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OPINION COLUMNISTS



Majors' opening bodes well for season

By Morris Dalla Costa



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The London Majors got off to a great start to their Intercounty Baseball League season.

Beating the Stratford Nationals 9-5 was good news enough. But they did it on a beautiful day for baseball at Labatt Park, in front of a decent opening day crowd of about 500.

And they won playing pretty good baseball considering the players barely had time to get the snow out of their boots.

Toss in the fact the Majors only dressed 15 while waiting for another eight to 10 players to be done with other commitments, including school, and manager Roop Chanderdat had to be pleased with how they played.

"We were happy with the win," he said. "We have a lot of young guys. We got the butterflies out of the way and we were shortstaffed. We expect the other guys to come in about the third week, but I liked how the young guys played today."

The number that is especially impressive was the zero in the Majors' error column. This early in the season, it's usually a case of stone hands and iron gloves.

"I'm really happy about that," Chanderdat said. "Our middle infielders (second baseman Vince) Burke and (shortstop Alex) Arango, they had a good game. Vince made three tough plays. They maybe should have turned a double play, but they've only had one day together. Once they get to know each other . . . And (third baseman Kyle) Piwowarczyk, he was stellar out there."

A lot of things went well for the Majors. Starter Adam Gautreau loaded the bases in the bottom of the first inning but got out of the jam. From that point on, he was terrific. He went four innings and left with a 6-0 lead.

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"We got great pitching from Gautreau," Chanderdat said. "He gave us a great start, but it's early and everyone is on a pitch count. His is 80. He was at 77 and it's early in the season. We wanted to get him a win, but you don't want to wreck your arm."

Tom Van Kastern came in to pitch the next two innings and earn the win.

The Majors scored two in the first and four in the fourth to break the game open.

Majors' outfielder Kevin Virtue had a pair of hits to lead his club.

The Majors had five stolen bases yesterday.

"We have some guys with some wheels, who can steal or take an extra base. It's going to be big," said Virtue, who also indicated it's going to take a while for everyone to get in game shape.

"It's one thing to hit all day in a cage and another thing to face a pitcher in a live situation," he said. "It's going to take a little while, but some of the guys timing is almost there. It was a good start."

Nationals' left fielder Steve Charles was the big producer for Stratford. He hit a pair of two-run homers.

Virtue likes the makeup of this team, especially when the full roster shows up.

"The core group we have here is ready to go. We're going to compete and win some ball games," he said. "For me? No I don't have any goals. I'm passed that. I just hope to make some contact and get on base."

Chanderdat will get a better idea of just what he's got in about a month.

"I always say the first three weeks is almost like a preseason," he said. "Three or four weeks into the season is when you see your real team.

"I'm not really worried about anything. I'd like another starter and if a power hitter happened to fall into your lap, I wouldn't turn that away. But we'd definitely want one more pitcher and we'll be fine."

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