

Pohlad Reiterates Twins Desire To Keep Mauer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minnesota Twins have been spending their way out of that small-budget image, mirroring the imminent increase in revenue from their new ballpark with a big spike in player salary commitments.

Lead owner Jim Pohlad said it's a sustainable development. So even if the Twins sign Joe Mauer to a mammoth contract extension, they're not afraid it would cost too much to keep a contending-caliber core of players around the American League MVP.

"I think Target Field puts us in better position to make sure that we have a competitive team from year to year," Pohlad said Monday. "Names will come and names will go, but overall the objective is always to have the best team on the field."

The Pohlad family has consistently followed a model of keeping the annual player payroll pegged to 50 percent of team revenue, though in rebuilding years it's fallen well below that. At the Metrodome, there wasn't as much money coming in. This year, though, the payroll will rise by roughly \$30 million to a team record above \$95 million.

"All new ballparks have their peaks, and I'm sure the initial years will be very good to the Twins," Pohlad said. "Then it'll be up to us to sustain it after that, but the ballpark itself I think can sustain it for a long time."

In a question-and-answer session with reporters in a conference room overlooking a snow-covered Target Field, Pohlad dismissed the notion that the team has been trying to disprove a tightfisted reputation.

"We're not trying to show people," he said. "We're trying to do what we said we're going to do."

Pohlad declined to discuss specifics about negotiations with Mauer on a new deal, citing a pledge to the catcher and his agent to keep the details private. He said he's "absolutely not active at all" in the process, but reiterated the team's desire to keep the homegrown star around for good.

Pohlad said the Twins aren't interested in the possibility of deferred compensation as a way to make a rich long-term contract like Mauer's work.

"They make you feel real good at the time, and then later on you wish you hadn't done that," Pohlad said.

He also indicated an openness to signing Mauer for nine or 10 years, if that's what it would take. First baseman Justin Morneau's six-year contract signed two years ago is the current Twins record.

"I don't think six is a magic number," Pohlad said, adding: "Total value is what drives it. We do not have a term policy."

Since last August, the Twins have added multimillion-dollar players in Orlando Hudson, Jim Thome, J.J. Hardy, Carl Pavano and Jon Rauch. Fans, though, should not expect a spree like that every year.

"We're not going to spend the money just to spend the money," Pohlad said, adding: "We're going to try to put the best team on the field in the most prudent financial way, and I think we accomplished that this year."

Asked about general manager Bill Smith's praise last year for the ownership's approval of the late-season acquisitions, Pohlad quipped: "I think it was time for his review."

Pohlad also reiterated the family's philosophy of trusting the front office to take care of the roster and not meddling or micromanaging in the day-to-day operations of the organization. The family has a small empire of business interests, and

T-Wolves To Be Quiet In Trade Talks

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minnesota Timberwolves remain focused on evaluation and determination of the core players they'll commit to beyond this rebuilding season and the approaching NBA trade deadline doesn't factor in to that process, president of basketball operations David Kahn said Monday.

So don't expect the Timberwolves to make any more than a minor move before the Feb. 18 cutoff for making deals, until the swapping and signing of players can begin again in July.

"I know that we won't do something dramatic," Kahn said, adding: "Firm as firm can be. Absolutely. We will not move one of the big people

in the next 10 days. It would be a mistake of epic proportions."

That means point guards Jonny Flynn and Ramon Sessions, perimeter players Corey Brewer and Ryan Gomes and power forwards Al Jefferson and Kevin Love have the rest of the season to prove their worth and their fit with coach Kurt Rambis's triangle scheme. First-round draft pick Ricky Rubio is part of that process too, a world away in Spain, but Kahn again ruled out a trade this year.

"We've gotten calls on him, of course, but there's no way I would do anything with him now. Absolutely none," Kahn said. "He's still young, and I still think he can be one of the better point guards to

NASCAR

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crash-filled ARCA race at Daytona International Speedway, where she successfully dodged one of the sloppiest events in recent memory. She pulled off a masterful save on a slide through the infield grass, fell to the back of the field, and still managed to drive her way to a sixth-place finish.

So it came as no surprise that after taking a day to catch her breath, Patrick decided she should indeed make her NASCAR debut this weekend in the second-tier Nationwide Series race at Daytona.

