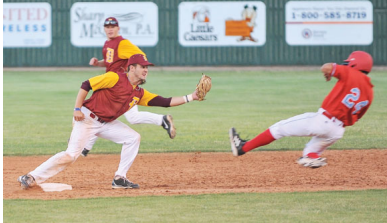


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By EARL WATT

- Leader & Times

A balk by Derby in the 11th inning led to a Bee Jay victory Saturday night at Brent Gould Field, but a slow start Sunday led to a disappointing 15-3 loss to the Twins Sunday, and the Bee Jays narrowly avoided a sweep in the three-game series..

The Bee Jays put together one of the team's biggest comebacks in team history Saturday after falling behind 8-0.

Liberal used a five-run seventh to tie the game 8-8.

The Twins took a 9-8 lead in the top of the 10th, and the Bee jays were down to their last strike before tying the game.

After holding the Twins scoreless in the top of the 11th, the Bee Jay had runners at first and third when the Twins pitcher committed a balk, and the winning run trotted home.

Sunday, the Bee Jays dug a hole early and never found a way to stop the Twins from getting hits, giving up 18 hits in a 15-3 loss.

Derby scored four runs in the first inning and added four more in the third including two walks with the bases loaded.

Frustration set in late, and after a Bee Jay was tossed, Liberal manager Brandon Kitch was ejected as well.

"I was defending one of my players," he said. "All the umpire told him was, 'Get back in the dugout.' That's all I heard. He didn't tell me he was tossed. Even when I sent him back out, the home plate umpire had to say something to me about it. I went out (to the field umpire) and had a few choice words."

The Twins continued to pound out hits, and the Bee Jays, too, had its share of base runners through the night and had 10 hits, but after scoring three in the first inning the Bee Jays could not push another runner across the plate.

"Bottom line, we have to pitch better than we have been," Kitch said. "We haven't got that the last two or three nights. We have to get quality starts, and we are not getting that now. We got 10 hits, and they out-hit us. It's not we aren't competing, we are not getting quality starts on the mound. We have to figure it out."

Kitch is seeing his pitching staff for the first time, but unlike the college game where he would have been able to watch his players for several weeks in practices and scrimmages, the first look at many of these players is when it counts.

"I usually tell my coaching staff 20 games in we will know what kind of team we will have," Kitch said. "We are ok so far. Hays is good, Derby is a good team, they will be in the mix. It will be a dogfight all summer. There won't be one or two teams at the top."

Liberal heads back to Dodge City for the second meeting of the year with the A's. Liberal won the first match-up 5-3.

But another slow start by a pitcher could lead to another loss.

“We have to show up and compete on the mound and get better quality starts,” Kitch said. “We have to pitch better and get timely hits. We have to find out who will compete on the mound and who will give us quality starts. The guys are still trying to get a feel for what to expect. The guys last year know what to expect, we have to figure out who can come in behind them and shut people out.”

The Bee Jays can remove the sting of dropping the series to Derby with a win tonight at Dodge.

“You come back next night and redeem yourself,” Kitch said. “Everything starts on the mound. We have to stop people. You can't take anything away from Derby, but when we get punched in the face, we have to punch back.”

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