

Major expectations as London takes the field

Majors hope to forget last season's disappointing first round playoff defeat with a long post-season run this year

By SEAN MEYER, The Londoner

With action in the Intercounty Baseball League season kicking off play in London this Sunday, May 7 - when the Majors host the Guelph Royals - the team was busy last week getting in shape. With the city skyline as a backdrop, team veterans Kevin Virtue and Simon Galarraga toss some warm-up throws in Labatt Park.

Roop Chanderdatt, the team's co-owner with Scott Dart, will serve not only as the Majors' general manager, but will also be putting his 12-year playing career behind him to take over as field manager. (below)



SEAN MEYER PHOTOS

Roop Chanderdatt is a busy man these days.

The co-owner, general manager and field manager of the London Majors recently added a new job to his busy schedule - furniture mover.

Roop recently helped move Simon Galarraga - the Majors' first baseman and director of Latin American scouting - along with his two daughters and wife into their London home.

This season marks the first time Simon, who is entering his fifth year with the Majors, has brought his family to the Forest City for the Intercounty Baseball League (IBL) season.

Simon, who was born in Venezuela and still lives there in the off-season, thanked his manager for his furniture-moving services and says that shows the kind of man Roop is. "Roop is such a hard worker. He is really amazing, how helpful he is. It's things like that that make you want to do your best for him. But, he might want to stick to baseball."

While Roop's furniture moving career may be a brief one, he has plenty of other jobs to keep him busy as the team prepares for the 2006 season opener this Sunday, May 7, at Labatt Park against Guelph Royals. This season marks the team's third year under the ownership of Scott Dart who officially brought Roop into the ownership structure last year.

"This season has seen our biggest changes so far, the changes we made to the organization. We wanted to assemble a good organization here and to do that, Scott and I believe you have to start at the top," Roop says. "I was already recruiting players as GM. So when we couldn't find just the right person for manager, I thought, why not follow right through. It seemed a natural, at least for this season."

Having played for 12 seasons in the IBL, Roop is excited about his



first opportunity at managing a team - especially one that he has helped build.

"My competitive juices are still flowing that's for sure. In my head, I thought I was over it (not playing anymore). But I was with Simon for our Venezuelan camp in February . . . and I took some batting practice. At that moment I thought, 'sheesh, I'm gonna miss this'," Roop says. "I see myself being a tough manager, a tough player's manager. Someone who stands by his players. Hard work, dedication and respect, that's our motto. That pretty much says what my managerial style will be."

Having the team's co-owner and general manager sitting in the dugout may seem strange to some, but not Kevin Virtue.

The long-time Majors' player has both played against and with Roop during his career and expects the new field manager will do just fine.

"I know Roop's a hard-working guy; I expect he will do well in this position too. My friendship with Roop goes back to when I started at 17," Kevin says. "He knows what we are capable of. He knows what the fans expect. I think everyone (in the locker room) is feeling comfortable with how things are."

As to what kind of baseball fans will see at Labatt Park this year - and how successful a season it will be - Roop says he expects a winning product both on and off the field.

"I wanna run. We are going to have a good running game and play strong defence. Sort of a National League-style of play. We don't have that big bopper where we are hitting them out. We'll use aggressive running, defence, the fans are going to see a competitive season," Roop says. "I'm not going to predict win totals, but I've always felt if you get into the playoffs anything can happen."

Both Kevin and Simon agree this year's team is capable of going deep into playoffs.

For Kevin, entering his seventh season with the Majors, his feeling is that both the team - as well as himself - have big seasons ahead of them.

"We're all excited. We've got a good group of guys who I think are committed to playing hard all season. Last season we ran into a hot Barrie team and that was frustrating after how well we did in the playoffs the year before," Kevin says. "I have high expectations. I try to stay in shape, but I know we have some good young talent here and nothing is guaranteed, even my spot. But I think we are all going to have a really good year."

Simon, who besides being a fan-favourite at Labatt Park now has the responsibility of scouting young Latin American talent for the team, says nothing could be better for a ball player than playing to an excited crowd in a beautiful ball park.

"London is the most beautiful, gorgeous place I have played. I love the quality of life here, that is why it was wonderful to be able to bring my family here for the first time," Simon says. "It feels great to be able to introduce young talent to this beautiful city, to appreciate the opportunity. I love this park; I have since '99 when I came to London with the Werewolves. I think we have a real chemistry in this park and where we were playing for .500 last year, from now on I think you will see us playing for first on a regular basis."

While the fans and the entire Majors' organization will certainly be expecting a playoff spot, Roop says the team's accountant will really be pulling for them.

"From the business side, we need to get to the second round of the playoffs," Roop says. "Scott and I are doing everything - we've cut payroll, we've done well sponsorship-wise. As of today, I feel good about where we are. We've overcome a lot of obstacles. Going forward, looking at just this season, things look good. But making the second round will be important."

There's no question Roop's busy schedule includes not only his responsibilities with the Majors, but that's

hardly all that's on his plate.

One might expect, with so much going on in his life, that Roop would be reaching his breaking point.

However, it seems quite the opposite is true.

"My life is time management at its fullest. I've had some tough days, but time management has always been one of my strengths. Family, business, the Majors, the Lancers. I'm very much hands-on and right now, we had to look at who was best for the job," Roop says. "On-field is easy, I love that. The recruitment of players, I enjoy that, too. I'm having fun, I enjoy a challenge and this certainly is. I'm not saying I'm going to do this forever. We will put a structure in place and then maybe someone comes in to take on some things. But right now, I'm having fun with it."

MAJORS HOME SCHEDULE

All games at Labatt Park

- Sunday, May 7 vs. Guelph, 1 p.m.
- Sunday, May 14 vs. Brantford, 1 p.m.
- Friday, May 19 vs. Hamilton, 7:30 p.m.
- Monday, May 22 vs. Oshawa, 1 p.m.
- Sunday, June 4 vs. Stratford, 1 p.m.
- Friday, June 9 vs. Kitchener, 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, June 11 vs. Guelph, 1 p.m.
- Sunday, June 18 vs. Barrie, 1 p.m.
- Friday, June 23 vs. Stratford, 7:30 p.m.
- Friday, June 30 vs. Hamilton, 7:30 p.m.
- Saturday, July 1 vs. Toronto, 4 p.m.
- Friday, July 7 vs. Kitchener 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, July 9 vs. Brantford, 1 p.m.
- Friday, July 14 vs. Hamilton, 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, July 23 vs. Brantford, 1 p.m.