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Dart deserves a win
By Morris Dalla Costa



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It's refreshing to see someone involved in the world of sports who still has a grip on the real world.

No pretensions. No whining. No asking for special treatment.

That's why it would be especially nice if good things happened for the London Majors and their co-owner Scott Dart.

An Intercounty Baseball League championship would be fitting. Given it's been 31 years since the Majors last won it, that would be the ultimate reward.

At the least, it would be nice if just once before this season ends, Dart could have the satisfaction of seeing a large gathering watching his team's playoff run at Labatt Park.

So far, so good. His Majors, with manager and co-owner Roop Chanderdatt leading them on the field, have a 2-0 lead over the Kitchener Panthers in quarter-final action.

The series opened Friday night. Game 3 is tonight.

Three years ago, a young and inexperienced Dart bought the team because he loves baseball. It would have been easy for him to make promises he would be unable to keep or set goals he would be unable to reach.

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Instead of ignoring reality, he accepted it. He knows baseball is a tough sell in London. For years, the Majors have drawn from a minimal fan base.

His goal was to gradually make it better.

"When we talked two years ago, I told you that after three years, I was hoping to average 500 fans a game," Dart said. "We're almost there. The average for the regular season was over 400 and that was for the smaller games. When you include Canada Day and Opening Day, we've reached the 500."

There is no better place to watch a baseball game than Labatt Park. It was hot and thunderstorms were threatening but a cold drink and a sausage would have made all of that forgettable.

On the field, the product is pretty good. The Majors are a team that can make things happen with an over-all team average of better than .300 and everyone likes to see lots of runs.

And there is great hope that this might be the team to end the long IBL drought.

It was the right mix for a decent crowd.

About 625 fans came out.

Now some owners would have ranted and raved and gone on about how disappointing it all was and about the lack of support.

"About 625 came out, it's good for the first night," Dart said. "Two years ago when we made that surprise run, we started with 125 people a game and we wound up at the end with almost 2,000 for our final game. As we get further in the playoffs, if that's any indication, we were getting 400 a game, we should see some good numbers."

That run he's talking about came in his first year as owner when the Majors made it to the IBL final. The run rekindled some real interest in the Majors.

Last year, there was no magical run through the playoffs and interest reflected that.

But that didn't discourage Dart. He went into co-ownership with high-school chum Chanderat letting him worry about what was happening on the field.

Dart worried about what was happening off the field. If he measured success on ration of hours-worked-to-return-seen scale, he'd probably dump the team.

But Dart isn't like that. Success, no matter how small, remains a cause for celebration and he'll be pleased that it's "going in the right direction."

"I think baseball carries an interest in London but there's a lot of fencesitters," Dart said. "They like baseball but unless you get them to a game and let them experience it, they don't know what it's all about. To me, we're doing the things we need to do on the field and (also) from a promotional standpoint. Now it's up to fans to come out and give it a try."

A try?

It's the least he deserves.

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Extent of Castro's illness unknown

Little was known of Fidel Castro's condition Tuesday after he had an operation and temporarily turned over the Cuban presidency to his brother Raul, ushering in a period of uncertainty at home and celebrations by his enemies abroad.

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