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SPORTS OTHER SPORTS

Majors offence goes cold again

Wed, July 30, 2008

London has lost both home playoff games against Hamilton

By RYAN PYETTE, FREE PRESS SPORTS REPORTER

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So when did home cooking become bat poison?

The London Majors, who won 15 of their 18 home games in their pennant-winning 2008 Intercounty Baseball League season, are 0-for-2 at Labatt Park so far in the playoffs.

The front-running Majors, who finished 17 games ahead of eighth-place Hamilton in the regular season, suffered a second straight low-scoring loss on their own diamond, falling 3-2 before about 700 last night.

On Sunday, the London bats were spooked by 28-year-old Coogie Freedman. This time, it was fine-throwing 19-year-old lefty Jesse Reinstein, who pitches for the University of Buffalo Bulls.

"I don't know what it is -- the bats were cold," London catcher Mason Reilly said. "We have a great offence (second-best in the IBL this year with a .300 team average). It doesn't really matter if it's a righty or lefty on the mound. We just have to get it going."

London trails the best-of-seven quarter-final series 2-1 and takes the bus



London Majors second baseman Jeff Helps tags out Matt Bekar of the Hamilton Thunderbirds during the Intercounty Baseball League quarter-final series last night at Labatt Park. (Morris Lamont, Sun Media)

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back to the Steel City -- where they won 10-3 on Monday -- for Game 4 tonight.

In two games in their own yard, the Majors have mustered just nine hits. When they hammered 13 hits in their lone victory, they jumped all over lefty starter Kevin Whyte in the first four innings.

"We have to get the bats going early," London manager Roop Chanderdat said. "We can't wait for it to happen."

London has already wasted two solid starts in this series from its pitching staff. Josh Palmer, who won't pitch again until Game 5 on Friday, was the hard-luck loser in the opener and tall righty Ryan McGorman knows how he feels after allowing just three runs on six hits in defeat.

With workhorse Adam Echlin still on the shelf, Chanderdat will turn to Mike Mitro tonight to try to even the series.

"We have the pitching depth on this team," Reilly said. "We're not worried. We just have to do our thing and score a few more runs."

McGorman cruised through his first five innings, giving up just a pair of singles. But working with a 2-0 lead, he allowed the first two batters to reach in the sixth and following a sacrifice bunt, Hamilton cleanup man Geoff Allen hit a high hopper through a drawn-in infield to score two runs.

Had shortstop David Narodowski been playing at normal depth, he likely would've been able to throw out the veteran Allen at first to surrender a single run -- and the Majors would've escaped with the lead after Tim Hebner struck out.

"Allen had only hit the ball hard once in the series," Chanderdat said. "He hit a hopper and it got through. That happens."

Allen came in to score from second on Richard Rausch's infield single. London second baseman Jeff Helps, showing little effects of a leg injury, made a diving stop back of the bag and fired home.

The throw beat Allen and Reilly mishandled the ball and his Hamilton counterpart ran him over for the winning run. Some of the Majors thought the Thunderbird hit their catcher late.

"I'm all right," Reilly said. "The ball slid a little bit and I saw him coming hard."

Hamilton manager Jason Booth threw his second straight southpaw at



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London's predominantly left-handed batting order -- Chanderdat's same starting nine that posted 10 runs the night before.

After two quiet innings, London quickly loaded the bases in the third on two singles and a perfectly executed bunt by Rudy Vallejos that handcuffed Hamilton. Lead-off man Christian Ruiz socked a sacrifice fly to centre field and Toshi Sasa, who wisely took third on the deep out, scored on a Kyle Piwowarczyk grounder that ate up Thunderbirds shortstop Scott Wells.

INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL

(Hamilton leads best-of-seven league quarter-final 2-1)

Hamilton 3, London 2

Game 4: Tonight, 7:30 p.m. at Hamilton's Bernie Arbour Stadium

Game 5: Friday, 7:30 p.m. at Labatt Park

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