

**SPORTS & FITNESS**

Losing start not end to Gryphons' season [here](#)

- Main Stories
- More Sports
- Event Listings

**All Knights**

- Knight News

**Columns**

- Sporting News
- The 19th. Hole
- The Fan



## Majors' season so far: 'We've had a lot of people step up'

By SEAN MEYER, The Londoner

*London Majors shortstop Alex Arango turns the double play and jumps to avoid the sliding Kitchener Panther during the Majors 7-2 win on Friday night at Labatt Memorial Park.*



MARK SPOWART PHOTO

After watching his team fall just short of a league championship last season, Roop Chanderdat knew it would be an uphill battle for the London Majors in 2007.

The Majors lost several veterans in the off-season while adding a number of younger players to a lineup that had made the Intercounty Baseball League (IBL) championship series two of the past four years.

And while Roop says he expected to face some challenges this year with a younger clubhouse, he didn't expect the team to have a losing record at the midway point of the season.

"Record wise, win-lose wise, no, I didn't expect we'd be where we are. We are a little lower in the standings than I would have predicted. But other than Toronto and Brantford, everyone is in mix for third to eighth, so that's encouraging," says Roop, who besides being field manager is also co-owner and general manager of the team. "We had a lot of turnover this season. I didn't quite know what to expect. Not so much in terms of wins and loses, but just where the team would be. But as of today, I would say we are getting there."

With the second half of the season still ahead, Roop says the Majors need two things to make a move up the standings – two things the team hasn't had much of all season.

"We need quality starts. It's not that we don't have quality starters, because we do. We just haven't been getting quality starts, except from Tom Van Kasteren. But the last little bit, five or six games now, we have gotten some (quality starts) and that's a good sign. Josh Palmer had two great starts in a row," Roop says. "And timely hitting is another thing. We've had decent hitting, but not what I would call timely hitting. We get the runner over to second, and we can't get him in. We are a young team with new pieces, and I see positives. We are coming around. I think you will see us make a good run at things, finish between fourth and sixth and build momentum for a good playoff run."

The team's disappointing start hasn't been without some highlights though, specifically the play of the team's four all-stars.

Joining Tom Van Kasteren on the league all-star team – which was coached by Roop in its game against the league champion Brantford Red Sox – were Kyle Piwowarczyk, Kevin Virtue and Rudy Vallejos.

"Tom has really stepped up for us. But all those guys, you expect it from Kyle and Kevin, they are always top at their positions," Roop says. "And Rudy has really played well coming off being rookie of the year. He's maybe just a smidge behind the other three. On a report card, he'd get a B to an A for the other three."

In keeping with those grades, Roop says he would give a C+ to the team's hitting, a C- to the pitching, a B+ for fielding and a B+ to the coaching staff.

And if the lowest grades were given for the team's hitting and pitching, the highest grades were reserved for the people filling the stands at Labatt Park.

"The fan support has been really good. I can't back it up with specific numbers, but just from looking out of the dugout, I know I've seen more faces in the stands. They definitely get an A+," says Roop, who can point to the 868 people who came out to the July 1 doubleheader as an indication of fan support this season. "We had fewer fans in the seats last year with a phenomenal team than we have this year. The fans have really been patient with a young team. We really can't ask any more of them."

Besides the team's difficulties on the diamond, Roop has faced some significant challenges off the field as well – and none more significant than the illness of Majors' co-owner Scott Dart.

While Scott has focused on dealing with the effects of pancreatitis (an inflammation of the pancreas which is part of the digestive system), Roop says he has had to take on more of the team's business operations.

"This year has been tougher with Scott being sick, not being able to be himself. I've had to add more responsibility, but that's nothing he wouldn't do for me," Roop says. "But it has been difficult, no question. So I am glad to have had a lot of support."

That support, Roop says, includes Rod Booth, game day coordinator; Anna Gladysz, sponsorship and event coordinator, Cathy Dobrentey, concessions manager and Terry Dart (Scott's dad), souvenir manager.

"All of them, their staff, our volunteers. They have just been tremendous. We've really had a lot of people step up," Roop says. "And I think you can see that again in the reaction of our fans. From a fan standpoint, I think the hard work of last season; last year's success has really paid off. I really think our success on the field is paying off. But we aren't going to rest of past success. We want to make sure and put the best team on the field we can game in and game out. We want to win and we will win."

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