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Palmer's relief let Majors breathe easier

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL: London hurler allows just two hits in nine innings, helping his team rebound from three runs down in a 15-inning marathon

By MORRIS DALLA COSTA, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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The London Majors swept a pair from the team they are battling for first place.

But that was far from the best news of the day.

Josh Palmer made that news from the pitching mound.

The Majors defeated the Barrie Baycats 9-1 Sunday at Labatt Park in Game 1 of what turned into a long, long, Intercounty Baseball League doubleheader. The Majors came back to win the second game 4-3 in 15 innings.

Catcher Tyler Graham, who caught all 22 innings on the day, ended the marathon day with a leadoff home run in front of 947.

But the man who made everyone take notice was Josh Palmer. For the Majors, a team that is going to need pitching as the season progresses, his nine-inning relief stint, in which he gave up only two hits, was a beautiful thing to behold.

Two years ago, Palmer was the dominant pitcher in the IBL. He was virtually unhittable.

Then the shoulder problems began. After two surgeries, no one, including Palmer, knew what would happen.

He answered a lot of questions Sunday.

He threw hard and was able to locate his pitches. More importantly, he feels great.

"I feels just like it did in '08," he said. "After I throw I wake up and don't feel any pain, just tiredness. It just feels good to be able to do this again."

Palmer has only pitched a few innings for the Majors this year.

He's busy in at his job in Chatham, building energy-efficient windmills. He throws bullpen and side sessions but hasn't been able to start a game.

"We're building him up," Majors manager Roop Chanderdar said. "He kept telling me he was fine. When he told me after three or four innings that he was just loosening up, I knew that was the Josh Palmer of old."

Palmer wasn't even sure he was going to pitch this year.

"It was a last-minute decision," he said. "The passion for the game and Roop talked to me. I couldn't miss out on such a great we have this year."

Sunday's doubleheader was a meeting of teams tied at the top of the standings at 11-2. The teams are identical in a lot of other ways as well, the most obvious is they can both hit.

So when a team gets good pitching to go with that hitting it's a tough combination to beat. The Baycats found that out.

Young Majors right-hander Adam Paish threw leadoff hitter Ryan Spatoro a hanging changeup that Spatoro hammered for a triple. It was one of the last bad pitches the kid threw.

Spatoro eventually scored to give Barrie a 1-0 lead.

That did not last long.

In the bottom of the inning the Majors loaded the bases and Baycats starter Adam Garner, who in two previous starts hadn't given up a run, threw his own bad pitch.

"It was a hanging slider," Majors banger Cleveland Brownlee said. "Oh, yeah, I knew it was gone when I hit it."

Long gone. Brownlee hit the ball to the deepest part of Labatt Park, over the centre-field fence.

There was no more unlikely combination providing the win than Brownlee and Paish.

Paish pitched for the Western Mustangs and hopes to get into medical school.

Brownlee is 26, still hoping to get a look by some major league organization. In the offseason in Atlanta, he teaches special needs kids in high school.

Brownlee is one of the most popular Majors and even though he knows time is running out to his baseball career along, he's happy just to play the game.

"I want to keep doing this as long as I can, as long as Roop lets me," Brownlee said.

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