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### Majors look to build on pennant-winning season

Posted By Sean Meyer

Posted 3 days ago



London Majors' first baseman Jeff Bechard keeps track of a Hamilton Thunderbird baserunner during game one of the two team's first round opener in the Intercounty Baseball League playoffs last Sunday. Despite the 2-1 loss, the Majors are hoping to build on their regular season success -- which saw the team win its first league pennant since 1975.

Mark Spowart Photo

Perhaps the truest of all sports clichés is anything can happen come playoff time.

It's a saying Roop Chanderdatt knows could turn a successful season into a disappointing one in just seven games or less.

The Intercounty Baseball League playoffs began this past weekend with the London Majors losing the first game of their best-of-seven first round series against the Hamilton Thunderbirds 2-1 this past Sunday at Labatt Park. Josh Palmer pitched a complete game for the Majors, allowing five hits and one earned run with eight strikeouts and three walks.

Losing game one of the series could serve as a reminder to the Majors of that old adage. Roop, London's co-owner, general manager and field manager, says he and his players know full well that even a regular season as successful as their -- which included the team's first league pennant since 1975 (the team won a division pennant in 1988) -- could become a disappointment if the team loses focus on its main goal.

"We're focused on a championship and we want to start building momentum towards that. We've had a great season no doubt, but that's not to say we haven't done a lot of fighting and scratching to get where we are," Roop says. "We've played a lot of one-run games, we've had our adversity. We were 5-4 at one point in the season (London finished the regular season 27-9). We've been on a tremendous roll, but this is the playoffs and like they say, really anything can happen."

The Majors battle with the Thunderbirds is one Roop says he feels confident about, but adds he knows nothing is easy in the playoffs.

"Hamilton is a tough team. They beat us once this season. They certainly have their strengths," Roop says. "But we match up well and you hope that in a seven-game series that the best team wins."

London's season was built around Roop's managerial philosophy of "small ball" which relies on pitching, defence and timely hitting. He says it is a formula he won't change just because the playoffs have arrived.

"We have strong pitching, solid defence. We play small ball, not waiting for the homerun, and that has been our strength all season. We like to get the lead early and build from there," Roop says. "And the guys have really bought in. They believe in the system. It's then just a matter of playing hard, playing like we are capable of, and seeing what happens."

Roop faced a challenging off-season following last summer's disappointing first-round elimination from the playoffs.

The near-total overhaul of the roster meant many late nights, plenty of phone calls and a lot of hard work. However, Roop says that hard work has made this season all the more satisfying.

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"Things have worked out really well. We have so many young guys. It really is about the chemistry we have developed. At one point we lost a double-header to Oshawa, we were right around .500 and I asked them if they were happy with that. I could see in their eyes they weren't," Roop says. "The guys really started to work hard. You could see that's where we really came together. I remember sitting at my desk in the winter having made 20 phone calls and getting one guy out of it. They all had valid reasons, but it was tough. That makes what we've been able to accomplish this season very satisfying."

And while the playoff story is yet to be written for the Majors, Roop says the guys should never forget the success they achieved during their pennant-winning regular season.

"Winning the pennant is something we definitely wanted. I've told the guys you could play 20 years and never win a pennant," Roop says. "But playoffs are different. To be a champion you have to be mentally tough and that is something we have going for us."

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