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DeLong gives Majors options

Thu, June 11, 2009

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL: Rookie from Henry Ford Community College a pitcher who also swings a mean bat

By RYAN PYETTE

Mike DeLong was just like the rest of them.

"Every pitcher who comes here says they can hit," London Majors manager Roop Chanderdat said. "They don't want a DH. They want to swing the bat, too."

Usually, Chanderdat gives them a couple of shots at the plate just to shut them up.

But there was something different about the big 21-year-old from Windsor when he arrived at Labatt Park to begin his Intercounty Baseball League career this spring.

"He puts on a show in batting practice," Chanderdat said. "He's right-handed and he routinely hits them out of the park and over the trees in left field."

The six-foot-four, 225-pound DeLong is strong enough to handle a massive 38-ounce bat. One day, Chanderdat told star first baseman Jess Bechard to take a look at the lumber.

"Jess said he couldn't even pick it up," Chanderdat said. "He asked how does Mike even swing it? It's something you bench press -- not hit with."

"It's a log," DeLong said with a laugh. "It's a midseason bat. I used it last year with the Windsor Selects because the guys we faced didn't throw as hard. I'm using a lighter bat now. I might break it out for BP though."

First he made Chanderdat take notice. Now he has started to earn his trust.

On May 27 in Brantford, DeLong was inserted as a designated hitter. First time up, he singled. Next, he clubbed a mighty three-run homer off Marc-Andre Major.

"He tried to blow a fastball by me," DeLong said. "All the guys said they thought it was going to hit the lights."

And with that, he has given the Majors some options. In his best and most recent mound outing, he tossed six innings of one-run ball in a victory over Kitchener on Sunday.

Next up for London (6-6) is Brantford's return to Labatt Park (Friday at 7:30 p.m.) for the first time since winning Game 7 of the IBL final last year.

"I thought I could've done better (against Kitchener)," said DeLong, who pitched and played first base to save his arm as a sophomore at Henry Ford Community College in Michigan this year. "By the end of the year, I want to be in the starting rotation and be able to hit, too."

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That's the challenge.

He's hitting .429 in 21 at-bats and is 1-0 with a save and a 4.38 earned-run average in 12.1 innings.

"I've tried to get him into the lineup against lefties and pinch-hit when I can," Chanderdat said. "When we faced Paul Spoljaric, I put him in as DH. It's tough. We have Chris Chambers, who's hurt but is a pretty good hitter who can DH. We have three or four pretty good players who won't play every game. Then when you're in the bullpen, it's possible you won't pitch, but you might. If you're in the field, you're throwing it's like a day of pitching so you need an extra day off."

He likely won't play a lot of first. Bechard is there and has torn the cover off the ball.

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Still, DeLong is on a mission.

He was passed over in the major league draft last year after needing surgery to remove a non-cancerous cyst from his right shoulder.

"It was June 1," he said. "It was the size of a golf ball and I was out three months. It was something I had to do. I had talked to all the National League teams -- a pitcher who could hit -- so now, I'm trying to get back in the scouts' eye again.

Former Majors infielder David Narodowski of Vancouver, took the first step to the higher level when he was drafted in the 15th round by the Arizona Diamondbacks on Wednesday.

Narodowski hit .299 with 33 RBIs in 34 regular season games last season. At the University of Kansas, he batted .354 with eight home-runs and 43 RBI in 60 games.

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SPORTS NEWS

Red Wings and Penguins ready to put everything on line in Game 7

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