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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Majors IBL victory in reach

Fri, July 18, 2008

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By **MORRIS DALLA COSTA**, FREE PRESS SPORTS COLUMNIST

Baseball is a game of numbers, but the math doesn't get simpler for the London Majors.

Win two games and they claim the Intercounty Baseball League pennant.

The Majors sit atop the IBL standings. The only team that can catch them is the Guelph Royals, but only if the Majors don't win their remaining games.

The Royals and Majors meet in the last game of the season Sunday at Labatt Park but it won't mean anything if the Majors beat the Brantford Red Sox tonight, also at Labatt Park.

If the Royals and Majors tie, there will be a playoff game Wednesday. If it comes to that, the Royals and Majors will have split their season series, so the location will be determined by run differential.

"I'm not even thinking of that right now," Majors manager Roon Chanderdat said.

It's a nice position to be in considering the uncertainty surrounding the beginning of the season.

Chanderdat's extreme makeover is a thing of beauty. While success in the playoffs is the ultimate

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measure, Chanderdat has put the Majors' in position to win a championship. How far the team goes from here is up to the players.

Chanderdat took a risk with some players -- older players, younger players, guys who hadn't played a lot of ball in the last few years -- and it paid off. He tossed it all in the mix and it came out smooth and silky.

"A lot of things came together," Chanderdat said. "As I said before, we have great chemistry. Everyone knew their role and they bought in. Even the guys on the bench.

"We play small ball but we seem to hit when we need to hit."

Winning breeds winning. There's always someone who steps up and delivers the big hit or the big play.

"A guy gets a big hit and the next guy wants to get a big hit," Chanderdat said. "(Adam) Echlin gets a win and (Josh) Palmer wants to go out and get a win. Then the next guy in the rotations says, 'I'm no slouch.' And he wants to go out and get a win.

"Guys have also taken time to work out on their own. One guy goes out and hits and the other guy says, 'I'd better go out and hit.'"

Echlin is one of those experienced pitchers, the guy whose been through just about everything.

The Majors have been lucky with young players as well. Then again, you make your own luck by being able to identify the good ones.

The Majors needed a shortstop this year so when the head scout for Major League Baseball in Canada dropped the name David Narodowski in Chanderdat's ear, the Majors' manager decided to give the 19-year-old a shot.

"Beside the talent he has as a baseball player, he's just a tremendous kid," Chanderdat said. "He's great character-wise and so respectful."

Narodowski has put together a solid season. He played two years in a junior college in Texas and after the summer is headed to University of Kansas on a full-scholarship.

He was the most valuable player in the IBL all-star game. Narodowski is hitting .310 and tops shortstops in fielding percentage at .940.

Narodowski was also a member of Canada's national junior team and comes from good athletic stock. His father was a top-notch bicycle racer in his native Poland. His sister was a scholarship softball player at Virginia Tech and a Canadian national team player.

Narodowski's parents have spent a lot of time in London watching David play, coming from their home in British Columbia.

"This has been the best team I've ever played on," Narodowski said. "I never thought it would be as good as it actually is."

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Narodowski says it's been a big learning experience.

"We have a good mix with young guys and older guys," he said. "I learn something every day. The guys who have played a lot longer, I think they kind of take care of me."

Chanderdat calls Narodowski a true shortstop. He can field and hit and it's his fielding that's really come along.

"It's really developed because in junior college, you don't get the chance to field as many ground balls as you do here," he said. "Every day you take a lot of ground balls and it helps you develop."

Narodowski is looking forward to the playoffs.

"I've never played in a best-of-seven series," he said.

He had a big hand, and glove, in putting them there.

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