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SPORTS **OTHER SPORTS**

Majors putting pieces of championship puzzle into place

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Fri, January 30, 2009

By **MORRIS DALLA COSTA**, FREE PRESS SPORTS COLUMNIST

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The green grass at Labatt Park is but a memory, but the London Majors have already used this winter to begin their return to the Intercounty Baseball League final.

The 2008 finalists announced that three of the key components to their pennant-winning season are returning this year.

Pitcher Josh Palmer and infielders Jess Bechard and Kyle Piwowarczyk have told manager Roop Chanderdat they will be back.

Palmer was outstanding last season. He was 8-0 with a 2.14 ERA that led the IBL during the regular season. He was a first team all-star. Palmer is in his junior year at Oklahoma Baptist University.

Bechard hit .356 to finish in the league's top 10 in batting. He had eight home runs and 34 RBIs and provided a lot of the Majors' power.

Piwowarczyk, a native Londoner, has always been a key component to their success. His defensive ability at third and his strength with the bat make him vital to the small ball Chanderdat likes to play.

Piwowarczyk batted .387, third best in the IBL. He had 48 hits and 21 RBIs in 34 games, but had to leave the team during the playoff run after signing a contract to play professional hockey in Germany. "It's always important to get the star local guy back," Chanderdat said. "He's been with me since we took over the Majors."

It's a expected Piwowarczyk will return to Germany.

The issue of players having to leave the team before the season ends has always created a major hole in the lineup at the most inopportune time. That includes players who return to university.

"It's an issue, but when you look at Kyle, that was his first year (in Germany) and he didn't have any choice but to go when they wanted him to go," Chanderdat said. "But he had a good year and this year because they know him and he has a new agent, he has a little more opportunity to negotiate when he will go.

"He's a key for me because I always hit him in the No. 2 hole because he can really handle the bat and it fits the way I like to play."



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General Comments

Chanderdat was certain that both Palmer and Bechard would be back.

"They believe in me and in the program. Now because Josh had such a great season last year, there's the potential that he'll be drafted and we could lose him that way. I hope he does get drafted, but we'll see what happens."

One of Chanderdat's first signings was a big one, getting Chatham's Alan Cattrysse. He attended Michigan State for four years, earning numerous honours. Last year, he played basketball for the University of Windsor Lancers.

Right now, Chanderdat says Cattrysse is pencilled in to play centre field.

"He can play a lot of places. I've been after him for three years. We also signed his brother Ryan. Ryan has raw athletic ability and I'm looking forward to coaching him."

Chanderdat says the holes in the roster are filling up quickly. Most arms on last year's impressive pitching staff will return.

He's waiting to firm up his catching, not knowing what last year's revelation, Mason Reilly of California, will do.

What Chanderdat is focusing on right now is finding another middle infielder, preferably a shortstop.

Young David Narodowski, an all-star shortstop last year, will be playing elsewhere this season.

Jeff Helps, who stepped up when Narodowski left for school and had a terrific playoff, will try to find a spot with a major league organization. If that doesn't pan out, Helps will try to make it in the Northern League.

The Majors begin once-a-week indoor workouts on Sunday.

"I like the talent we have," Chanderdat said. "That's what we try and do is put the best talent we have on the field and then play hard. The wins and losses will take care of themselves."



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Proprietor and Publisher - The London Free Press,
P.O. Box 2280, 369 York Street, London Ontario Canada N6A 4G1