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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Manager remains optimist

Wed, August 12, 2009

By **RYAN PYETTE**

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As painful as it felt, the walk-filled, nine-run sixth inning that spelled the end of the London Majors' season Monday night hasn't shaken manager Roop Chanderdar's faith or resolve.

After presiding over that magnificent mound meltdown at Labatt Park, he still believes his club had the pitching depth to make more noise in the Intercounty Baseball League playoffs.

"It was unfortunate what happened, but it was really an anomaly," Chanderdar said. "We just had to get to Game 7 because we had (ace) Craig Bate and (veteran) Mike Mitro lined up for us and anybody in our league would take that. We had the depth.

"I took out (struggling starter) Mike DeLong because he was walking some guys, had thrown over 100 pitches and you don't want to ruin him for college. I brought in (lefty reliever) Aaron Boag because Toronto had some lefty hitters -- Kern Watts, Danny Gibbons -- coming up, but he walked guys too, and his stats show he doesn't walk very many (six in 16 2/3 innings in the regular season).

"Even Adam Echlin, who hardly walks anybody, walked a few. It was tough."

As Majors' co-owner, Chanderdar has many responsibilities to juggle. Still, he hasn't employed a pitching coach to advise him since he and Harry Muir parted ways a few years back.

"It's easy to be an armchair manager," Chanderdar said, "but we didn't use a pitching coach last year (and the Majors made it to Game 7 of the league final). Even if you have a pitching coach, it's still the manager who makes the decision when to make a change.

"We'll send (coach) Casey (Pulham) down to the bullpen when we're getting someone up. When you have veterans like (Adam) Echlin, everyone helps out down

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there."

The performance of Echlin and Josh Palmer was the most shocking change from London's pennant winner a year ago.

The pair of trusted horses went from two of the dominant starters in the IBL last summer to relief help this season.

Following an eight-win season and seven complete games, Palmer finished this regular season 2-5 with a 5.63 earned run average. Echlin, 7-2 last year, was 1-4 with a 9.53 ERA.

"We had some guys struggle but we finished the season 12-3 and I know Toronto, as hot as they were at the end of the year, didn't want to play us in the first round," Chanderdat said. "We worked hard all series . . . we kept fighting.

"I wish people could see in our locker room sometimes. Everyone spoke after and it was very emotional. Ninety-nine percent of the guys said this year was the most fun they've had in their life."

The four IBL semifinal teams -- Barrie, Toronto, Guelph, Brantford -- all make the case for stabilizing a roster with a base core of proven veterans. London often recruits from college connections so there is turnover each season.

"It gets publicized that we lose a few players each year so everybody thinks we have a young team," Chanderdat said. "But we have Adam Echlin, Mike Mitro. They're not going anywhere. Guys like (Craig) Bate, Kyle Piwowarczyk, (Will) Richards, Chris Chambers -- they're done school. These are the guys you build around."

Richards would've been neck-and-neck with Bate for series MVP had London come back to win. The first baseman's hitting managed to quiet a major concern after all-star Jess Bechard's sudden decision to quit at mid-season.

"I'm going to take a few weeks off and starting making up my depth chart on Sept. 3," he said. "At that time, we'll take a look at what we need for next year'."

Chanderdat and co-owner Scott Dart have tried to add some perks to their program over the past five years that could help recruitment. The Majors cut out renting a school bus for road games and went coach this season.

"We're trying to make sure we enhance the experience each year," Chanderdat said. "For fans, we got the (licence to sell) beer . . . When you get to the championship, that's when you can make some money ."

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