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Majors taking run at first place

Fri, July 14, 2006

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

Reassembling the London Majors' prime lineup is the task over the next four days as they jockey for a top playoff spot in the Intercounty Baseball League.

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"Every game is big. They get bigger and bigger," field manager Roop Chanderdat said.

The Majors were a game behind first-place Barrie going into a game last night in Kitchener against the Panthers and tied for second with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Tonight, the Majors play the series rubber match with the Hamilton Thunderbirds at Labatt Park at 7:30 p.m. They've split their four games.

Sunday, the Majors go to Stratford to play the last-place Nationals, then on to Barrie to play the first-place Baycats in a Monday doubleheader, a date previously rained out.

"It's a lot of ball in a short time," Chanderdat said, "but we want to get our injured players back and have a regular lineup and be ready for the playoffs."

Third baseman Peter Babcock has been ailing, although he's done some duty as a pinch-hitter. He'll be testing his fielding abilities while shortstop Mike Ambrose is nursing a leg problem and is day-to-day.

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Pitcher Tom Van Kasteren, with an elbow injury the last two weeks, was to have tested it against Kitchener last night.

And 7-1 import pitcher Erick Perez is to return to London tomorrow after attending his father's funeral in Venezuela.

Hiarali Garcia (4-1) is to start tonight against Hamilton and rookie Adam Arnold may get a second start against Stratford on Sunday.

"Adam pitched five innings against Stratford (a 2-1 London win Tuesday) and gave up one run but had eight walks," Chanderdat said. "Maybe he'll go again."

Perez would be used in one of the Barrie games.

Chanderdat signed left-handed pitcher Mark Voakes, who played with the junior St. Thomas Tomcats, at Monday's deadline. He'll work out of the bullpen.

The Majors remain the top offensive team with centre-fielder Brad McElroy, infielder Kyle Piwowarczyk and DH Chuck Roberts among the leaders.

Chanderdat noted catchers Chad McKellar and Brian Blackburn are starting to be threats at the plate.

"McKellar is coming around," Chanderdat said.

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Proprietor and Publisher - The London Free Press,
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