John Shipley | Pioneer Press | November 13, 2018**

Joe Mauer had a standing offer to return to the Twins as a player in 2019; now he has a standing offer to return to the organization in a different capacity, whatever that might be.

He seems willing to accept it — at some point.

"No matter what happens, I'll be here and be ready to help this team win in the future," Mauer said during his retirement news conference Monday at Target Field.

Twins chief baseball officer Derek Falvey said he will give Mauer, 35, all the time he needs. Mauer and his wife, Maddie, are expecting their third child any day now, and Mauer said his first priority is to be there for his family.

"What I had told him during the course of the year, and it's easier to say now on the record, was just, 'Listen, if you want to be back here, we'll figure out a way around this, but I also don't want to pressure you into what your future looks like,' " Falvey said Monday.

Falvey said he already has leaned on Mauer for ideas, especially regarding strength-and-conditioning and flexibility routines that helped him play 15 major league seasons. Whatever Mauer might do in the future, whether it's in the front office or as a coach, Falvey said, "I think Joe's going to have opportunities to do about whatever he wants. We would welcome him and would want him to be involved at the level that he feels is appropriate."

How about working with catchers? Mauer won three Gold Gloves, and three batting titles, while playing catcher before a serious concussion forced him to switch to first base.

"Oh, my God, we would love for him to spend some time with our young catchers, and some of the catchers at the big-league level," Falvey said.

NO DECISION

Paul Molitor hasn't yet made a decision on his immediate future, the Hall of Fame player and former Twins manager said.

Among the dozens of Minnesota baseball luminaries to attend Mauer's retirement news conference at Target Field, Molitor said he is still weighing his options after being fired as the Twins' manager a day after the team's 2018 season ended with a six-game winning streak.

“No progress on an answer,” he said. “I don’t really have anything going on yet. It’s kind of quiet.”

The St. Paul native and Cretin High School grad was fired with a year left on a contract that will pay him about \$1.5 million in 2019. He has been offered an undetermined position within the organization, but neither he nor the team have come to any conclusions. The Twins had winning records in two of his four seasons as manager, and he was named the 2017 American League manager of the year after the team returned to the playoffs for the first time since 2010 by earned the AL’s second wild-card spot.

He said he’s had conversations with Twins leadership over the past month and a half but nothing “very substantive as of yet. I don’t think anybody feels any urgency — me or them. We will keep talking and see if anything makes sense.”

Molitor could almost certainly land a coaching job elsewhere, but at 61 it’s unclear whether he wants to jump back in or take a season off. Before succeeding Rob Gardenhire as manager, he was a longtime roving instructor in the Twins organization.

“Let’s let the calendar turn and see what January holds,” he said. “I’m enjoying some down time.”

CURATING MAUER

Mauer said he kept his catcher’s gear in his home since he retired from catching after the 2013 season. After wearing them one last time in the Twins’ Sept. 30 season finale, he donated it all to the Twins.

Team historian Clyde Doepner made a small display for Monday’s announcement that included the jersey, batting helmet, chest protector and catcher’s helmet Mauer wore during a 5-4 victory over the Chicago White Sox at Target Field. But he has much more — spikes, a first baseman’s glove and the jersey Mauer wore on the day he signed with the Twins, July 17, 2001.

“Number 71,” Doepner said. “We couldn’t give him his high school number, 16, because that was Doug Mientkiewicz’s number, and you couldn’t tell Dougie you’d just given his number to a rookie.”

Doepner said he is assembling a Mauer exhibit that will display in a common area at Target Field next season.