She'd been previously praised for declaring Daytona not the right place to make her NASCAR debut, but after holding her own in the ARCA race, everyone anticipated the about-face that came Monday.

"Racing in the Nationwide Series race was my goal during this entire two-month preparation process, but we wanted to make sure it was the right thing to do," she said. "The ARCA race was a blast, and I'm not ready for my first Daytona Speedweeks to end just yet. I want more racing."

She'll get it, too. Saturday's race

is a big boy race, with 14 full-time Sprint Cup Series drivers among the 53 entries. Among them are Tony Stewart, Kevin Harvick, Kyle Busch, and Patrick's boss, Dale Earnhardt Jr.

The Cup drivers have won nine of the last 10 Nationwide races at Daytona, dating back to 2005 when Martin Truex Jr. won it in a JR Motorsports car.

Kelley Earnhardt, general manager and part owner of JRM, doesn't think Patrick will take the team back to Victory Lane on Saturday.

But she doesn't think Patrick, who joins Chrissy Wallace as the only women entered, will stink up the show, either.

"My dream scenario is she would be up there in the top five competing for the win," Earnhardt said Monday. "My reasonable expectation is that she just finishes, and brings the car home and maybe gets a top 15. From a car owner standpoint, she should be good Saturday that she can make good decisions and not put other cars in jeopardy."

"Now, going forward, if something catastrophic happens this Saturday, you've still got last week to look back on and say 'We came out of that OK.' I think that takes some of the pressure off and allows her to go into her first NASCAR race not worried about her debut."

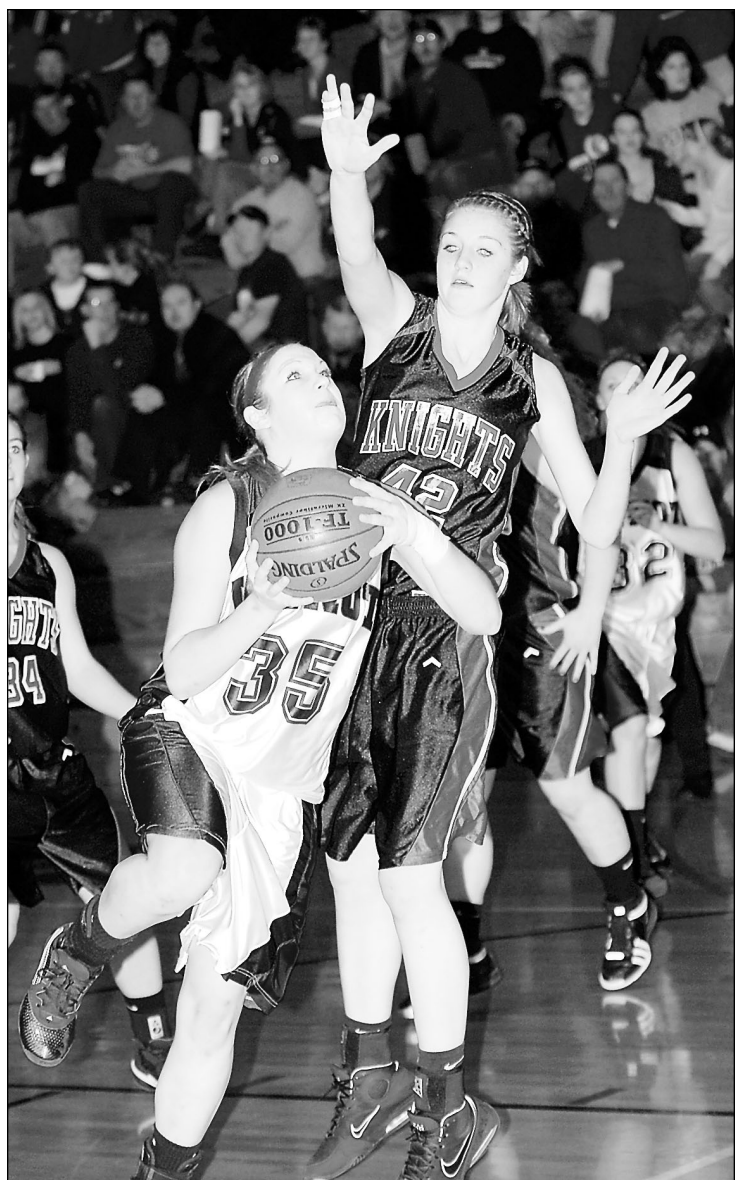
Regardless of how she performs, Patrick is guaranteed to have an immense spotlight on her the rest of the week.

