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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Majors crash in sixth

Tue, August 11, 2009

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL

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By **RYAN PYETTE**

Baseball and the number nine have forever been intertwined.

It's the number of players on the field and in a batting order.

It's the number of innings in a standard game.

But it is not, under any circumstances, the number of runs a team can allow in a half-inning and expect a win -- especially in a do-or-die game.

The London Majors did just that in a horrendous sixth inning and their Intercounty Baseball League playoff came to a crashing halt amidst an ocean of walks and tidal wave of pitching changes in a 10-7 defeat to the Toronto Maple Leafs last night before 1,000 at Labatt Park.

The Leafs took the series in six games and move on to a semifinal to face the Barrie Baycats and former teammate Paul Spoljaric.

Four Majors pitchers -- starter Mike DeLong and relievers Aaron Boag, Matt Brennan and Adam Echlin -- combined to walk seven batters (three with the bases loaded) in the agonizing sixth inning.

"I'm speechless right now," said London left fielder Chris Chambers, who socked two homers in the loss. "We played our hearts out. It's tough (that sixth inning) when you're standing out there and there's nothing you can do to help your team."

The disciplined Maple Leafs gorged themselves on a flood of free passes sandwiched around a three-run double by Kyle Degrace and a couple clutch RBI singles.

"We were swinging at bad pitches early," Toronto centrefielder Kern Watts said. "We got better at taking those later on. It was a combination (of good eyes and bad



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itches). It was a tough series. Traffic permitting, weather permitting, we both came to play.

"It wasn't easy."

Before surrendering the nine-spot, the Majors were in control of the contest and in great shape to force seventh-game heaven tonight in Toronto.

London posted four runs in the second inning and had a 5-1 lead by the fifth.

In that rousing second, Chambers started the rally with a long solo homer to right. The Majors followed with three straight singles before Will Richards laced a two-run double.

At times in the series, London's bats had fallen silent against Toronto's terrific starting corps. Not Richards, though.

The first baseman's bat was as loud as a gong all six games.

The Mississauga native had three home runs and 10 RBI, including three last night. He was walked a half-dozen times.

Many wondered what the Majors would do for a big bat after Jess Bechard suddenly quit in midseason. Richards answered the ball.

London's batters looked frustrated against righty Marek Deska in a 6-2 loss in Game 2. The Majors beat up the starter a bit more (he still went the distance again) but not enough to make up the nine runs.

No one had an answer for that terrible sixth. But there were harbingers of doom an inning earlier when hard-throwing DeLong escaped a bases-loaded jam by inducing a double-play ball. But DeLong was clearly spent.

He only recorded one out before being replaced by Boag, who walked home a pair and gave up Degrace's two-base knock.

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