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Game tips cap to founding team

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL LEAGUE

By MORRIS DALLA COSTA, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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GUELPH - The real home team was buried in the lineup of the two teams actually playing.

While the Guelph Royals are no longer operating, their spirit was very much in evidence.

The Barrie Baycats and London Majors participated in a contest that transcended winning and losing. It was truly about the game of baseball itself.

The two Intercounty Baseball League teams, who are battling for the league lead, played a regular season game at Hastings Stadium in Guelph Tuesday.

It was Barrie's home game and there were multiple purposes to playing the game in Guelph.

Majors' manager Roop Chanderdat said it best.

"This is bigger than a baseball game," Chanderdat said.

The biggest reason was bringing Intercounty League Baseball back to a city that had had a team in the league since 1919. A stadium dispute between the city and the Royals forced the team to take a one-year leave from the league.

"We wanted to play a game in Guelph to make sure the wonderful baseball fans in Guelph knew that the league hasn't forgotten about them and that we are working hard to get the Guelph Royals back on the field," said Joe O'Neill commissioner of the IBL.

Between 300 and 400 people came to the game.

The home team was represented in the Baycats' and Majors' lineups.

The Baycats have six ex-Royals -- Frankie Hare, Greg Byron, Chris Romano, Sean Reilly, Adam Reynolds and Kevin Hinton.

London has one, pitcher Ryan Hart who started the game. Chris Stewart, another Royals' outfielder, was supposed to be with the Majors but he has personnel commitments that haven't allowed him to make it yet.

Hinton played 23 years for the Royals.

Bringing a game back to Guelph was also important because Hinton needed to be honoured.

Jim Rooney, one of the Royals owners, and O'Neill helped retire Hinton's No. 25 before the game.

They hope the retirement ceremony wasn't an ominous sign of what the future holds for the Royals. The plexiglass frame holding Hinton's sweater blew off the table and broke apart.

Hinton moved to Aurora a year ago. For years he not only played but did just about everything else for the Royals. The commute to Guelph proved too much for him. Hinton opted to do something with the Baycats and they made him their general manager as well as playing.

But coming back to Guelph where there is no Intercounty team is difficult for him.

"That's tough to swallow," Hinton said. "It's hard to know there's no game in town. I just hope everyone comes out and shows that we miss it. I stayed here so many years just to make sure that we had it."

Hinton says walking into the ballpark wearing another uniform "feels really weird."

"But this is easier than if I was playing against my old team," he said. "It would have been really hard if I had been playing my old team. At least I have some guys who are with me who were my teammates."

Not only are the Royals not operating this year but Guelph's junior team, with no senior team to work toward, also shut down.

Hastings Stadium is a great facility but the only team playing in it is the Guelph midgets.

There is bitterness among the fans, not only with the city but also the team ownership over what has transpired.

"As a fan of the league, the league is not the same without the Guelph Royals," O'Neill said. "We're talking about a franchise that along with the Kitchener Panthers, are the two founding franchises in the league in 1919.

The proceeds from the game went to the Guelph Minor Baseball Association.

Chanderdat was "100% in favour" of playing in Guelph.

"The fans have a little bitterness," Chanderdat said. "This will give them a taste of (baseball.) The players that played there for a long time and are now in other places were talking about coming back. They were the franchise. They were the main guys. For them to come back and play at their home park, it's going to be a special night for them."

Chanderdat did his part to contribute to the evening. He started Hart even though he is injured.

"The selfish thing would have been for me to start someone else and give him a rest," Chanderdat said. "He's still hurt a little bit. We have guys on the pitching staff that are ready to go. But this is bigger than a baseball game."

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BAYCATS 6, MAJORS 3

Key play: Barrie home game played in Guelph. Key play was the bottom of the seventh scored tied 3-3. Majors' shortstop Kevin Mailloux got tossed from the game. Second baseman Steve Froese moved to short, catcher Mac Harrison went to third. Froese and Harrison committed consecutive errors allowing two runs to score. Baycats score three in inning

Game: Former Royals Ryan Hart starts for Majors. Goes 6 2/3 gives up six hit, six runs, four earned. Majors, Baycats commit four errors each. Mac Harrison has two hits and two RBI and Cleveland Brownlee has two hits for Majors.

Next game: Majors play makeup game Friday, 7:30 at Labatt Park against Kitchener Panthers.

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