

## Port Dover Clippers Junior A Provincial Champions 2016

A provincial pennant will hang high above Misner Park courtesy of the Port Dover Clippers.

The Junior squad comprised of players from all corners of Norfolk was in Sarnia/Lambton this past weekend for the Ontario Baseball Provincial 'A' Championships, where they took the long way home.

After winning the opener 6-3 against Wyoming Friday night the Clippers dropped a 9-7 decision to Harrow Saturday morning. With their backs against the wall in the double-elimination format, a Saturday afternoon contest vs. Halton Hills was rained out, leaving a cluster of games scheduled for Sunday.

Port Dover eventually topped Halton 8-4 the next morning. The club then reeled off four straight wins, including two against previously unbeaten New Lowell for all the marbles.

“The fact that we played five games in one day and won all five was huge,” said Clippers manager Garnet Henrich. “It’s a huge accomplishment – I’ve never heard of any team winning five games in one day.”

Baseball fans in Norfolk are well aware of the Clippers' recent exploits. This is the same roster that finished with a 12-13 record in the Junior InterCounty Baseball League (JICBL) and has won seven in a row. They now sit with a 1-0 lead in the best-of-three final against Brantford with Game 2 to be played Tuesday night.

Knowing more big games loomed this week, Port Dover threw caution to the wind and went for the kill.

“It was tough because obviously in the back of my mind I was thinking about the (InterCounty) playoffs,” Henrich admitted in an interview Monday morning. “At this point right now some of our pitching is spent, but I could see it in the boys' eyes they wanted the OBA provincial championship and I wasn't going to take that away from them. I put my best lineups out, I made sure the guys that were available to pitch were on the mound. As a head coach, I did everything possible to allow these boys to win.”

Andy Wilson threw twice on Sunday, his brother Sam, Rhett Roney and Zach Heipel also took to the hill.

Heipel – used primarily out of the bullpen this season – was outstanding in the final contest (a 2-0 win) tossing nine innings of shutout ball.

“It was a big outing for him because we had no (more) pitching at that point. He really pulled through ... it was more than I could've asked from him,” said Henrich, who walked a fine line between going for the win and keeping some arms in reserve.

“I was basically asking everybody how they felt - if anybody was sore to the point where they couldn't pitch, that would be a no-go but anybody who was able to throw for me, I

put them on the mound,” he added. “Obviously, after five games people were sore ... but they sucked it up and they battled through it and accomplished their goal. They were all hungry for the win.”

The victory further added to Port Dover's magical run, one they're intent on finishing in style.

“A lot of them won the OBA championships when they were younger kids but I think this season has proven to them that they're a good ball club,” Henrich explained. “They've all really been working hard trying to get better, meshing as a team. To get to this point of winning a championship, I think it just confirms all the work that they've put into this so far. They believe in themselves now – they were a great team and were able to get to the championship round of the playoffs and know that we deserve that OBA championship. I think everybody is extremely proud of themselves but they want more – they want the JICBL (title).”

Game 2 of the JICBL final series goes at Brantford's Arnold Anderson Stadium at 8p.m. If necessary, the winner-take-all Game 3 is set for Wednesday in Port Dover at 7:30p.m.