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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Majors ready for Game 7

Fri, August 29, 2008

London tries for its first championship in 33 years tonight at Labatt Park

By RYAN PYETTE

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Who's going to be Game 7 hero?

Will it be Brantford boy Jess Bechard's big bat delivering the London Majors their first Intercounty Baseball League title in 33 years?

Or perhaps Brantford Red Sox catcher Wayne Forman, the former London Werewolves player who can recall last year's seventh-game defeat in this same situation to the Toronto Maple Leafs?

"It's for all the marbles -- use any cliché out there," London manager Roop Chanderdat said about tonight's championship series Game 7 at 7:30 p.m. at Labatt Park.

"We're excited. I think if you asked everyone in the IBL at the start of the year, no one would've expected the London Majors to win the pennant and then be playing in the seventh game of the league final.

"We know we let one chance get away (a 6-2 Game 6 defeat in Brantford on Wednesday) but we're back at home and we have one more crack at it."

London hasn't played a seven-gamer in the final in 32 years. They lost that one to Stratford.

The home team has won every game this year.

Pitching, in every contest, has been a factor. The one guy most responsible for a clutch victory will likely spend serious time on the mound.

Tonight, the probable starters are London's young ace Josh Palmer against Tillsonburg native Mike Meyers. It would be a matchup of a college star with a buzz on for complete games against the seasoned former Chicago Cubs property who has already climbed all the rungs in pro ball and has been back again.

Chanderdat and coaches James Sinfield and Casey Pulham huddled up late after Game 6 and selected Palmer. Considering the stakes and the fact the Bewdley native had normal rest between starts, it had to be an easy choice.

"We feel good about sending Josh out there -- he's been our guy all year," said Chanderdat, who has seen his pitching ranks thin out with players heading back to school. "But we still have (closer) Mehdi Djebbar -- he only threw 20-something pitches in Game 6 -- and Jeff Newnes is ready to go too.

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"We're going to be all right for pitching."

Chanderdat didn't bring Palmer to Brantford for Game 6. The hurler, who could very well pitch his final game for the Majors tonight, will leave immediately for school at Oklahoma Baptist.

"He wasn't at the park (Wednesday) but he has been around," Chanderdat said. "He had a lot of stuff to take care of."

But there aren't any surprises here. Both starters are already familiar to the hitters. Palmer has already pitched twice in the series -- the opener that London won in 10 innings and a Game 4 loss when Brantford's John Ogiltee worked his own specialty against him -- a complete game.

In Meyers' most recent start, he threw well but was at the business end of Ryan McGorman's one-hitter in a 2-0 London win in Game 3.

He'll be trying to pitch as many innings as he can but there will be some fans in the stands hoping for this dramatic moment: at some point, Brantford manager Adam Clarke bringing in Brett Gray, who plans to retire this year, to pitch at the park he provided such a major thrill -- a record 25 strikeouts in one game when he was with the Werewolves.

The Majors are trying to end a 33-year championship drought. They've been knocked out of the playoffs the previous two years by Brantford, including the 2006 final.

They are trying to get it done with a short-handed staff that lost two of their top player -- Kyle Piwowarczyk, to hockey overseas, and David Narodowski, to college at Kansas.

"We have to find a way to finish and I'm confident in our guys," Chanderdat said.

The veteran-laden Red Sox know, if they defeated Toronto in last year's final, they could've been looking at a third straight championship -- a dynasty by any measure. But they also know if they lose this one, they will be one-for-three -- a good batting average but a less-than-stellar record when it counts most.

Flip a coin. The campagne is on ice.

MAJORS IN THE FINAL

1975: defeated Guelph 4-2

1978: lost to Hamilton 4-2

1983: lost to Toronto 4-2

2004: lost to Guelph 4-1

2006: lost to Brantford 4-1

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SPORTS NEWS

Lee's blocked punt, touchdown help East Carolina shock Virginia Tech 27-22

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - T.J. Lee blocked a punt and returned it 27 yards for a touchdown with 1:52 left to help East Carolina stun No. 17 Virginia Tech 27-22 on Saturday.


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