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## SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

### Majors bats tee off on T-Birds

Tue, July 29, 2008

#### INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL: London squares its quarter-final with Hamilton

By RYAN PYETTE, FREE PRESS SPORTS REPORTER

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HAMILTON -- Jess Bechard helped the London Majors find their hitting shoes.

Teetering at times on the edge, starting pitcher Pierre Miville-Deschenes kept landing on his feet.

All in all, pennant-winning London's sharp balancing act ensured eighth-place Hamilton wouldn't trip them up again, escaping the Steel City with a 10-3 victory over the Thunderbirds before 250 last night at Bernie Arbour Stadium.

Bechard, London's veteran first baseman, moved into the cleanup spot in the order and reached base in his first five at-bats -- including a towering two-run home run to right in the fourth inning -- to chase Hamilton starting lefty Kevin Whyte and bust open the second game of their Intercounty Baseball League quarter-final.

The series is tied 1-1 and returns to London tonight at 7:30 p.m. at Labatt Park.

Miville-Deschenes, suffering from intermittent control woes, loaded the bases three times in his five innings of work by walking eight and hitting another batter. But he only surrendered two runs on four hits and managed to



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strand 11 runners.

London's offence bounced back from a sub-par outing in Sunday's opener. The Majors held a spirited closed-door meeting and manager Roop Chanderdat shuffled his lineup. Both worked.

The Majors pounded three two-out hits in the first inning to open the scoring and then piled on three each in the third and fourth, touching up Whyte for six runs (five earned) on nine hits in just 3 1/3 innings. It was the kind of display expected from a team that hit a collective .300 in the regular season.

"It wasn't just Roop -- a couple of the veterans had some things they wanted to say (in the meeting)," Bechard said. "You don't want to feel anything's different in the playoffs but everything is magnified, like it or not.

"You can't give away at-bats. Their (Game 1) pitcher treated each at-bat as a personal battle. We have to take that same approach."

Hamilton is very wary of battling Bechard. He walked twice in the first game and was given three free passes last night -- two intentionally -- but he still found a way to beat them.

"For some of us, this is our only chance to win," Bechard said. "Some guys are going back to school to play but the rest of us get up in the morning and go to work every day (Bechard in the communications department at Western) and you can't win at work. Labatt Park is all we've got."

The Majors also have their confidence at the plate back. They had smarter at-bats and kept the base paths full.

"That Hamilton team played us five times (in the regular season) and played us tough," Bechard added. "They know how they have to pitch to (centre fielder) Christian Ruiz. They know how to pitch to (shortstop) Dave Narodowski. But we all have to go up there with a plan.

"If I go 0-for-four but I move the runner from second to third with nobody out every time and someone else drives him in, then I feel like that run is just as much mine."

The Majors got an instant boost from the return of second baseman Jeff Helps. The Petrolia native, who is injured and a game-time decision every day right now, provided a two-run single in the third to put London ahead.

"Everyone knows what we're playing for," Bechard said. "We have enough guys who have been through series like this.



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"Kyle Piwowarczyk has been through it in baseball and hockey. He knows what it's like to sit in a dressing room and realize a team has beaten you four times (in a series) and you're done. It's not a good feeling."

London opened the scoring in the top of the first with three straight two-out hits highlighted by Mason Reilly's RBI single.

In Hamilton's half, Deschenes pitched around two walks and left the bases loaded. But the T-Birds tied it in the second when No. 9 hitter Matt Bekar's groundout to second cashed in a run from third.

Hamilton catcher Henry Duke, who took a foul off the wrist in the first inning of the series opener on Sunday, wasn't in the starting lineup.

Majors 10, Thunderbirds 3

(Best-of-seven Intercounty Baseball League quarter-final tied 1-1.)

Game 3: Tonight, 7:30 p.m. at Labatt Park

Game 4: Tomorrow, 7:30 p.m. at Hamilton##

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STOKE, England - Stoke is hoping to sign former Aston Villa and Sunderland goalkeeper Thomas Sorensen on a free transfer.  
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