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Majors subdue Cats, show signs of hope

BASEBALL: London Majors down Ottawa Fat Cats 6-1, 17-5

By RYAN PYETTE, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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London Majors third baseman Vince Burke holds up the ball after he put the tag on Cody Mombourquette of the Ottawa Fat Cats. (MIKE HENSEN, The London Free Press)

During his second game with the London Majors last year, Chris Chambers hurt his knee.

He tore it up pretty bad, actually.

He needed anterior cruciate ligament surgery in September after the season ended.

"I played through it," the 23-year-old said. "There's pain, yeah, but you do what you can."

London manager Roop Chanderdat even assigned Chambers to roam the outfield in a few of those Intercounty Baseball League games late in the season.

"I knew it was pretty bad," Chanderdat said.

"It's not easy to play through injuries like that in this game."

Some guys never come back the same.

But wasn't that Chambers playing first base for the Majors Sunday afternoon at Labatt Park, hustling after a ball from a bad pickoff play and firing a laser beam to third to nail speedy Ottawa Fat Cats' centrefielder Cody Mombourquette?

And wasn't that a good-legged Chambers charging hard to steal second base in London's double-header 6-1 victory over expansion Ottawa in the first half of a doubleheader before about 250 at the historic diamond?

Sure, the throw down to second hit Chambers, which helped. And yeah, it was supposed to be a hit-and-run play, too.

But hey, this guy can move. Aren't most first basemen supposed to run like they have chronic knee woes?

"I came back here this summer with something to prove," Chambers said.

"I'm way ahead of schedule for this kind of thing. I feel good. I want to help this team."

Chambers did it again with three straight hits in the second game, a 17-5 blowout victory. It's early, but he's hitting .800 so far.

And two wins over Ottawa isn't going to break out pennant fever. Brantford, still the IBL's gold standard, beat London 11-5 last Friday.

But there are signs, such as Chambers' resurgence, that inspire hope.

Andy St. Gelais threw seven innings of two-hit ball, needing just 88 pitches to finish off the Fat Cats' bats.

"Here's a rookie who's 3-1 and he could've easily been 4-0 because he lost 1-0 to Kitchener," Chanderdat said.

And he overcame an oddity. Chanderdat took out catcher Taylor Frederick after an inning and replaced him with Emiliano (Milly) Martiniello, who the Majors just signed last week after Peterborough's Tyler Plumpton, being counted on to handle London's catching duties this summer, was hurt in a college game at Rio Grande University.

"He (Martiniello) just needs to get to know the league better," Chanderdat said.

The Majors are still waiting for three more starting pitchers to arrive: Chris Cox, who just finished his season at Canisius College in Buffalo; Pierre Deschenes (Buffalo University), who's due back next week; and Craig Bate, still waiting for his release from minor pro ball.

"You don't want to get in a hole early," said Chambers, whose Majors started by losing four of their first seven games. "But the additions on this team have been huge this year. I think our team, once everyone gets here, is coming to be capable of a lot."

Ryan LaPensee hit a homer in his first IBL at-bat against Kitchener last week.

Big Cleveland Brownlee, the guy with baseball's best name, hit two homers and a double in the two games Sunday.

The homer, in the opener, landed halfway up the big trees that save home run balls from plunking into the Thames River.

"Cleveland puts on a show in batting practice," Chanderdat said. "He's a big guy, but he can run, too. When we play basketball, he's very good. That's what we're looking for here — athletes, first and foremost."

Add in pain-free, surgically repaired with something to prove.

For Chambers on this day, it was a winning combination.

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Intercounty baseball

Game 1: Majors 6, Fat Cats 1

Game 2: Majors 17, Fat Cats 5

Next: The Majors (4-4) head to Guelph to face the Royals on Tuesday. Game time is 7:30 p.m.

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