

Bee Jays take 3 of 4, league race tightens

Monday, 08 July 2013 10:01



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- Leader & Times

Saturday night at Brent Gould Field the Liberal Bee Jays knocked off the first place Hays Larks 6-1 to complete a two game sweep at home.

In a game that started off looking like a pitcher's duel, the Bee Jay hitters dominated the Larks pitcher in the final four innings to come away with the impressive win.

Through the first two innings the board remained spotless, with neither team managing to get so much as a hit.

Hays broke through in the third with a run to take a 1-0 lead. That was all the run support their pitchers got on the night.

Despite allowing a good number of base runners to get on, Liberal's pitchers held the Larks without another run.

The Bee Jays knotted the game up at 1-1 in the bottom half of the third inning when Darien

McLemore scored on a Tanner Rainey sacrifice fly to center field.

Liberal took the lead in the fifth inning on a Tanner Kirk single that brought in two runs that put the Bee Jays up 3-1.

Kirk later stole home on a wild pitch that sailed by the Hays catcher to make it 4-1. Kirk finished the night with two RBIs and a run scored.

“He’s got to keep doing what he is doing,” Liberal manager Brandon Kitch said. “He’s playing defense well, hitting the ball well, coming up with timely hits, and he is competing. That is all we ask him to do.”

Outfielder Lewis Guilbeau got a two-RBI single in the eighth inning to make it 6-1.

The persistence of the Bee Jay hitters proved to be too much for the Larks pitchers to handle. Liberal pressured the Hays pitching staff all night by consistently finding a way to get base-runners on.

“We’re having quality at bats,” Kitch said. “Even with two outs we’ve got a chance to score some runs if we can just extend some innings, and that is what we did tonight. Guys are having good approaches at the plate and swinging at quality pitches. We’ve just got to keep competing at the plate.”

Liberal starter Justin Bethard faced just as much pressure as his counterpart early on, but managed to fight his way out of those jams every time.

“He competed his tail off and gave us seven quality innings,” Kitch said. “We need that because our bullpen is stretched a little thin right now. It was a big win for him.”

The two-game sweep of league leading Hays was a great way for the Bee Jays to head into a big six-game road trip.

“This gives us a lot of confidence,” Kitch said. “These guys have finally figured it out. They’re putting pressure on other teams instead of figuring out ways to lose. We’re a quality team, and we’re starting to get better. It’s the right time to get better. We can’t take any games off and we’ve just got to keep competing.”

The Bee Jay road trip started with a bump in Dodge City Sunday.

Austin King gave up seven runs in the first inning and a third, and the Bee Jays fought uphill the rest of the way. The A’s defeated the Bee Jays 12-8 to end Liberal’s three-game league win streak.

The Bee Jays will take today off and head to Wellington Tuesday to open a three-game series with the Heat. The two teams are only separated by one game in the league standings. Liberal will then travel to Hays to complete the season series with the Larks in a two-game set.