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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Taking two out of three in Wellington and earning a split with Hays would have left the Bee Jays 14-14 and clearly in the hunt for an automatic berth to the NBC World Series. 

Instead, Liberal dropped two out of three to Wellington and was swept by Hays over the weekend and are now one Hays win or one Bee Jay loss from being eliminated from the Jayhawk League title chase and need to make up three-and-a-half games against Wellington for a third-place finish with only six games to be played.

The Bee Jays had a golden opportunity for a win Saturday at Hays when Justin Bethard had a strong start, but the Bee Jay offense offered no support.

Hays was able to get a 2-1 win in the 10th inning.

The Bee Jays faltered early Sunday and found themselves playing catch-up the rest of the game in a 6-3 loss.

The 2-4 road trip left the Bee Jays four games under .500 in league play with six games remaining on the schedule.

Liberal will get today off before hosting Dodge City Tuesday and then traveling to Dodge City Wednesday.

The Bee Jays will get Thursday off and then host El Dorado for a three-game weekend set.

After another day off July 22, Liberal will play the final league game July 23 when they host Dodge City.

To earn one of the three automatic bids for the Jayhawk League at the national tournament, the Bee Jays will need to sweep the final six games and get some help against Wellington and El Dorado.

There are only three position guaranteed to the Jayhawk League at the NBC World Series, but there are three at-large bids that could be used. However, the NBC released a statement that indicated those spots were being held for leagues that are currently in negotiation with the NBC.

But if some teams opt not to accept their bid that have guaranteed positions, like the Alaska League, for example, the NBC will have to invite additional teams to make round out the field.

It is highly likely that a team from the Jayhawk League could receive an invitation if that should happen.

The new format of the two-week tournament has a "Championship Week," and a challenger's week poorly named "The First Week."

The top two teams from the first week will advance to Championship Week.

Rough weekend for Bee Jays

Monday, 15 July 2013 09:52

The purpose of the change was to help reduce tournament cross for teams that have to travel and stay in Wichita for two-plus weeks.

The two teams that qualify from the first week receive a \$5,000 bonus intended to help with the additional expenses of staying at the tournament a second week.

There is only one at-large bid in the 16-team First Week and two at-large bids in Championship Week, but it is highly likely that if a team declines a bid, the field will be shuffled, and any at-large bids will be placed in The First Week.

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