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## SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

### Journeying north pays off for Ruiz

Sat, July 19, 2008  
**Puerto Rican fits in nicely with the Majors**

By RYAN PYETTE

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There's a dozen guys worthy of being the London Majors MVP this summer.

But move last night's starter Josh Palmer to the front of the line.

He didn't just dominate on the mound this season. He also helped deliver the team's best hitter -- centre-fielder and schoolmate Christian Ruiz.

Last year, Palmer went back to Oklahoma Baptist University with instructions from London manager Roop Chanderdatt to keep his eyes on a couple of Bisons mates. The hurler's recruiting pitch was as convincing as his mound work -- at least to Ruiz.

"Palmer kept telling me you have to come to London, you have to come to London," the 22-year-old Puerto Rican said through interpreter and teammate Rudy Vallejos.

"He told me that London had a good team and this might be the year they win it all so I had to come and play here and be a part of it."

All Ruiz has done since he arrived is tear up Intercountry Baseball League pitching. He entered last night's 2-1 win over Brantford at Labatt Park sitting third in batting with a .374 average. He has five homers and 18 RBIs.

Was Palmer right? Was it worth the trip?

"Definitely," Ruiz said with a big grin. "This is the highest league I've played in and I'm hoping we go on to win the championship."

Vallejos was the IBL rookie of the year in 2006. He wouldn't be surprised if Ruiz followed in his cleat marks.

"He shouldn't be here," Vallejos said as way of a compliment that he believes Ruiz should be in organizational ball.

"I think someone will pick him up this winter. If he keeps putting up good numbers in the playoffs, someone will notice and sign him."

Ruiz wants a pro opportunity.

The lanky swinger with surprising power hails from Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and said his favourite baseball player is Roberto Clemente, who died in a plane crash long before Ruiz was born.

"But Clemente's legacy and his stories would've been passed down to him over the years by his elders," Vallejos said. "He would've heard a lot about Clemente growing up."



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Ruiz has taken a little bit from Detroit Tigers catcher Ivan Rodriguez in his religious style. After every hit, he makes the sign of the cross and points to the sky.

It takes some faith to move to an unfamiliar country to play baseball. But Chanderdat and co-owner Scott Dart have made it feel just like school for Ruiz -- he's living in a Western dormitory while he's here.

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MAJORS 2, RED SOX 1

- The Majors loaded the bases in the ninth inning on two walks and a bunt single by DH Vince Burke to set the table for second baseman Jeff Helps, who ripped a grounder through a drawn-in infield to drive in the winning run.

- Starter Josh Palmer threw a three-hitter, striking out six, in London's league-leading 12th complete game.

- The Majors (27-8), who clinched at least a tie for first, are 10-1 in July and close out the regular season tomorrow at home against the Guelph Royals at 1 p.m.

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