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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Majors one win from championship series

Fri, August 15, 2008

A rejuvenated Rudy Vallejoes has helped them get to this point

By **RYAN PYETTE, FREE PRESS SPORTS REPORTER**

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The London Majors are a win away from reaching the Intercounty Baseball League final.

Utility man Vince Burke came off the bench to hit a sacrifice fly in the eighth inning and plate the winning run in a 5-4 victory over the Oshawa Dodgers last night in Oshawa.

The Majors have a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven semifinal.

"The guys want to win at home -- these bus trips are getting long," London manager Roop Chanderdatt said. "That was a pivotal game after they beat us at home (1-0 on Wednesday). We're getting pretty thin on pitching. We used almost our whole bench (in Game 4).

"The guys know what's at stake now."

Ryan McGorman provided another solid start for London and lefty Mehdi Djebbar pitched two innings of sparkling relief for the save.

"Ryan kept us in it and Mehdi just did a heck of a job," Chanderdatt said. "We got some early runs and it was another close game. The pitching came through and the offence got some big hits. We knew it'd be tight. Oshawa is a good pitching

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team."

No club has pitched better than London. Right-hander Pierre Miville-Deschenes is scheduled to make the start for the Majors tonight. He's 1-0 in these playoffs with a 2.57 ERA, nine walks and eight strikeouts.

"It's a close-out game," Chanderdat said. "It's a big one for us, an opportunity."

Brantford and Guelph -- the two other semifinalists -- are tied 2-2 with Game 5 tomorrow in Guelph.

London right fielder Kevin Virtue had three hits, including a double. Left fielder Rudy Vallejos had an RBI single as he continues his incredible resurgence for the Majors.

In 2006, Vallejos was the IBL's rookie of the year.

He hit .300, knocked in over 40 runs and nearly stole 20 bases. He was a key reason why the team went to the final against Brantford that year.

As Chanderdat built talent around him the past few years, he did what he could to keep the outfielder from Ottawa in the batting order, including moving him to catcher.

But this regular season was different. While the Majors enjoyed their best summer in 20 years and won the pennant, Vallejos saw his plate appearances and average shrink, then found himself spending more and more time on the bench.

"I had a difficult year, personally," he said yesterday. "I changed my stance a couple of times. I changed my swing. When you're a baseball player, confidence is everything and there were times when I wasn't 100 per cent confident at the plate."

To his credit, Vallejos didn't become a distraction, ask to be traded or sulk on the bench. He kept swinging, served as an interpreter for talented Puerto Rican centre fielder Christian Ruiz and waited for a shot to be an everyday player again.

It happened in the first round against Hamilton. The bats went cold at home and Chanderdat re-inserted Vallejos in left field for an offensive spark.

He's not quite at his 2006 level, but still, he's making things happen and he made it difficult to remove him from the lineup again.

Majors 5, Dodgers 4

The series: (London leads the best-of-seven IBL semifinal 3-1.)

Game 5: Tonight, 7:30 p.m., at Labatt Park.

Game 6: Tomorrow, 5 p.m., in Oshawa, if nec.



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Phelps makes it 6-for-6


Michael Phelps made it 6-for-6 at the Beijing Olympics, winning another gold medal Friday and closing in on Mark Spitz with another world record.

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