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Thievery major part of success

Fri, July 28, 2006

London takes its league lead in stolen bases into tonight's first playoff game.

By **ERIC BENDER**, FREE PRESS SPORTS REPORTER

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Running the opposition ragged has become a facet of the London Majors' game this season as they head into their first playoff game tonight against the Kitchener Panthers at Labatt Park.

Individually they are not the top base stealers in the Intercounty Baseball League, but a tag team trio has given the Majors a wide margin over the other eight teams.

Second baseman Kyle Piwowarczyk, left-fielder Rudy Vallejos and centre-fielder Brad McElroy have 19 stolen bases each and the team has 75 on the season. Next is Barrie with 66.

"I like to keep base stealing as simple as possible," said Piwowarczyk, who lets field manager Roop Chanderdat make his calls most of the time, but it's up to him to do the reads.



Kyle Piwowarczyk shows his form as a base-stealing machine for the Intercounty Baseball League's London Majors. Piwowarczyk has 19 stolen bases this year. (Mike Hensen, LFP)

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Base stealing has something to do with the fact they are one, two and three in the batting order.

"If we can get to second, we have big batters up behind us (designated-hitter Chuck Roberts, Kevin Virtue and Simon Galarraga) and we have a pretty good chance of scoring."

Piwowarczyk and McElroy are second (36) and third (35), respectively, in the league in runs scored.

Piwowarczyk said he has to pick the right count on which to run and says Vallejos and McElroy have different skills.

"Rudy is so fast it doesn't matter and Brad is so good at reading the pitcher that he's got the base stolen before the pitch crosses the plate."

The aspects of thievery to take into account, Piwowarczyk said, are several.

"You have to consider the count. You have to consider whether the batter is left-handed or right-handed because that makes a difference if you're stealing second or third. You have to consider the catcher's arm. You have to know him. There are a lot in this league who have good arms."

Reading the pitcher is key.

"I like to see the pitcher throw a couple of pitches so I can get his speed and see his move to first base before I go."

The leadoff is also important. For Piwowarczyk, a Western Mustangs hockey player and former London Knight, that burst of speed is something he does in game conditions all year.

Chanderdat said he studies the tendencies of opposition pitchers.

"I know what counts to run on. I try to run with the breaking ball pitch."

Chanderdat sends the steal signals in through a three-man relay that makes it difficult for the opposition to intercept. He does give a green light to Vallejos and McElroy, although he sends in some signs to keep control of the offence.

"We've done a lot of hit and run," he said.

The Majors, for their aggressive ways, have ended the regular season as the top offensive team, not just on the base paths but in hitting with a collective .305 average.

Their first playoff round opens tonight at 7:30 against Kitchener, the weakest offensive team in the league.

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SPORTS NEWS

Double trouble

Brad Ference knows the question will come. Repeatedly. The Calgary-born defenceman, who signed a free-agent contract with the Flames yesterday, knows he'll often be asked if he's related to Flames teammate Andrew Ference.

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