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London Majors hope for reprise of 2008 season

Wed, April 29, 2009

By [MORRIS DALLA COSTA](#)

When last we joined the London Majors, they were basking in the kind of setting they've been trying to establish in this city for many years.

They were playing Brantford Red Sox in the seventh game of the Intercounty Baseball League final in front of almost 4,000 fans at Labatt Park. It was the kind of atmosphere and situation Majors owners Roop Chanderdat and Scott Dart had been working toward since they took over the team.

The ending wasn't what they'd hoped for. The Red Sox won 8-2, extending the Majors streak of not winning an IBL championship since 1975.

But that was last year. This year Chanderdat is bringing back many of the parts that made last year's machine run in the hope of a reprise for the 2009 season.

Whether the regular season attracts and retains any of the almost 4,000 who watched the final remains to be seen.

But by bringing back most of the pitching staff that was one of the best in the IBL, Chanderdat believes he's made a good start at retaining a team capable of going back to the final.

"I've always said that you have to have good pitching and we have that," Chanderdat said. "I feel good about it. We have depth. Now is (Josh) Palmer going to go 8-0? Probably not, but with the depth we have, the good veteran presence and catching depth . . . if we can be patient until the good young kids get in and settle themselves down, we should be fine."

Palmer, the young righthander, went 8-0 with a 2.14 ERA. He's a junior at Oklahoma Baptist but hasn't pitched the last month because of the shoulder injury.

"He's healthy now. He's just rehabbing it and I hope to have him for our home opener," Chanderdat said.

Also back is veteran Adam Echlin, who finished with a 7-2 mark and gave the Majors some experience. That pair will be joined by Geoff Mann, Mehdi Djebbar, Pierre Miville Deschene and Mike Mitro. Some young arms round out the staff. But missing is Ryan McGorman.

Not returning from last year's regular lineup are players such as David Narodowski, Jeff Helps, Rudy Vallejos and Christian Ruiz.

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Some of the returning veteran presence includes Jess Bechard, Kyle Piowarczyk and Vince Burke.

Chanderdat had to do some hunting to find middle infielders in the off-season with both Helps and Narodowski gone.

He signed Chatham's Alan Cattrysse. Cattrysse played at Michigan State University, posting a .303 career batting average with a personal best .342 in his senior year. He also finished second in all-time hits with 228.

While it's still early in the season, Cattrysse is slotted in as the starting shortstop.

Burke stepped in last year with a terrific playoff run. With Narodowski gone off to school and Helps having to move to shortstop, Burke filled the gap offensively and defensively.

"I still have a few more players to sign," Chanderdat said. "I'd probably like another middle infielder. Three middle infielders for two positions is good because you saw what happened last year."

If there is a key piece returning to the Majors, it's catcher Mason Reilly. Reilly eliminated the opposition's running game with his ability to throw runners out.

Chanderdat is also going to look at another Japanese import, Masa Inuoe, but with only three imports allowed, he's hoping to get a better look at everyone when the weather improves.

"The weather hasn't worked out for us," he said. "Every time we have a practice scheduled, we either get rain or a wet field. We've been indoors since February. That's been helping, but for long toss and fielding, there's certain things you need outdoors for."

The Majors are hoping to get outdoors this weekend when they hold an exhibition doubleheader at Labatt Park Saturday beginning at 1 p.m. against Michigan's Jet Box Baseball, the 2007 and 2008 senior men's baseball champions.

"We're going to have a bit of a skeleton crew, but I like what we have," Chanderdat said. "I always look at it this way: The first two to three weeks when the season starts is Season 1. That's when I have just the guys that are here. Then the college guys come back near mid-May to mid-June. That's the start of Season 2. Season 3 is the playoffs."

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