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I AM SEEKING AGE TO ZIP

Learning about fun and opportunities at Labatt Park

Posted By Sean Meyer

Posted 2 days ago

Joe O'Neill has fond memories of watching Kyle Piowowarczyk play baseball.

Joe has watched Kyle play since he was a young boy picking up the sport as a member of the London and District Baseball Association (LDBA) to today where he is an all-star for the London Majors of the Intercountry Baseball League.

And while Joe, LDBA president, can look back with fond memories of Kyle's introduction to baseball, he is hoping several hundred London kids will take their opportunity to watch him play – for free – this Friday during LDBA Day, and perhaps one day following him to the field at Labatt Park.

"This is a great way to support the Majors, the premier baseball team in this area, but also it's important for our young players to get the opportunity to see the game they love played at a high level and in one of the most beautiful ballparks in North America," Joe says. "Some of the very young players have maybe only see the game played at such a high level on TV, but I believe you can learn a lot more by coming out and watching the game played live. They can come out and watch players like Kyle who played in the LDBA just like they are and know they have the chance to do the same thing."

The LDBA Day will see commemorative medals given out to the first 250 kids who come to Labatt Park this Friday, July 17, to watch the Majors take on the Kitchener Panthers. The game will be free of charge to all LDBA players.

Anna Gladysz, the Majors' marking manager, says the day is about showing the kids they could one day be playing for their hometown team.



The London Majors will help celebrate the talent of local baseball players with their annual London and District Baseball Association Day, Friday, July 17, during the team's game against the Kitchener Panthers at Labatt Park. Among those joining the many kids who will fill the bleachers that day – such as these players with Eager Beavers Baseball – are (back left) Scott Dart, Majors' co-owner; Joe O'Neill, president of the London and District Baseball Association; Jim Nother, owner and president of Nothers Recognition and Signage, one of the sponsors of the day; and Anna Gladysz, Majors' marketing manager.

Sean Meyer Photo

"I feel this day is all about the kids and that's how this started. The reason this team exists is the kids from London working their way up through the system. This is where they can make it to the major leagues or maybe get a scholarship to university or just keep playing a game they love," Anna says. "To the kids, this is the same as playing for the Toronto Blue Jays (of Major League Baseball). To these kids, the players are their idols, their heroes. They can come in for free, thanks to our sponsors, have a great time with their teammates and just have fun. That's the biggest thing, it's the most important thing for the kids to come and have a good time and come back again."

The game is free to the kids, Anna says, thanks to the sponsors who have come forward such as Apple Auto Glass, Pete Sports and Nothers Recognition and Signage.

Jim Nother, owner and president of Nothers, says his company is involved to support both the kids and the Majors.

"We talked about how we could do something to give back to the community and we like what Scott (Dart) and Roop (Chanderdat, co-owners of the Majors) are doing to promote youth baseball, so we wanted to help them with that," Jim says. "We are hoping a day like this, where the kids can get a medal and see a game for free, will not only encourage them to not only play baseball, but any sport, to get out and get active."

Joe says events such as LDBA Day do help get kids more involved in baseball. At the very least, it is perhaps on of the reasons why LDBA had 3,604 London kids playing in the association last year.

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"We have a lot of kids from London playing baseball from ages 4- 70. People talk about declining enrolment in baseball, but we probably have more senior players, over 21, than any other community in Ontario. And our participation in the youngest ages is growing nicely," Joe says. "Many people are realising the skills needed to play baseball. They still say hitting a round ball with a round bat is the hardest thing to do in sports. But these kids can come out and see the game played at a high level and know that with hard work this opportunity exists very close to home."

LDBA Day is an opportunity Anna says the team always looks forward to as well.

"Any time we can have an event like this, obviously it is an opportunity for us to get more fans to the park, to get the word out there about the Majors," Anna says. "But also our players, they are thrilled to have so many kids in the park during a game. They have thanked me in the past for having the kids come out; it brings just the best atmosphere to the park. They enjoy the game so much, have so much fun. That excitement rubs off on our players. It just makes for a great time at the ballpark."

Want to know more?

! The London and District Baseball Association Day at Labatt Park takes place Friday, July 17, during the London Majors game against the Kitchener Panthers. The game, which is free to members of LDBA, begins at 7:30 p.m.

! To find out more about the London Majors, visit www.londonmajors.com.

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