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Bunt goes a long way as Majors win opener
 Fri, August 8, 2008

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By **STEVE GREEN**, FREE PRESS SPORTS REPORTER

What started out as a game of poker with the London Majors holding a pair of aces suddenly turned into a session of crazy eights last night.

When the dust settled at Labatt Park, the Majors had a 7-4 win over the Oshawa Dodgers and a 1-0 lead in their best-of-seven Intercounty Baseball League semifinal.

Behind two of their big guns, Josh Palmer and Jess Bechard, London appeared to be on cruise control, leading 4-1 heading to the top of the eighth. Palmer, who was 8-0 in the regular season and led the league with a 2.14 ERA, had a two-hitter and first baseman Bechard had all four RBIs on a double and a three-run homer.

The Dodgers, however, tied it on a double-play grounder, a passed ball and an RBI single by Ryan Fleming. But even stranger stuff was to come in the bottom of the eighth.

With Kyle Piwowarczyk on second, shortstop Dave Narodowski laid down a sacrifice bunt. Oshawa pitcher Cam Gray, who took the loss, threw wildly to third and the ball rolled into the left-field corner, allowing Narodowski to chug all the way around. Eventually, Bechard was on second and he came around on another poor throw on a sacrifice bunt by Kevin Virtue, this time by catcher Mike Reeves.

"I've never played in a game that was so back and forth, emotions up, emotions down," Narodowski said. "We couldn't let ourselves get down after they tied it. We'd come here with

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a game plan and we had to win this game."

As for his inside-the-park "home run" he said: "I just had to do a job and get Piwo over to third. I saw (Gray) throw it away and it just kept going down the line, so I thought I maybe could get to third. Then I saw them waving me in."

Bechard, the Majors' leader in homers (eight) and RBIs (34) during the regular season, was equally bemused by the turn of events.

"I've never seen that. I've played thousands of games and I've never seen a bunt come around to score," he said, adding the response to the Dodgers was typical of the Majors' season.

"We've done that several times this season. We're confident that if we fall behind or the other team ties it, we know our pitching's going to keep us in there and give us a chance."

Both of Bechard's hits -- an opposite-field double down the left-field line and a towering shot to right for his third playoff homer -- came with two out.

"That's actually something I haven't been super-pleased with this year," he said. "I've been trying to work on getting clutch hits with two out. On the first one, I just had to hit it where it was pitched. Having (Jeff) Helps and Piwo on ahead of me made it easier (on the home run)."

Mehdi Djebbar got the win, his first of the playoffs, with 1 2/3 innings of relief.



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