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Trumped by an ace

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL LEAGUE: St-Gelais signing with Red Sox shocks London manager

By RYAN PYETTE, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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Terrell Alliman of the Brantford Red Sox dives back to first base as London Majors first baseman Chris Chambers waits for the ball on a pick-off attempt during the first inning of Tuesday's Intercounty Baseball League game at Labatt Park. Alliman was safe and the Red Sox rallied with six runs in the top of the ninth inning to beat the Majors 10-8. (SUE REEVE, The London Free Press)

The London Majors' pitching ace is back in the Intercounty Baseball League.

But in a nightmare twist, Andy St-Gelais will be throwing for the Brantford Red Sox.

The reigning IBL rookie of the year and first-team all-star righthander signed with the three-time defending champs just before Monday's league cutoff to add players.

"I'm disappointed," London co-owner and manager Roop Chanderdat said. "We thought Andy was a London Major through and through. Andy's an ace. He's a No. 1, not a No. 3 or 4.

"You're always looking for starting pitchers who can go out and beat the Brantfords, the Barries and the Torontos in the playoffs. Andy's that kind of guy."

It's a transaction that tips the balance of power to the first-place Sox, who started a home-and-home series with another former Major — Adam Arnold — on the mound Tuesday night at Labatt Park.

The Majors are bracing for potentially facing St-Gelais Wednesday night in Brantford. He led the league last year in wins (7), finished second in earned run average (2.30) and was third in strikeouts (58).

Chanderdat didn't know the 23-year-old from Pintendre, Que., was negotiating with the Sox.

"I kept in touch with him and figured if he would come back to this league, it would be with us," he said.

After his standout London season last summer, St-Gelais pitched in Australia in the winter. He played part of this season in the Can-Am League with the Quebec Capitales, the club famous for having previously inked former big-league closer Eric Gagne.

On the weekend in Sherbrooke, St-Gelais played for an all-star team from the Quebec senior elite league and threw three shutout innings in a 6-0 win over a group of Intercounty all-stars. The Majors weren't part of the series — they had a pair of games in Ottawa, where they lost both to drop out of first place.

"Andy wanted to stay close to home and play in Thetford Mines (for the Blue Sox) and I understood that," Chanderdat said. "Andy's a guy who would come over to my house and ate dinner with my family, so it's a bitter pill (to see him with Brantford)."

IBL teams are allowed to protect five players on an inactive list. The Majors didn't protect St-Gelais, which permitted new Brantford GM Mike Bonanno to go after him.

"We put guys like Will Richards and Brad McElroy on the list," Chanderdat said. "You keep guys on there who haven't played in a while or guys who have gone off to chase the dream just in case they end up coming back."

Rosters are locked in for the rest of the summer so the Majors have no way of answering the devastating move made by one of their biggest rivals.

"I'd like to see some form of protection," Chanderdat said. "People are always asking me, 'Who are these guys?' They don't know who Andy St-Gelais, Christian Ruiz and Ryan LaPensee are until they come here and get a chance to show what they can do.

"I do my work and I bring them here. We developed him so we should get first rights if they come back in the league."

Under that scenerio, the Majors would be permitted to trade St-Gelais' rights to the highest bidder if he didn't want to come back.

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