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Despite loss, Majors see bright future

The season ends one game short of championship

Posted By Sean Meyer

Posted 4 days ago



Six-year-old Emma Brown cheers loudly for her London Majors during game seven of the Intercounty League championships. London lost 8-2 but team owners are encouraged by the growing fan base. More than 4,000 people joined Emma for the final game at Labatt Park last Friday.

Mark Spowart Photo

London Majors fell short of one goal last Friday night – but might just have taken a major step to something more important.

The Majors lost 8-2 to the Brantford Red Sox in game seven of the Intercounty Baseball League championship series before a crowd estimated at between 4,000 and 5,000 fans at Labatt Park.

And while the loss extended the Majors championship drought to 34 years and marked the team's third defeat in the finals in five years – including twice to the Red Sox – the road to the championship might have shown London can be a baseball town after all.

Roop Chanderdar, the Majors' co-owner, general manager and field manager, says he believes this season's playoff run, together with the team's first regular season pennant since 1975, is a sign of things to come.

"You have to win games in London," Roop said in a post-season interview. "You win and people will come out to support you. Well, we won and the people came out. I think that shows the support is there."

"I hope we touched people. I am sure we have increased our fan base for next season. We have been around 500 most games this year, that should be 1,000 and I think it could be. I think we're getting there."

Scott Dart, Roop's partner in ownership of the Majors, is quick to agree.

"I definitely saw a change in the way people look at the team," he says. "To see the support from the fans (in game seven). It does well to expand our fan base by bringing greater exposure to the team."

I had a chance to interact with a lot of fans before the game. They were all saying what a fantastic night it was and where had all these people been all season. Someone said you have to be proud of this. And I am."

From a business perspective, Roop says 2008 will go down as the best season the Majors have enjoyed since he and Scott took over the team.

"I think we are getting to where we want to be," Roop says. "We sold quite a few season passes during the playoffs. We had tremendous support. I'm sure we broke even. You see teams who have three jerseys, three pairs of pants. We want to be able to afford the extras. I obviously haven't seen any final numbers, but I think we probably broke even, maybe even made a little money. Any money we did make will go back into the team."

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As excited as each man is about the franchise's future, each is understandably disappointed they weren't quite able to reach the immediate goal of securing a championship for London, for their players, and even themselves.

"It's an empty feeling, I can't lie," Roop says. "It's like something just doesn't feel right. I got pretty choked up. You think, 'what more can I do?' Losing in the finals again, it hurts. It's a failure. Part of you thinks, 'if we had won this game or that game. If we win game six there is no game seven.'"

"But the bottom line is you have to get back on that horse. But to get to a game seven against what is basically a pro team in Brantford. To be missing one whole side of our infield (third baseman Kyle Piwowarczyk left to play pro hockey in Germany while shortstop David Narodowski also had to leave early to enroll at the University of Kansas). To have won a pennant when if you ask anyone who knows about the IBL we were predicted to finish between sixth and eighth. It really was a tremendous season. But it is hard to think about that when you are just so disappointed. I am just so proud of this team."

Roop's disappointment isn't limited to just his players and the fans either.

"I felt really bad for the fans, for our veterans. But I also felt so bad for all our volunteers. My mother-in-law works the concessions, she doesn't get to watch the games even. I feel sorry for all our volunteers, they have given us so much. If we had been able to win, then they would have been able to say they were a part of a championship. I feel bad about that."

Scott is also disappointed he didn't get to bring home the title, but he says he can't forget how proud he is of the team and its manager.

"Of course we are disappointed by the end result, but there is no question I am proud of what we accomplished. I'm not happy we didn't win, but the guys played hard, won a pennant. And we had a lot of guys who were willing to get out into the community. We really had a tremendous group of guys," Scott says. "Roop did a fantastic job. Our whole coaching staff did. The work Roop did on recruiting these players, keeping them focused all year, motivating them. Roop and his staff did a fantastic job. The chemistry they all created is what helped build the success we had this season."

Roop still feels the pain of losing, but is quick to say he is proud of his entire roster.

"Jeff Helps wins playoff MVP (most valuable player). We worked hard to get him here and he has said he has learned so much this season to help him at the next level. Josh Palmer, Josh goes 8-0 in the regular season, wins the ERA title (for lowest earned run average). He was our horse and we rode him to the final. He really stepped up this season, showed his leadership.

"Adam Echlin, he pushed Josh all season, he set the bar for us. Jess Bechard, I would say he was our season MVP. He was one of our leaders. Kyle Piwowarczyk and David Narodowski were tremendous. And Mason Riley, after Will Richards got hurt we asked Mason to catch every game. He was tremendous. We had so much depth this year. You lose your number two and number three hitters and you shouldn't compete. But we took Brantford to seven games and I am so proud of what the guys did this year."

Before Roop and Scott start thinking about how to get one game farther in the championship series, they find themselves getting excited – about hockey season.

Roop and Scott just recently sold the Lambeth Lancers Jr. B club and have now moved their Junior B franchise – the former Petrolia Jets – to Forest where they have been renamed the Lambton Shores Predators.

"We have a brand new facility in Forest, it is just incredible," Roop says. "And the support has been great. We packed in 1,000 people for our first game. I'll take a little time away from the baseball team, maybe a month or so. I've started working on the hockey team, but I will start thinking baseball again soon."

Scott says the Predators will keep both he and Roop from enjoying just too much time off.

"Roop and I are so tied to hockey, we really don't have the luxury of a bunch of downtime," Scott says. "I'll take some time, but then we have to start thinking about doing new things for next season at the ball park. Finding out how we can top what we are doing and build on our growing fan base. I will take some time off, but if I had to bet, Roop will take less."

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