She's been the central figure of Speedweeks since her arrival Thursday, and has been constantly swarmed by media and fans every time she steps into the garage. Her participation brought a whole new level of interest to the typically overlooked ARCA Series, and will undoubtedly do the same for NASCAR at a time when the auto racing series is looking at anyway possible to re-ignite fan interest.

Earnhardt has seen circus-like celebrity before, first with her father, the late Dale Earnhardt, and again with brother Dale Earnhardt Jr.

And even though Dale Jr. is annually named NASCAR's most popular driver, it's been quite some time since his big sister has seen such intense interest at the track.

"I've been in situations with both of them that have seemed very chaotic, but with Danica, it seemed like there were always at least 200 people swarming her," Earnhardt said. "I was really in awe, because I haven't seen something like that in our sport for awhile. You see a crowd moving through the garage, and you know that Dale (Jr.) is coming, but with Danica, this was definitely different."



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Wynot's Ashley Schmidt attacks the basket against Homer's Breanna Nogelmeier during the championship of the Lewis & Clark Conference Girls' Basketball Tournament Monday in Laurel, Neb.

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"It's really difficult to do with how the economy is now," Johnson said. "It's huge sacrifice for us. Nick and I should be moving onto college, but we're sacrificing that part of our life for our sport. And it's an even bigger sacrifice for our family to work that extra bit to keep that Olympic dream alive for us."

They stay in the cheapest hotels they can find, wax their own skis and even sew their own ski suits to keep going.

"It's just a leap of faith that one day we will get funding if results are improving," Frenette said.

They have, with Alexander, a 21-year-old from Lebanon, N.H., qualifying for six International Ski Federation (FIS) World Cups. Anders Johnson, 20, competed in Turin, Italy, in 2006 before blowing out his knee last summer, and Frenette is coming off a top-20 finish in Japan. As if the pressure of making it past Olympic qualifying weren't enough, they are keenly aware how much a strong showing would mean to their sport.

"Ski jumping isn't exactly a huge sport in the U.S., and it's kind of a constant struggle for us to make it well known," said Johnson, who came back from a torn ACL in July in just three months and qualified for the Olympics at the last minute. "It's definitely tough for us because we don't have much support, and finances are pretty rough for our team. We do best we can, but it takes a few breakthrough results to get yourself known."

WOMEN'S MOGULS TEAM: The U.S. Olympic women's moguls team arrived in Vancouver on Monday to height-

ened medal expectations after finishing first through fourth at a World Cup event in Lake Placid, N.Y., last month. Hannah Kearney, Shannon Bahrke and Heather McPhie all finished on the podium, with Michelle Roark fourth.

"It's incredible to be part of a U.S. sweep right before the games, and maybe it is pressure and more attention from American media," Kearney said. "But I would be excited to get the public behind us because we have four people with a really good chance at a medal, so tune in."

Any added pressure on the U.S. team is nothing, however, compared to the hype surrounding Canadian gold-medal favorite Jennifer Heil. Notably absent at the recent American-dominated races in Lake Placid, Heil is the defending Olympic champion.

"I can sort of imagine what it would be like, put myself in her shoes, and I don't envy it," said Kearney, a World Cup champion who went into the 2006 Games as a medal favorite but never made it out of qualifying. "It depends how she handles it, but I did just learn that Canada has never won a gold medal as an Olympic host. She seems like she's got it pretty well figured out how not to internalize those things and have it affect her performance, but who knows? At one point this season I

said I really want to go into the Olympics as the favorite because that would mean I was skiing incredibly well and dominating. But you know what, being the 'underdog' is easier."

UNBEATABLE BUT INSPIRATIONAL: The brass for Canada's snowboard team spent a good portion of their half-hour press conference talking about increased funding and what it means to their squads. They talked at length about how the best support in the program's history had produced the best Canadian teams ever, citing 26 World Cup and championships medals last season as an example, and boldly called for up to five medals as 2010 Olympic hosts.

