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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Echlin pitches a gem in Majors win
 Wed, July 2, 2008
Majors earn split of doubleheader with Dodgers
 By **STEVE GREEN**

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He's probably one of the older Intercounty Baseball League rookies ever, but Adam Echlin sure isn't pitching like one.

The 33-year-old came within an out of his second straight complete-game shutout as the London Majors beat the Oshawa Dodgers 4-1 in the opener of their Canada Day doubleheader yesterday at Labatt Park. The Dodgers snapped the Majors' seven-game win streak with a 3-2 victory in the nightcap.

"We've got a lot of young players who are still developing and you've got old guys like me trying to teach them," said Echlin (5-1), who won the NABF World Series with Detroit Jet Box last year. He joined the Majors after getting a job at the Ford St. Thomas assembly plant when his job in Windsor disappeared.

"I just wish I'd come here when I was 18," he said. "It's a great opportunity and it's almost like playing pro ball here."

Last year, the Majors finished 15-21 and were swept in the first round of the playoffs by the Brantford Red Sox. Now 18-8 this season, they're challenging for first place and have already cemented a postseason berth.

"We definitely have a better group," said third baseman Kyle Piwowarczyk, who went 3-for-3 with an RBI and a run scored in the opener. "Everyone gets along -- the best on any team I've played on. Plus we've added a couple of older guys in Adam and Jess (first baseman Bechard, who homered in the nightcap). Their leadership is big-time."



A MAN WITH BIG DREAMS...

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In the opener, centre-fielder Christian Ruiz led the Majors with a pair of RBIs. Piwowarczyk, who's heading to Germany to play pro hockey in August, also made a nice game-ending play on a slow roller with the bases loaded.

London starter Geoff Mann's inability to find the plate hurt the Majors in the nightcap. Mann (1-2) walked six batters in two-plus innings and two ended up scoring. Steve Lewis's solo shot off reliever Medhi Djebbar capped the three-run third and proved to be the difference.

It could have been worse for the Majors, but stellar catches by outfielders Rudy Vallejos and Ruiz ended the first two innings and catcher Mason Reilly threw out two base stealers (plus one in the opener).

"Our team is pitching and defence," said manager Roop Chanderdat, who lauded Echlin's effort. "Adam's a pro. He's in every game and he gives you a chance to win every time."

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Earlier, Chanderdat said there wasn't much difference between this year's team and last year's.

"Two things really hurt us last year. We lost Chris Dennis in the draft -- he really solidified the middle of our lineup with his five home runs. And we had all those suspensions after the brawl with Barrie. We were peaking just before that."

Still, there is at least one significant change.

"We've got solid pitching and depth in pitching, a lot more than last year," Chanderdat said.

The schedule favours the Majors as they have seven of their remaining 10 games at Labatt Park.

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