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By JEREMIAH WILSON

• Leader & Times

The Liberal Bee Jays took the field Friday night to take on the first place Hays Larks and walked away with a 9-5 win.

The game was a back-and-forth battle in which both teams coughed up early leads. In the end, the Bee Jay bats proved to be too much for the Larks pitching staff.

Liberal opened the game by scoring in the home half of the first inning when first baseman Brady Capshaw brought Tanner Kirk home with an RBI single to center field.

Bee Jay starter Tyler Wiedenfeld cruised through the first two innings with little resistance from the Hays hitters. But the Larks broke through in the third by scoring three runs for a 3-1 Hays lead.

“Tyler (Wiedenfeld) didn’t have his best stuff,” Liberal manager Brandon Kitch said. “But he battled and made some big pitches.”

Liberal answered right back in the bottom of the third with a run of their own when Capshaw scored on a Darien McLemore single to make it a 3-2 game.

Trailing 4-2 in the fourth the Bee Jay hitters got hot and took the lead. Outfielder Tanner Rainey scored on a Tanner Kirk double. Rainey stole home to tie the game at 4-4.

Capshaw then brought third baseman John Mestas home with an RBI single that gave Liberal a 5-4 lead.

“(Capshaw) had some big hits for us and got some RBI’s,” Kitch said.

In the seventh Zach Reding provided insurance when he nailed a two-run home run to left center to put the Bee Jays up 7-4.

“Zach (Reding) had a big night,” Kitch said. “That two-run home run was huge for us. It gave us a little bit more momentum.”

The Larks scored a run in the eighth, but Liberal answered right back scoring two more runs on a Mestas double to put Hays away 9-5.

The Bee Jays bullpen came up huge in the game, allowing only one run over the last four innings.

“I told Trevor Lundgrin, ‘The bullpen is going to win this game for us today,’” Kitch said. “I told him, ‘Make sure they stay focused,’ because he is kind of the leader of the pitching staff.”

Liberal had contributions from just about everybody in the lineup. Kirk came up big in the win,

scoring three times, and Rainey scored twice as well.

"Tanner (Rainey) is starting to get it going," Kitch said. "He's been struggling, and it's really good to see a smile on his face. Tanner Kirk is coming up big, and he does a great job for us every night. He has really stepped up and played defense well for us when we needed a shortstop. The guys around him are starting to see that."

With the win the Bee Jays gain a game on the league-leading Larks and played Hays one more time late Saturday night at Brent Gould Field.

"If we compete, and we've just proven it, we beat the No. 1 team in the conference right now, and we can gain some more ground (Saturday)," Kitch said. "If we go out and show up like we did tonight we're going to make a run at this thing."

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