They were not, however, predicting any upset of American Shaun White, the reigning gold medalist in the halfpipe.

"That would be a pleasant surprise," said Christian Hrab, director of high-performance for Canada's snowboard teams.

"We can give thanks to Shaun for pushing snowboarding — not just our team but all the world's teams and all of snowboarding — and inventing the future, if you will. What he's done and what he is doing is fantastic. He's helped a lot of people open their eyes to the possibilities of acrobatics in the half pipe."

GIRLS

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Vermillion Tanager past West Central 60-35 Monday night in Vermillion.

Hannah Nehlich-Arobba notched 11 points and four assists for the Tangers (4-12), while Sarah Day supplied 10 points.

For the Trojans (8-8), Hilary Mettler had 11 points, while Jaelyn Ketcham added eight points and five rebounds.

The Tangers will travel to Dakota Valley today (Tuesday), while the Trojans will host Beresford today (Tuesday).

VERMILION (4-12).....16 24 49 68
WEST CENTRAL (4-8).....8 13 23 35

Hurley 62, Gayville-Volin 46
GAYVILLE — Jasmyne Hansen had 26 points to lead the Hurley Bulldogs past Gayville-Volin 62-46 Monday night in Gayville.

The Bulldogs won their sixth game of the season bring their record to 6-9.

For the Raiders (1-15), Natalie Harkness supplied eight points. The Bulldogs will host Baltic on Friday, while the Raiders will travel to Wathill, Neb. today (Tuesday).

HURLEY (1-15).....11 25 43 62
GAYVILLE-VOLIN (1-15).....8 11 21 28 46

Avon 56, Marty Indian 33
MARTY — Lanae VanGerpen landed 17 points and eight rebounds to lead the Avon Lady Pirates past Marty Indian School 56-33 Monday night in Marty.

Shayna Nagel added 12 points for the Lady Pirates (8-7), while Gina Cuka grabbed nine rebounds.

For the Braves (1-11), Kishelle Shields tallied 15 points and eight rebounds.

The Lady Pirates will host Viborg today (Tuesday), while the Braves travel to Santee, Neb. for the Dakota Plains Invitational Tournament on Thursday.

AVON (8-7).....21 33 44 58
MARTY INDIAN (1-11).....5 10 17 33

SAINTS

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cian. "They've come along and we've come along."

For her, it was a moment of joy surrounded by stark reality. Her street is dotted by boarded-up homes, abandoned by flood victims who were unable to come back or couldn't find the will to rebuild.

"One house after the other is empty," said Schexnyder, whose own house is still being rebuilt. "I had some bad luck with contractors. I have extension cords around the house. My plumbing is not finished. FEMA took my trailer away."

The Saints were temporarily relocated to San Antonio after Katrina. In exile like the rest of the city, the players lived out of hotels and did weight training at Gold's Gyms. They went 3-13 that season and for a while practiced at a high school.

Meanwhile, San Antonio's mayor said he had set up talks with team owner Tom Benson about moving the club to Texas. Even the future of the Louisiana Superdome, where thousands sought refuge after Katrina, was in doubt.

"They wanted to tear down the Superdome! You can't do that to us," said Lacey Hyer, holding a mimosa after a noisy, all-night party in the French Quarter.

The stars had begun to align for the Saints by 2006. The Dome was fixed up. Payton and quarterback Drew Brees were brought in. Heisman Trophy winner Reggie

Bush was obtained by a stroke of good fortune in the draft, and the Saints sold out their season tickets. They went to the NFC championship for the first time that first season back in New Orleans.

And on Sunday, after only their

ninth winning season in their 43 years, the Saints became champions. Long-suffering fans throughout the city shot off fireworks, danced in the streets and on rooftops, and celebrated a team, and maybe a city, reborn.

PIANOPALOOZA

DUELING PIANOS

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VERVE MEMBERS \$30
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Thursday, February 11th

Game sponsored by

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8:00PM Tipoff - Men
Halftime - Hoops for Loot Contest

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\$1,027 Cash from

Doubleheader Vs. New Jersey Tech

Saturday, February 13th

Game sponsored by

6:00PM Tipoff - Women • 8:00PM Tipoff - Men
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3:30 - Exhibition Wheelchair Basketball Game
Red Dawgs vs. Vermillion All Stars

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