

Aurora Jays shake off the rust in season opener



By Jeff Doner

The Aurora Jays senior men's baseball team finally kicked off their 2014 North Dufferin Baseball League (NDBL) season last week and are poised to make another strong run at a title.

With the core of the team back and some new reinforcements brought in to improve the club, the Jays are optimistic for what the season will bring.

The Jays started out their regular season at home last Tuesday with a matchup against the reigning NDBL champion Bolton Brewers.

It didn't go quite the way they wanted (a 9 ? 4 loss), but the Jays knew they would be in tough against the Brewers, especially early in the season.

?With such limited access to the field with the wet spring, we really couldn't have asked for much more from the guys,? said player/coach Rob Wilson. ?Mentally we've all been very strong and really we've put together very good start to the season despite the physical restrictions.?

In the Bolton game, both teams scored early to build a 5 ? 4 score in favour of Bolton after just the third inning.

That would be all the offence the Jays would muster, but the Brewers used a three-run sixth and added another in the seventh to serve the Jays a 9 ? 4 loss.

Two nights later, the Jays redeemed the loss to Bolton with a road win against the Midland Indians.

Andrew Bukovec, who seldom pitches for the Jays, threw a gem to give his team a shot at the win.

The team also got some clutch hitting from Ryan Lewis, who returned from injury to belt a three-run home run to break a 2 ? 2 tie.

Kyle Handley and Jake Pinnegar, both former Jays who returned this season after leaving the team for a while, also helped create offence in a big five-run fifth inning to deliver a 7 ? 5 win.

Postgame, Wilson said he was happy with the way his team was able to rebound against Midland.

?When you keep your expectations in check, it makes it a little bit easier to kind of look beyond those individual errors when you're trying to shake that rust,? he said. ?We've given up nine runs to Bolton and four to Midland, so that kind of reflects some of that lack of preparation time, but on the other side of that, we've been hitting the ball very well and have put up a solid number of runs.?

Wilson added that things should start to tighten up as the season wears on.

In the meantime, the team is also feeling good about the production from its new players.

Handley and Pinnegar are strong positional players that can add some pop to the offence, as are Brad Crosby, Dan Lehmkuhl and Fab Dolan.

Lehmkuhl will add depth to the infield and the pitching staff while Dolan will shore up the catching position.

This year the Jays will again play home games on most Tuesday nights at Lambert Willson Park in Aurora and will try to start an early-season winning streak when they host the Bolton Dodgers this week, and then the Barrie Angels on Thursday night, again at 7:30 p.m.

For more information on the Jays, including the schedule, stats and updates, visit www.ndbl.ca