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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

London after Major improvement on field

Sun, May 6, 2007

By MORRIS DALLA COSTA, SUN MEDIA

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If optimism won pennants, the London Majors would have captured two or three by now.

Unfortunately, optimism only earns you the right to come back year after year, often face the same problems and work as hard as you can to make some headway.

In his third year as co-owner of the Intercounty Baseball League

Majors, Scott Dart is as optimistic as he was the day he purchased the club. He still has a firm belief that baseball can work in London, and he's determined to see it through.

The Majors open their Intercounty League season tomorrow against the Stratford Nationals at Labatt Park.

There's no question there is great optimism for what's happening on the field. Majors co-owner and field manager Roop Chanderdat has made numerous changes to the on-field product, which last year went to the league final against Brantford and lost. It was the second time in three years the Majors had made it to the final. The last time they won the league title was 1975.

Success on the field has been achieved; off the field, the growth hasn't been as evident. There have been times when it appeared the Majors had turned the corner when they drew bigger crowds. But many times it was the usual handful of supporters warming the seats at Labatt Park.

Whether it's 200 or 2,000 in the stands, Dart is going about the business of building the business. If you enjoy the game of baseball and don't care for the drive to the Toronto, the expense or aggravation, there is really no better place to sit and watch a game than Labatt Park. It's affordable, accessible and without stress and you aren't nailed to the seat.

Dart is hoping the game is in a revival stage. He says that registrations in minor baseball are up for the first time in a number of years and he's going to focus on young fans.



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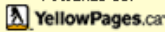
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"I see things moving in the right direction," said Dart. "We've had a huge shift from the first year to the third year."

"We have more things happening with kids being involved . . . we're starting to work on the kids fun and we're going more into the public schools and it's only going to increase our attendance."

Dart believes if he can just get people to come, they'll be back. "We want people to take advantage of the situation we offer . . . They take advantage of free tickets for the kids on the turnaround that the parents are going to come, and what kid doesn't like to spend money on concessions. As long as we keep track of our paid attendance and that's increasing, that's all we care about."

Dart believes the interest is there. He says the Majors' website was up from 400,000 hits in April of last year to 600,000 hits last month. In a peak month last year, the site had 1.1 million hits.

Now if only the Majors could manage that many base hits. Chanderdat and Dart have done a good job making this franchise competitive. "We bounce ideas off each other but Roop is responsible for putting the players on the field," Dart said. "Winning games is very important. If we don't have a good product on the field, people won't show up."

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