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Bechard a howling success with Majors

Fri, July 11, 2008

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

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When he joined them this year, the London Majors expected several things from Jess Bechard. And so far, he's ticked a lot of boxes.

Offence? He leads the Intercounty Baseball League team with five homers and 28 RBIs heading into last night's game in Kitchener against the Panthers.

Defence? He's third among first basemen with a .993 fielding percentage, with only one error all season.

Experience? He played professionally for the London Werewolves in their third -- and final -- season at Labatt Park in 2001.

Maturity? He is 30, after all.

But clubhouse levity?

"I probably goof off around the clubhouse more than anybody," he said yesterday. "So does Kyle Piwowarczyk, who's a veteran on this team. It helps the young players relate to us better and it keeps us young."

Of course, it's easier to have fun when you're winning and the Majors are doing plenty of that right now. They opened a four-games-in-four-days stretch last night a half-game out of the league lead at 21-8 and they play the first-place Guelph Royals tonight at Labatt Park at 7:30 p.m.



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Ryan McGorman started last night's game, Josh Palmer (6-0, 2.40 ERA) starts against Guelph, either Medhi Djebbar (1-1, 3.38) or Mike Mitro (1-1, 3.27) starts tomorrow in Stratford and Adam Echlin (6-1, 2.18) faces Hamilton Sunday at Labatt Park at 1 p.m.

Bechard said the fact everyone is contributing makes this season even more enjoyable.

"It's something different every night, but it all starts on the hill. Our staff gives us a chance to win every night, and on the rare night they're off, we get a new hero hitting. It just seems to be a total team effort."

Bechard, who works at the University of Western Ontario, said the Majors are a whole new ball game from the Werewolves.

"It's certainly different in that when I played for the Werewolves, we were all in the same boat. It was everyone's first kick at pro baseball, nobody knew what to expect and everyone was learning.

"The team we have now is so different demographically, with teenagers and older guys like myself. We older guys have learned a lot, things we can carry through to the younger guys, things like thinking smarter and playing smarter. We don't necessarily need to be as good as we were, we just know how to play the game."

The Brantford native played in the IBL in 1995 and 1996 for his hometown Red Sox and in a big win last Friday over that team he got a good look at the differences in age -- and experience -- in the league.

"I came up in the ninth and there was a 17-year-old kid facing me and he walked me on five pitches. I'm going to guess he was a little more nervous in that situation than I was."

The Majors scored three in the ninth that night for a 6-5 win, a hefty boost to a team already full of confidence.

"That was big for us in that (dressing) room," he said. "We know now we can come back, that if we hit a bump in the road we can find a way to recover."

Majors manager Roop Chanderdatt can't say enough about his first baseman.

"He's taken over the leadership role and really stepped to the forefront. The guys really respect him."

He's taken over the leadership role and really stepped to the forefront. The guys really respect him.

Majors manager Roop Chanderdatt on first baseman Jess Bechard



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