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## OPINION COLUMNISTS



**One strike against Majors**  
 By **MORRIS DALLA COSTA**, FREE PRESS SPORTS COLUMNIST

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One chance gone, two to go.

The London Majors squandered their first opportunity to win the Intercounty Baseball League pennant yesterday, losing to the Guelph Royals 11-5 at Labatt Park.

The Royals drew to within a half-game of the Majors, who played their last regular season game but still have two chances to enter the IBL playoffs as the top team.

The Royals play tomorrow at home against Oshawa. A Guelph loss gives London top spot. A Guelph win will mean the Royals and Majors will play a first-place tiebreaker game Wednesday at Labatt Park to determine the regular season championship.

That said, the Majors would have preferred to take all the guesswork out of the equation by winning in front of a good crowd yesterday.

"It's disappointing but before the season started, if you had said we'd be in this position, you would have been happy to take it," Majors manager Roop Chanderdar said.

The Majors had ace Adam Echlin pitching. He was 7-1 going into the game with a league-leading 2.37 ERA. He's only walked three batters all year.

But it wasn't his day.

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The Royals are the best hitting team in the league and they showed it yesterday, knocking around one of the best pitchers in the entire league.

It was a nightmarish third inning for the Majors.

They went into it leading 1-0, but Guelph's Mark Allen led off by hammering an Echlin offering to deep centre field. The ball hit well up the light standard for the No. 9 hitter's sixth home run of the season.

By the time the third out was recorded, Echlin had given up seven runs and seven hits, including another home run, a three-run bomb by Sean Reilly.

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"My stuff was OK," Echlin said. "They were just hitting it."

Indeed they were.

Erik Kelly went six innings for the win, allowing four runs on seven hits for the Royals.

It was a game the Majors worked like crazy to get in. It didn't look as if there was any way it could be held with the heavy weekend rain. But the Labatt Park ground crew did an exceptional job getting the field ready, though the game was a half-hour late starting.

"The delay didn't help," Echlin said. "I got here three -hours before the game and I never get here that early. Then you have to wait. But they are a good hitting team."

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At game's end, Chanderdat was in the clubhouse for a while with Royals player-manager Kevin Hinton.

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"He came to congratulate us on winning the pennant," Chanderdat said. "He read the rule one way and I read it the other."

When teams are tied for first place at the end of the season, run-differential comes into play. London holds a plus-two advantage and Hinton believed that gave the Majors the pennant. Instead, the run differential gives the Majors home field for a tiebreaker.

If there is a game on Wednesday in London, Chanderdat doesn't plan to make any changes to the rotation that would allow undefeated Josh Palmer to pitch. He'll go with Pierre Deschamps.

"We have some guys who are hurt. Second baseman Jeff Helps hurt a groin. We'll try and get guys healthy," Chanderdat said.



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Despite the loss, the Majors were upbeat. Winning a pennant would be nice, but their goal is to win a championship.

Catcher Mason Reilly is one of those guys who illustrates what this Majors' team is all about. He's scrappy, tough and loves to play. Since the injury to catcher Will Richards early in the season, Reilly has stepped in and been exceptional, especially defensively.

You don't need a program to recognize him. He's the one with the

General Contest Rules

uniform that would challenge any detergent to get it clean.

Reilly is confident his team will bounce back. "We're streaky," he said. "We lose one, we'll win eight, nine, 10 in a row. It was a tough day for everyone, not just Adam. We're a good team."

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