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The London Free Press

IN SATURDAY'S PAPER
 Monthly unemployment numbers! Is there any relief in sight for London's swelling ranks of the jobless?



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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Majors even Leafs series

Sat, August 8, 2009
BASEBALL

By **RYAN PYETTE**

Manager Roop Chanderdatt armed the London Majors with their biggest bullet to shoot down the heavy-hitting Toronto Maple Leafs.

Ace gunner Craig Bate, as expected, provided the ammo.

The 22-year-old St. Thomas native again twisted Toronto's lightning-charged bats into knots with his strong left pitching arm and turned the Intercounty Baseball League quarterfinal into a best-of-three with a 7-5 victory before 850 last night at Labatt Park.

Bate was brilliant in the series opener, an 11-1 win at tiny Christie Pits.

He was back at it in the all-important fourth game to ensure the Majors at least return to their own stomping grounds for a sixth tilt tomorrow afternoon at 1 p.m.

Bate struck out six in the first three innings and surrendered just three hits over seven strong innings.

"This was a must win," he said. "Definitely, it felt good. I don't know if I can pitch again (this series). Maybe something out of the bullpen. We'll have to see."

He left after his team jumped out to a 7-0 lead with a four-run seventh.

But there was some nail-biting after Matt Brennan surrendered five runs in the top of the eighth. Adam Echlin, one of last year's starting studs, recaptured some magic, got out of the jam and struck out the side in the ninth for the save.

"I knew the bullpen would do it," Bate said. "A guy (Echlin) who had his struggles, to come back like that, was great to see."

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So far, both London wins in the series belong to Bate.

That's good and bad news for the Majors.

Game 7, if necessary, is slated for Monday in no-longer-stinky Toronto after the end of the garbage strike.

It's a stretch to believe Bate, who's a couple of seasons removed from always-scary Tommy John surgery, could recover in time to pitch again in a potential finale on less than three days rest.

Chanderdat sold the future to bank a win now.

"Craig threw 80 pitches and 120 in Game 1," Chanderdat said. "That's 200 pitches. I don't know if he'll be back again. We have to make sure he gets his rest."

The Majors clearly love playing behind Bate. The offence supported him with 18 runs in 16 innings.

Mike Mitro and Aaron Boag, London's Games 2 and 3 losers, only received three runs combined in their outings and two of those were in the ninth innings when the games were already blowouts.

But Bate came back to beat fellow lefty Drew Taylor again. The Leafs starter only lasted four-plus innings and surrendered three runs.

The Majors piled on four more in the seventh off reliever Lee Witmer.

But this time, London set the tone.

Chanderdat tweaked his batting order. He moved big-bopping lefty Will Richards up to third and wedged righty Alan Cattrysse in the cleanup spot in front of designated hitter Chris Chambers.

Chambers, who missed a bulk of at bats this season with a wonky knee, blasted a two-run, two-out double in the first to kick-start the scoring.

"We've been tough to play against when we score first," Chanderdat said. "We have to get back to that."

For one night behind Bate, it was a solid start.

INTERCOUNTY PLAYOFFS

London vs. Toronto

(Best-of-seven quarterfinal tied 2-2)

Last night: London 7, Toronto 5

Game 5: Today, at Toronto, 2 p.m.

Game 6: Tomorrow, 1 p.m. at Labatt Park 2

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SPORTS NEWS

Woods shoots 65 for Firestone win

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