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### Majors facing tough test

Fri, July 7, 2006

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

Fortunately, two of the London Majors games this weekend are at home, because between tonight's game against the Kitchener Panthers and Sunday's 1 p.m. start against the Brantford Red Sox, six of the Majors will make the trek to Barrie for the annual all-star game.

Tonight at 7:30, the third-place Majors (18-7) meet the sixth-place Panthers (11-15).

"The weekend stretch will be a good test for us," said Majors field manager Roop Chanderdat. "Brantford is one of the teams to beat right now. They have put together a really good team."

But he's not taking Kitchener, 8 1/2 games back, lightly. Starting tonight will be import rookie southpaw Erick Perez (7-1), who has proved to be the Majors ace and workhorse. London takes a 2-1 series lead over Kitchener into tonight's game. Sunday, right-hander Josh Palmer (2-1) is slated to take the hill against Brantford, 17-10 and three games out of first.

The Majors are one game out, although the first-place Barrie Baycats were to play Oshawa last night. Toronto sits a half game behind Barrie.

The Majors wrap up their regular season July 23 against Brantford.

Three Majors are "iffy" for tonight's game. Third baseman Peter

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Babcock, catcher Andrew Mercier and shortstop Mike Ambrose, who rejoined the team recently and filled a big infield need, are all nursing minor injuries.

Tuesday against Stratford, Newcomer Matt Luvisotto played third base and got a key hit and outfielder Rudy Vallejos came in to play second base in place of Kyle Piwowarczyk, who moved to shortstop.

In Stratford, a 5-1 London win, Majors hurler Hiarali Garcia (3-1) gave up nine hits and struck out 16 in working a complete game. Right-fielder Kevin Virtue continued his hot hand at the plate with three hits, including a home run.

Pitcher Tom Van Kastern, who built a 9-0 lead over the Hamilton Thunderbirds by the fourth inning last Sunday in Hamilton, has a sore elbow. He hurt it throwing between innings, attempted to continue, but Hamilton came back to win 16-9.

Centre-fielder Brad McElroy (.427) continues to top the league in hitting and leads the Majors (.323) as the top offensive team in the league.

Palmer has joined the Majors' contingent for the all-star game tomorrow at 4 p.m. in a matchup against Barrie, last year's league champion.

Chanderdat is one of the three managers going to the game along with Piwowarczyk, McElroy, Virtue and Perez. Simon Galarraga is a reserve first baseman.

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##### Report: Scolari to leave Portugal

Luiz Felipe Scolari will resign as Portugal coach on Tuesday, according to Friday's edition of the sports daily Record.

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