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Major bummer

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL PLAYOFFS: 1-0 gem by Ottawa ace ends London's season

By DON BRENNAN, QMI AGENCY

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London Majors' Alan Cattryse, left, watches as Ottawa Fat Cats' Kyle Barclay, 18, steals second base during game 5 of the IBL Quarterfinals at the Ottawa Baseball Stadium Monday. The Fats Cats won 1-0. (DARREN BROWN, QMI Agency)

OTTAWA - The Ottawa Fat Cats threw their ace Monday.

And he trumped all.

Matt McGovern held the London Majors to four hits while striking out 11 in a complete game, 1-0 victory.

The win gives the second-year Fat Cats the best-of-seven opening round Intercounty Baseball League series, 4-1. They advance to the semi-finals, starting on the road later this week.

"If we keep winning, we keep playing, and nobody wants to quit playing," said McGovern, a right-hander, who, after the final out, jumped into the arms of catcher Eitan Maoz before the jubilant battery was joined by a mob of teammates and many of the 3,269 in attendance jumped onto the field. "It was important for this team, this town, to get this series out of the way."

It was crucial for the Fat Cats to put the Majors away when they had the chance. Ottawa stole the first game of the series in London then returned home with a split before taking care of business on home soil.

Had two more games been necessary, they would have been played at London's Labatt Park.

"That was my worst fear," said Fat Cats manager Tim Nelson. "I was confident we could lock this up, but nobody wanted to go back to London. Nobody wanted to get back on that bus. The fact that we wrapped it up here and stepped on their neck was perfect."

To do so, they needed McGovern, the regular season, ERA league-leader with a 1.83 and the winner of the series opener, to outlast IBL strikeout king Jordi Amargos in a classic pitcher's duel.

Fat Cats scored only run in fifth inning Amargos also went the distance, limiting the Fat Cats to five hits while collecting seven K's.

"I knew coming in it was me against him, and he did a great job," said McGovern. "I knew I had to pick it up a little."

Asked for one word to describe McGovern's effort, Nelson used a few.

"Outstanding, awesome, spectacular, locked in . . .," said the skipper. "He threw a two-hitter against Hamilton, and Hamilton's not quite the same team as London. To be in that situation today, with a chance to clinch against a team like London . . . that's as locked in as you can get."

The Fat Cats scored the only run with what seems like their daily, fifth-inning stirring. Thing is, they probably should have scored more than.

LeDale Hayes opened the inning with a walk, and Ottawa had runners on first and second when the next batter, Joe Stone, was hit by a pitch.

Amargos' case of wildness would last one more guy.

When Kyle Barclay laid down a sacrifice bunt, Amargos picked up the ball and tried to get Hayes sliding into third. His throw would be off the mark, however, and wound up in the left field corner, allowing Hayes to trot home with the key run.

With runners on second and third and still none out, Nelson called for Chris Latimer to lay down a suicide squeeze. But Latimer missed with his bunt attempt and Stone was a dead duck at the plate.

A couple of pitches later, Latimer beat out an infield hit that would have cashed Stone.

Cody Mombourquette grounded to short and Mark Charrette fled to left to end the inning.

Fortunately for Ottawa, McGovern saw to it that no more offence was needed.

The only batter McGovern really had any problems with was London third basemen Steve Froese.

He had two of his team's three hits, then drew a lead off walk to start the eighth. But any real danger was avoided when McGovern struck out Springer then induced Shawn Robinson to hit into a fielder's choice.

Fat Cats catcher Eitan Maoz slammed the door shut on the Majors when he gunned down Robinson trying to steal.

First baseman Rick Howroyd was the Fat Cats leader with a pair of hits.

The Fat Cats, who finished in sixth while the Majors were third, almost certainly have caught the attention of the rest of the league with the series victory. Nobody wants to make the drive here, especially to play a team that appears to be peaking.

"I think we surprised London," said Nelson. "They've got a good team over there as well. Every single game was a great game. Just the small things that got us over the top."

"It was well pitched on both sides. I think we just managed to do a few little things to push across a couple more runs."

Meanwhile, the Fat Cats are playing with a lot of confidence right now. How far can they go? There's no limit.

"It's going to come down to who wants it more," said McGovern. "And I definitely think this team wants it."

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