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Majors have keys to success
INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL
 By **MORRIS DALLA COSTA, FREE PRESS SPORTS COLUMNIST**

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It's one of the oldest bromides in the baseball lexicon: pitching and defence win championships.

"That's been why we've been successful so far this year," London Majors manager Roop Chanderdar said. "We play solid defence and our pitching, every time we send out Adam Echlin and Josh Palmer we feel we have a chance to win."

The Majors had a tough season last year. When Chanderdar started recruiting this offseason, he knew what he was looking for. Pitching and defence were uppermost in his mind but he also wanted players who wanted to play and wanted to be in London.

He's managed to find all of that.

The Majors are a half-game behind Guelph in the race for first place in the Intercounty Baseball League. They are 21-8 going into one of their biggest weeks of the season. Beginning tonight when they travel to Stratford, the Majors will play five games this week, including home games Friday against Guelph and Sunday afternoon against Hamilton.

London is among the leading teams in pitching and defence. Echlin is

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4-1 with a 2.06 ERA, while Palmer is 5-0 with a 2.84 ERA and four complete games.

"But right now it's more than just Echlin and Palmer," Chanderdat said. "Pierre Miville-Deschenes and Ryan McGorman have given us real depth. I started them against teams I thought we could really compete with because I didn't know what we had. Now they've had starts against the top teams in the league like Brantford and they've pitched well. We've got good depth and you're going to need that."

Good pitching doesn't do much good if you can't catch the ball. Chanderdat said his club's defence up the middle is as good as any Majors' team he can remember.

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He said shortstop Dave Narodowski and second baseman Jeff Helps are the best in the league. Centre fielder Christian Ruiz can go get the ball.

But perhaps the key who's tied it together is catcher Mason Reilly, who stepped in when starter Will Richards hurt his hand early. Chanderdat thought it would be a devastating blow. "What Reilly has done . . . he's pretty much stopped the other team's running game and he's starting to hit," Chanderdat said.

Not only is the middle of the infield doing the job with the glove, those players are putting up some big numbers.

Ruiz is second in the league in hitting at .443. Narodowski is hitting .330. Sandwich Jess Bechard in the mix with a .382 average and 25 RBIs and that's a potent top of the order.

Chanderdat believes both Narodowski and Ruiz, with the exposure they're getting, will find their way into the minor leagues.

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"I said it before, I can't believe Ruiz has fallen through the cracks but we've had scouts up looking," he said. "Narodowski is heading to the University of Kansas. After playing in Division I, everyone will see he can play."

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Chanderdat was also determined to put a team on the field that got along in the clubhouse and played for each other on the field.

That's what he got.

"The chemistry on this team has been unbelievable," he said. "I've had people who have played on this team for years who have told me that this is the best team we've ever had as far as chemistry."



There is still a long way to go before the final accounting is done. The next few weeks will see Chanderdat try and get his team healthy and get his players enough games to qualify for the playoffs.

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"You never know what's going to happen but right now I'm happy, really happy," said Chanderdat. "It's nice when you see all the hard work begin to pay off."

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