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## Majors lose ugly marathon

Four-hour game littered with missed opportunities

By MORRIS DALLA COSTA, LONDON FREE PRESS

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London Majors second baseman Vince Burke, left, throws to first base after getting Jon Saporsantos of the Hamilton Thunderbirds out at second during the Majors' Intercounty Baseball League home opener Sunday at Labatt Park. The Thunderbirds won 11-9. (SUE REEVE, The London Free Press)

It was a home opener that felt like a whole season.

That was mostly because both teams seemed determined to put everything into one game.

After almost four hours of baseball, the Hamilton Thunderbirds won their first game of the Intercounty Baseball League season Sunday, defeating the previously unbeaten Majors 11-9 in front of 1,012 fans at Labatt Park.

The beautiful park was the site of some ugliness on the day.

Poor pitching, inconsistent hitting, five error, eight pitching changes, 19 walks, 20 runs and 25 hits went a long way toward making the day a marathon.

And despite trailing the whole game, once by seven runs, the Majors had plenty of chances to get back in the game. They left the bases loaded four times and stranded 18 runners.

"This game was about opportunities," said Majors manager Roop Chanderdatt.

"We had bases loaded, the right guys up, the middle of the order. We just didn't capitalize. If you ask me to take my chances again with that, I would take it."

To make a strange day even stranger, it was terrific defensive plays by the Thunderbirds that allowed them to come away with the win.

Hamilton shortstop Adam Cholewka made at least four great plays to save runs. And while right fielder Matt McGraw had a good day at the plate, it was his glove that made the game-changing play.

It came in the bottom of the fifth when the Majors were down 10-3, but had two runs in and the bases loaded. With two out, cleanup hitter Chris Chambers ripped a line drive directly over McGraw's head. McGraw turned on the ball, ran and made a leaping one-handed catch almost at the fence. The hit would have cleared the bases.

It was just part of a frustrating day for Chambers, who left eight runners on base.

"It was a tough loss today," said Majors' outfielder Alan Cattyrsse said. "We have to be a little more mentally focused early. They came out swinging . . . Walks hurt us. The first six innings the leadoff guy got on and scored. But we'll get better. We were down, but we still fought back."

Cattyrsse had himself a big day at the plate. He had three hits, walked once, stole a couple of bases and had two RBIs as the leadoff batter. He normally bats in the power positions.

"But you do whatever you have to do to help the team win," he said. "It's a little odd for me. Today I felt good. It's a little bit different approach for me. It's going to take me a little while to get used to it. I only batted leadoff once or twice at school. The big thing is I still got to stay aggressive like I was a three-hole hitter. I still go up and swing the bat. Today I stayed aggressive and it paid off."

Mike Mitro started for the Majors and took the loss. He only went 1 2/3 innings. Kyle Pegg got the win in relief of starter Matt Martinow.

The Majors were 2-0 going into the game and are still waiting for about half-dozen players they've signed.

"We really wanted to build a team with good chemistry," Chanderdatt said. "We wanted good character guys."

Last year there were rough times in the Majors' clubhouse. Even though it's early, Cattyrsse likes this team's makeup.

"Clubhouse is great this year," Cattyrsse said. "Last year it was a little different. We had guys hurt, guys showed up at certain times, guys had problems with coaches. It took a little while to figure it out. But this year there's a great group of guys. Guys are bonding early. We're still excited for the new guys to come so we can become a team, bond together, get hot and make a real run for this." We're looking good and we're confident."

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