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Slim win over Fat Cats

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL LEAGUE

By STEVE GREEN, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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London Major designated hitter Julio Estrada embraces Steve Froese in front of Ottawa Fat Cats catcher Ricky Howroyd after Estrada's second-inning home run at Labatt Park on Thursday. Froese also scored on the hit, putting the home team ahead 5-0. (DEREK RUTTAN, The London Free Press)

It's amazing how often one at-bat can turn a baseball game around. Shawn Robinson had one Thursday night that may have saved the London Majors' season and he didn't even get a hit.

With the bases loaded and one out in the bottom of the eighth, the London shortstop battled Ottawa reliever Danny Descouds for a bases-loaded walk -- fouling off at least five pitches on a full count -- to tie the game 7-7. Centre fielder Chris Stewart followed with a two-run single down the left-field line to give the Majors a 9-7 win over the Fat Cats at Labatt Park and square their best-of-seven Intercounty Baseball League quarterfinal 1-1.

Games 3-5 are this weekend in Ottawa, starting Saturday night. Adam Paish will start Game 3 for the Majors.

"I went up there determined not to get out. I didn't have my greatest game in the field," said Robinson, who had two errors, one setting up Cody Mombourquette's three-run double in the sixth that gave Ottawa a 6-5 lead. "So I had to do something to get my mind off that.

"Coming back and winning like this really gives us momentum. Now we just have to go to Ottawa and play London Majors baseball and we will win this series."

Stewart, who had three hits, said Robinson's effort was huge.

"That was the at-bat," he said. "Without that, where are we? Two out with me up and maybe I don't get that hit.

"But a win like this really builds momentum. The thing is, we create our own reality and the reality is if you play nine innings, you can win a baseball game. There's no doubt on this team; we're all strong-minded guys and baseball is a mental game."

The Majors staked starter Ryan Hart to a 5-0 lead after two innings, with the key blows being two-run homers by Cleveland Brownlee and Julio Estrada. While Brownlee's wasn't a surprise, Estrada's was as he batted only .133 in the regular season with four hits in 30 at-bats.

"It's always nice to contribute," said the native of Cuba. "My timing had been a little bit off because I wasn't getting many at-bats, but now I feel a lot better. I'm putting things together. And I'm happy with the way we won. We really needed this win."

Majors manager Roop Chanderdat said he played a hunch in starting Estrada at DH with Adwin Springer late arriving from work in Toronto.

"Julio has had great BP before the last two games and I knew he would contribute at some point," he said. "I didn't know it would be as a starter, though, but I knew he'd help us.

"The big thing tonight is we fought back and this gives us something to build on."

Mombourquette, who had three hits on the night, said the Fat Cats head home content.

"We've got to be happy," the third baseman said. "We came here with 12 guys and put on a hell of an effort last night and again tonight. Yesterday we had two pitchers in the starting lineup."

The Fat Cats scored five of their runs with two out and a sixth on a one-out sacrifice fly as they showed time and again how resilient a bunch they are.

"We just hate to lose," Mombourquette said. "Anything we can do to come out on top, we'll do."

"We're not likely the most talented team, but we're probably the most scrappy," added manager Tim Nelson. "A split is always nice on the road, but we had them on the ropes with a chance to finish them off and we didn't do it. But that's the game."

Down five, the Fat Cats started their comeback with a Kyle Barclay solo homer and a two-run single by Kevin Dietrich in the fifth off Hart. The Majors tied it 6-6 in their half of the sixth on Steve Froese's RBI single.

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MAJORS 9, FAT CATS 7

Series: Best-of-seven Intercounty Baseball League quarterfinal tied 1-1.

London highlights: Cleveland Brownlee and Julio Estrada both had two-run homers; Chris Stewart had two-run single in eighth to win it.

Ottawa highlights: Cody Mombourquette had a three-run double, Kyle Barclay had a solo homer and Kevin Dietrich had a two-run single.

Next: Games 3, 4 and 5 are Saturday through Monday in Ottawa.

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