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Weekend from hell for Majors

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL

By STEVE GREEN, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

Last Updated: August 3, 2011 8:33am

A regular season that began full of promise has ended in yet another playoff disappointment for the London Majors.

This time, it was a quarterfinal upset by the sixth-place Ottawa Fat Cats, who swept all three games at home over the holiday weekend to take the best-of-seven series in five games and leave the Majors again wondering when their Intercounty Baseball league title drought — which stretches back to 1975 — will end.

The coup de grace came in a 1-0 loss Monday in a pitcher's duel won by Ottawa's Matt McGovern over London's Jordi Amargos. It was a rematch of the series opener, which McGovern also won. In the decisive game, a throwing error by Amargos on a sacrifice bunt allowed LaDale Hayes, who had walked to lead off the fifth inning, to score the only run.

"We've had better weekends," Majors co-owner and manager Roop Chanderdat said wryly Tuesday. "It was just little mistakes, nothing major. Things like walking their leadoff hitter, or one of our guys swinging at the first pitch with the bases loaded (and making an out) instead of working their pitcher. But whenever we made a mistake, whether mental or physical, it cost us.

"It wasn't like they were hitting the ball hard on us, either, but they just pitched great, especially McGovern. And Jordi makes just the one error — he's one of the best fielding pitchers in the league — and that's the difference. He pitched well, but we just couldn't get him any offence.

"And Ottawa's record (16-18) is not indicative of how good that team is. They played a lot of day-night doubleheaders (with games in different cities to minimize the travel) and that takes its toll."

Unlike previous seasons, when the Majors played .500 ball until the stretch drive, they came out of the gate flying this year, winning their first five straight. But injuries and illnesses — right fielder Paul LaMantia missed the final month of the season with what Chanderdat would only say are "serious medical issues" that are still ongoing — eventually took their toll as the Majors limped home at 22-13, tying for second with Toronto but being placed third as the Maple Leafs won the season series 3-2.

One more win would have had the Majors facing the much weaker Burlington Twins instead of the Fat Cats in the quarterfinals, but Chanderdat refused to consider the whole season a disappointment.

"Playoff-wise, yeah, but overall I don't think it was," he said. "We had a great regular season and overcame a lot of things. We keep recruiting great players and we're still one of the top teams in the league; we just haven't got over that playoff hump yet."

Sometimes, that results in the ownership and manager parting ways, but Chanderdat isn't having that conversation with himself yet.

"I don't think so," he said of relinquishing the manager's role. "I'm just going to give it some time and then look back and see where we can tweak things."

Player turnover is inevitable, especially with imports like Cleveland Brownlee, the team's home run leader with eight in the regular season.

"It's always year-to-year with imports," Chanderdat said. "It depends on what happens in their lives with jobs and careers. I'm not worried about filling any holes."

The Majors were bolstered this year with the addition of pitcher Ryan Hart and outfielder Chris Stewart from the Guelph Royals, who have suspended operations due to a stadium lease dispute with the city. If the Royals return next season, the two would have to go back unless a release deal could be brokered.

"From an ownership standpoint, I want to see Guelph come back. It would be good for the league," Chanderdat said. "But if not, we'll welcome them back with open arms."

Arms that will, once again, have to wait until next year to hold the IBL championship trophy.

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