

## MAJORS SET TO BEGIN SEASON

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If the London Majors are going to avoid the sluggish start that hampered their 2009 Intercounty Baseball League season, they'll have to do it on the road.

Their push for a third league final appearance in five seasons begins Sunday in Hamilton against the Thunderbirds.

Two more road games follow May 9 at Kitchener and May 15 at defending-champion Brantford before the home opener May 16 against Hamilton at Labatt Park at 1 p.m.

Last season, the Majors went 8-10 over the first half before a 13-5 second half resulted in a fifth-place finish. However, they were bounced in the quarterfinals in six games by the Toronto Maple Leafs. The Majors last won the IBL championship in 1975

Majors co-owner and field manager Roop Chanderdat said last seasons early struggles eventually caught up with them and he's eager to avoid a repeat.

"You want to finish in the top four so you at least start off the first round with home-field advantage and a little easier opponent, if there is such a thing in this league," he said.

"And as a manager, I like starting on the road. It gets the guys more mentally prepared, they get on the bus for a bit of bonding and there's no pressure. It's all about expectations for us. As an organization, we expect to win and the guys in that clubhouse are competitors.

The Majors went 2-0-1 against Michigan Jet Box in three exhibition games at Labatt Park last weekend, winning 14-4 on the Friday, then tying 1-1 and winning 7-2 on the Saturday.

And there were a few performances in that series that had Chanderdat smiling. Most notable was pitcher Andy St. Gelais going five innings with eight strikeouts in the 1-1 game.

"He didn't have his fastball, but his changeup was working well and he still showed me something," the manager said, adding he was also buoyed by the performance of Josh Palmer, the Majors ace in 2008 who missed last season after shoulder surgery. he pitched a couple of innings against Jet Box.

"I don't want to say he's back, but he's close to his 2008 form," said Chanderdat, who plans to bring Palmer out of the bullpen to start the season.

The Majors will be without the veteran presence of third baseman Kyle Piwowarczyk, who's taking the summer off after playing pro hockey in Germany and baseball in the summer the past few years. Chanderdat is looking at junior-aged Londoner Paul Lytwynec, who was a member of last years Canadian midget champion London badgers squad, to earn a starting spot while also playing for the junior St. Thomas Tomcats.

"He doesn't have to be Kyle Piwowarczyk," Chanderdat said of Lytwynec. "Paul's got a strong arm and can really fire it across the infield; Kyle was more of a position-type, quick-release player."

The Majors play 11 of their first 18 games on the road, including doubleheaders in Barrie and Toronto. That means a favourable schedule for the second half of the season, which includes consecutive doubleheaders with Barrie and Toronto, the latter being the annual July 1 matchup that's followed by Canada Day fireworks.

Londons only other doubleheaders are against the expansion Ottawa Fatcats at home May 30, in Ottawa July 10. The Majors also have a pair of 11 a.m. starts with the Mississauga tied with school promotions. The Labatt Park game is June 15.

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