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The London Free Press

IN WEDNESDAY'S PAPER

Ian Gilles! Our City columnist profiles an octogenarian artist who calls herself 'Grandma Moses on meds'



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OPINION COLUMNISTS



Home opening victory caps an already special day

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INTERCOUNTY BASEBALL
By **MORRIS DALLA COSTA, FREE PRESS SPORTS COLUMNIST**

It was a good day for the London Majors.

And it was more than their 12-0 Intercounty Baseball league home opener win over the Hamilton Thunderbirds.

The score made them feel good and just about everything else that took place yesterday made the home opener special.

Ace Josh Palmer, who had a little more than two months off of shoulder surgery, threw for five innings and didn't feel pain.

Third baseman Kyle Piowarczyk, who returned from playing professional hockey in Germany, had a four-hit afternoon. Combined with Jess Bechard, the Majors No. 4 man in the order who had three hits, it's a good start to the season for guys who must produce.

In the two-game weekend, Bechard produced seven hits.

"I moved Kyle to the No. 3 spot because he's stronger this year," Majors manager Roop Chanderdat said. "He's hitting the ball harder and so far it's paid off."

Piowarczyk is a Majors' veteran. The former Mustang and Knights hockey player made some money playing professionally in Germany and will likely be heading back.

There was never any question he'd play baseball this year.

"As soon as hockey season is winding up, I'm looking forward to ball and as soon as ball season is winding down, I'm looking forward to hockey season," Piowarczyk said. "I was talking to Roop most of the winter through e-mail, guys he was signing. I was committed all winter."

Piowarczyk signed a one-year contract and has had discussions with teams interested in his services for next year.

Piowarczyk has had a good start to the season even though he hasn't had as much of a chance to work



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out at baseball as much as he normally would.

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"I was worried about a slow start a little bit," he said. "I put in a little more work than some of the other guys who have been throwing all winter but I don't mind. Our coaches are good. There is always someone to hit you ground balls or throw (batting practice.) I'm lucky."

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While he intends to go back, one of his wishes is that he gets to stay as late as possible with his team. He had to leave before last year's championship series against Brantford that went seven games.

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"There is nothing worse, nothing worse than being helpless," Piwowarczyk said. "Nothing worse than watching your team in a Game 7 and you can't do nothing but wake up in the morning and check your computer."

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Last year, when Piwowarczyk and David Narodowski left early, it gave second baseman Vince Burke a chance to play. He was outstanding in the playoffs and has picked up where he left off.

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On Sunday, he got on base five times with a walk and four hits and looked at home at second.

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"We tell Vince he's a big part of our team no matter whether he's starting or not," Chanderdat said.

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The big news on the day, though, was Palmer.

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Palmer was 8-0 last season but underwent rotator cuff surgery at university.

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"There were no tears, no nothing. It was just decompression surgery," Palmer said. "Two months out of surgery I was just trying to get a feel and trying to get my command out there.

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Palmer got stronger as the game progressed. He went five innings. Palmer allowed the lead off man to get on base the first four innings but he battled through whatever problems he had and began to hit his spots.

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"Throwing bullpens and throwing in a game are two different things. My mechanics are still off but it was more the feeling of throwing strikes and hitting my spots. That was more important than throwing hard."

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Palmer said he didn't really air the ball out but over five innings, he only gave up two hits, walked four and had seven strikeouts.

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Other than one of the Thunderbird hits, no balls reached the outfield off Palmer.

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Palmer was on a pitch count. He was only supposed to throw 75 but he wound up throwing 84.

Play

"There's no pain, it's just trying to build my muscle strength up," Palmer said. "It's just the fear of throwing hard but the good thing is there is no pain."

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Proprietor and Publisher - The London Free Press,
P.O. Box 2280, 369 York Street, London Ontario Canada N6A 4G1