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## Bad weather helps bond players

**INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL: Fast start has London Majors tied for first**

By STEVE GREEN, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

Last Updated: June 9, 2011 9:22am

Slow starters the last two seasons, the London Majors have burst from the gate this time around. And ironically, the bad spring weather may have played a part.

The Majors are 7-1, tied for first in the Intercounty Baseball League with the Barrie Baycats heading into Friday night's game at Labatt Park against the 6-3 Kitchener Panthers. It's the first meeting of the season between London and Kitchener since the Majors won Game 7 of their quarterfinal last year.

Two earlier meetings this season were postponed by rain and Majors manager Roop Chanderdat said that may have been a blessing in disguise as some new faces got a chance to fit in.

"This team has gelled really quickly," he said Wednesday, "and some of these rainouts may have helped in terms of team bonding, because the guys were still here, sitting around the clubhouse, and got to know each other a little better."

Last year, the Majors struggled all season to get above .500 and only just reached it, going 18-18 to finish fifth before upsetting the fourth-place Panthers, with whom they'd had a bench-clearing brawl two weeks before the playoffs. In 2009, the Majors again struggled at .500 until a late surge allowed them to finish 21-15, but they fell in the quarterfinals to Toronto.

This season has been a pleasant surprise. So far, anyway.

"We've always been a strong-finishing team, but this year we really talked about getting off to a good start," Chanderdat said. "We need to win the games we're supposed to -- without any disrespect intended. Last year we were 18-18 and lost two games to (expansion) Ottawa and two to Hamilton. That's 22-16 and fourth place.

"You always talk about hitting and pitching being keys, but the biggest has been just winning. These guys have been finding a way to win the close games and winning just instills confidence."

The Majors are swinging the lumber well right now -- they lead the league in slugging percentage (.541), OPS (on-base plus slugging, .918), home runs (16) and total bases (153) and are in second in batting average (.311) and RBI (57).

"I think the difference is we have a full lineup this season, from one through nine. I always say one through 12 can hit with this team," Chanderdat said, including bench players, "so other teams have to pick their poison. Anyone on any given day can carry this team and if other teams want to dictate who they pitch to, it can come back to haunt them."

London pitching has also been holding its own, for the most part. The Majors are third in team ERA at 2.75, while Ryan Hart (2-1 with 17 strikeouts) is fourth individually at 1.52. If he recovers from a rolled ankle sufficiently, he's due to start against Kitchener. If not, Jordi Amargos (1-0, 3.38 ERA, 16 strikeouts) will likely get the nod, Chanderdat said.

With 16 games in June alone, the pitching depth will be tested.

Friday's game is the start of a big weekend for the Majors. They play the Ottawa Fat Cats at Labatt Park Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and again Sunday at 1 p.m. That game will be the Pack the Park Day, with proceeds going to the Sunshine Foundation.

And the Majors may be facing a tired Ottawa team, which is also playing in Burlington against the Twins on Saturday at 2 p.m.

### MAJORS WEEKEND

All at Labatt Park

**Friday:** vs. Kitchener, 7:30 p.m.

**Saturday:** vs. Ottawa, 7:30 p.m.

**Sunday:** Pack the Park vs. Ottawa, 1 p.m.

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