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London Majors hope to continue a winning tradition in 2010

Posted By Sean Meyer

Posted 1 day ago



SEAN MEYER PHOTRoop Chanderdar, co-owner, general manager and field manager of the London Majors, is busy getting his roster ready for the 2010 Intercounty Baseball League season.

In 2006, Roop Chanderdar took the London Majors all the way to the Intercounty Baseball League (IBL) championship series in his first season as the team's field manager.

The Majors would lose the series in five games to the Brantford Red Sox, but that season started a trend that Roop, the team's co-owner, general manager and field manager, is hoping continues this season.

The Majors were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs in 2007 before returning to the finals and an eventual game seven defeat to the Red Sox in 2008. Last season, the team was once again eliminated in the first round of the playoffs.

So, if this rather peculiar trend continues, Roop may well find himself in position to finally raise an IBL championship banner over the grounds of historic Labatt Park later this summer.

"The every other year thing, it is there, and yes, it maybe pushes me a little. The trend is there and you can't ignore a trend. I look forward to those kinds of challenges. Can the team come together off the field, can they adapt and to learn and play the kind of ball I want, the kind that wins on the field," Roop says. "We have done it the first year, the third year, now can we do it in the fifth? It isn't about stats, I keep telling the guys the numbers will take care of themselves by the end of the year. Let's do the little things we need to win the game."

The Majors begin their season in Hamilton on May 2 before getting their home schedule started May 16 in a rematch against those same Thunderbirds. Start time for the home opener is 1 p.m.

For years now Roop has said his focus is on making sure London fields one of the league's most consistent and successful franchises. That being said, he also is quick to add a championship would be nice too.

"As I am getting older, a championship does matter. Not just for me, for Scott (Dart, the team's co-owner along with Roop), for the people at the concession stand, for everyone. All these people have put in all these hours. I want to win for everyone; I take that on myself," Roop says. "Even sometimes I look back to that Game 7 (against Brantford in 2008) and think we were so close, but it would be nice to win a championship for London in baseball. It would be nice to do this for everyone associated with it. We put an end to the pennant drought in 2008, maybe this year we can put an end to the championship drought."

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Whatever this season's level of success might be, Roop says it goes hand-in-hand with the team's focus of getting players to the next level.

"I am going into my fifth year as the manager. In four years, I am coming up to my 100th win. In those four years we have had eight guys drafted to, or signed by, MLB (Major League Baseball) teams. This year we lost two guys to pro teams, Will Richards (.295, 7 HR, 33 RBI) and Craig Bate (1.72 ERA, 5-1, 54 SO)," Roop says. "So we continue our trend of moving guys along. I always say our goal is to be competitive; you always want to win, but to also develop kids. And I think we are doing that by showing guys do move on."

And although Roop takes a great deal of pride in seeing some of his best players move on to higher levels of baseball, he says that has never – and will never – stop him from fielding the best team he can every season.

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"I view it hand-in-hand. I feel a strong obligation to our fans to win. Not necessarily to win a championship, but to provide a winning team," Roop says. "When you look every year, even if we finish fourth we are just two, three games out of the whole thing. We are always right there."

Roop's worst season as field manager was his second year when the team finished seventh with a record of 15-21. His best season was 2008 when the team went 27-9 and London won the league's regular season pennant. Roop's other two seasons finished with identical 21-15 campaigns.

"I look at my wins as setting team goals. The first year, going to the finals, that proved that proved to me and to my coaches that we belonged in this league, that we could have success. That was important to show I could do the job as GM and field manager. And then winning the pennant, going to the finals again, it showed we are doing things right," Roop says. "The individual wins don't mean anything. Maybe you look back when it is done and reflect on them. But it isn't just me; it's my coaches. James Sinfield has been with me every year. Casey Pulham has been with me three of the four years. Those guys have always been there for me."

The victories the Majors have picked up over Roop's first four years are something he is happy about, but he also says numbers don't often tell the whole story.

"The total wins don't mean anything; it's team goals. If you win 15 one year – like my second year – we lost to Brantford in the first round, but we played them tough. If we had beaten them, moved on to the second round, then 15 wins aren't so bad," Roop says. "But again, it is team success. You look at the guys drafted and signed, you look at the number of all-stars we have had. We have had more all-stars in four years than the Majors have had in a lot of years. So guys are having individual success."

That on-field success is something Roop says has definitely turned into off-field success – quite an achievement in a hockey-mad city.

"I think it is a successful franchise. We can walk around town and the Majors are known. They are a known commodity. Even guys who play for the team are recognized. I joke with Anna (Gladys, the team's marketing manager), we need to win and then do the marketing; they go hand-in-hand. You can market the heck out of something, but you need to win. The on-field success and the off-field success go hand-in-hand to create a successful franchise."

Owners of an IBL franchise don't typically expect to make bags of money off the venture and Roop is quick to say the Majors are only now reaching the break-even point.

"Overall, we are breaking even now, but I think we have a little catching up to do from the early years. Not that we didn't have good crowds the first few years, but things have really come a long way. I think we are averaging 800 fans a game now, not counting the July 1 games and playoffs, those are unique situations," Roop says. "Now I do expect to make that money back. If we can keep building, I think we are still on the up-rise. From a business standpoint we would like to get our money back. We knew this was a long-term investment, if you ever get your money back. But we didn't go into it from the business end; we went into it with a passion for the game."

Still, one of the things that are expected to make a difference on the corporate balance sheets is the liquor license the team acquired at the end of last season.

"Having the liquor license for a full season is exciting for us, to see where that goes. That has to get us money to pay pack all those upfront costs then hopefully next year we can start making some money from it," Roops says. "We had it for the last two games and the playoffs. It wasn't much, but it was a great experience to see how it would all work. And then to raise the awareness that we do have it, a cold beer and a hot dog, if you ask anyone, they go hand-in-hand. Not that we are promoting drinking, we are always going to be family entertainment and always will be that. But it gives the older boys and girls something to look forward to."

Although the liquor license will hopefully help attract both fans and dollars to Labatt Park, Roop is quick to say it will never change the focus of the organization he and Scott have built.

"We are never going to get away from the family entertainment. I still like to see the kids hanging off the rails, asking for a ball, asking for an autograph. To me, that is London Majors baseball," Roop says. "After the game, kids come on the field asking for autographs, with their grandparents, with their parents, glove in hand. They look up to our players and that is why we always, win or lose, do that 20 minutes, half-hour after the game, we will always do that."

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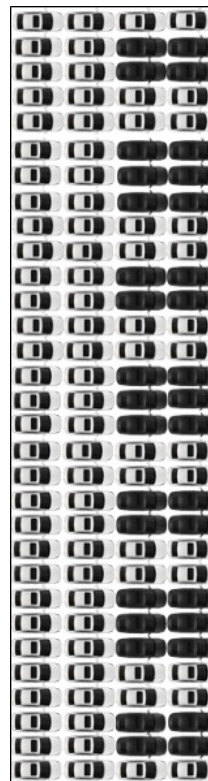
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