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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Ensuring base runners key to Majors' success

Fri, July 17, 2009

But big-bopping Will Richards, who has helped London win six of its last seven games, is an exception

By **RYAN PYETTE**, FREE PRESS SPORTS REPORTER

There's a reason the London Majors have struck out less than any other team in the Intercounty Baseball League.

"We're about making contact, moving base runners over," Majors manager Roop Chanderdat said. "That's the kind of baseball I like to play. I don't believe in going up there looking for the home run."

With one exception, of course.

Last Sunday night at Kitchener's comfy Jack Couch Park, London was drilling the home Panthers 20-9. Chanderdat told big-bopping Will Richards to swing for the fence.

"Will already had two homers and I told him I haven't seen too many guys in this league hit three in one game," Chanderdat said. "And he ended up doing it. He had a fantastic game. In an individual case like that, I'm all right with it."

Richards ended up going four-for-six with five runs and seven RBI in arguably the league's most offensive game this summer.

The Mississauga native is coming off a tremendous season at Indiana State this past year. He's a big reason why the Majors (15-13), who face Kitchener (9-20) again at Labatt Park tonight at 7:30 p.m. on London and District Baseball Association night, have won six of their last seven games.

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On Canada Day, Richards beat the Toronto Maple Leafs in Game 2 of a doubleheader with a walkoff home run. He has seven long balls and 31 RBI in a splendid bounce-back season.

"We've talked a lot about different things lately that have sparked us and that was definitely one of them," Chanderdat said. "I've known Will for a long time and I traded for him last year (Richards had been an all-star with the Stratford Nationals), planning to have him split the catching with Mason Reilly and play some first base, too.

"But he got injured in a game early in the season with Hamilton. We were up big and a guy ran him at the plate, which is uncalled for in that situation, and he hurt his wrist.

"I know he was pretty sad about it because he wasn't able to help us the way he wanted to (in London's run to the pennant)."

But Chanderdat trusted Richards. When he healed, the manager stuck him right back in the lineup during the first round of the playoffs against Hamilton. "That caused a stir with some of the guys because they didn't know him that well and it was tweaking the lineup in the playoffs, but I was confident in Will. I know he can hit and I knew he could help us. He was hitting No. 3 for me in Game 7 (of the IBL final series against Brantford)."

Richards repaid the loyalty by staying with the Majors even after his hometown, Mississauga, adopted Stratford's spot in the league and became the Twins.

"That says something that he has a team probably 20 minutes from his house and he still chose to come play in London. I told him, 'Will, you can hit the ball. You can play for me any time.'"

London travels to Mississauga tomorrow for a doubleheader. The slumping Twins fired manager Adeo Calcagni this week and coach Ian Held takes over on an interim basis.

"We want to finish strong," Chanderdat said. "We know we're going to play a Barrie or Guelph or Toronto. We have to be ready for that. The most important thing is to get to the playoffs on a roll."

The Majors have rescheduled their June 28 twinbill against the league-leading Barrie Baycats to Tuesday at Labatt Park at 4:30 p.m.

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