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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Liberal manager Brandon Kitch told his players prior to the game in Derby that if the Bee Jays were going to get back in the Jayhawk League race, they would need to sweep the Twins.

They started with a 2-1 win over Derby in an attempt to earn the sweep, and Tyler Wiedenfeld led the way, pitching seven-and-two-thirds innings and only allowing one run.

“It was a good start by Wiedenfeld,” Kitch said. “We came out aggressive at the plate. Defensively we played well, we only had two errors. But they were not costly errors.”

The only Twin to cross home plate scored after he hit a lead-off double and two Twins sacrificed to push him across the plate.

Tyler Buss came in to get the final out of the inning to preserve Liberal's 2-1 lead.

The Bee Jays scored both runs in the fifth when Darian McLemore led off with a walk, and Lewis Guilbeau hit a double off the right center field wall. McLemore scored from first, and Guilbeau later scored when Tanner Rainey laid down a sacrifice bunt.

"We had chances all day," Kitch said. "We should have scored more than two runs."

The Bee Jays had runner at third in the first and third innings but failed to push them across the plate.

While Liberal struggled to get a timely hit, Wiedenfeld was keeping the Twins off the bases as well. The revamped defense showed some improvement since the 13-error series with Wellington last week and only committed two fielding miscues.

Both times, Wiedenfeld was able to overcome the mistakes without giving up a run.

Liberal had runners at second and third in the third inning, but a come-backer to the mound and the inability to get a deep fly ball prevented either from scoring.

That put pressure on Wiedenfeld to keep the Twins off the board until the Bee Jays could manufacture a run.

"He did a good job competing on the mound," Kitch said.

While the Bee Jays only scored two runs, they were putting pressure on the Twins pitching staff by getting runners on base throughout the game.

“We competed at the plate all day,” Kitch said. “We had chances to score in every inning. Their guy was a crafty lefty. Not overpowering — he had about an 84-, 86-mile-per-hour fastball. With our approach, we were getting tricked. He kept us off balance.”

The scoring tallies have slowed over the past two games for the Bee Jays, and Kitch believed that his batters need to make some adjustments to get quality at-bats.

“We have guys guessing at the plate,” he said. “If you guess right, it will might only happen 30 percent of the time. They need to start hitting better counts and be aggressive in 0-0 counts.”

The win was critical for the Bee Jays to stay alive for the second half of the Jayhawk League season. With 17 of the 34 league games complete, the Bee Jays will have to improve on their 7-10 start to qualify for the national tournament.

Liberal is currently 2-2 against Derby, and after the weekend’s games the two will have completed their six-game season series.

After July 1 and 2 games against non-league Owasso, the Bee jays will play 15 consecutive league games in 19 days from July 4 to July 23.

The Bee Jays are only one game away from third place and two from second after the slow first half, and Kitch gave his players a pre-game talk Friday in an effort to help them turn their season around.

“I told the guys you can’t take this for granted,” Kitch said. “You never know when it gets taken away. They get to do something every day that I would trade places with them to do — play baseball. They have to stay motivated and focused for four hours. If we do that and get beat, fine. If we beat ourselves, you are not focused.”

The Bee Jays were looking for their second consecutive league win for only the second time this season Saturday at Derby.

Kitch put Austin King on the mound.

Kitch also continued to shuffle the infield in an attempt to minimize errors.

“We are going go with Tanner Kirk,” Kitch said. “We got another infielder today — a guy from Southern Arkansas, Brady Capshaw — to help us defensively. We are trying to solidify some spots that have been letting us down.”

King is a crafty lefty, according to Kitch, and that ha been a tough description for pitchers throughout the Jayhawk League this season.

“There are a number of crafty lefties in the league this year,” Kitch said.

Kitch was not ready to choose Sunday’s starter yet, but he said the full pitching staff except the starters in the first two games and Chad Nack would be available.

Nack is slated to start the Fourth of July game against the Dodge City A’s.

Everyone else is available except Nack.

For Kitch, the first win of the series was just the beginning of a much-needed string of wins the Bee Jays will need to reach the critical top three of the Jayhawk League.

Only the top three will qualify for the NBC World Series. Currently, Liberal is fifth out of six teams.

“We have to sweep to get back into the thick of things,” Kitch said. “We will go out and compete and get back to the top three.”

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