By the time the Liberal Bee Jays step on to the turf at Lawrence Dumont Stadium at 4 p.m. Saturday, two teams will have already been eliminated from the tournament.

4th & GOAL

EARL WATT

The action begins at 9 a.m. Friday morning, and teams from eight states will take the field on opening day including the El Dorado Broncos who will play in the featured 7 p.m. game.

The Broncos will face the Jasper, Ind., Reds, but the first game of the tournament will feature the Denver Cougars vs. the Houston Tuzos.

El Dorado, much like the Bee Jays, will play in “Challenger’s Week” in hopes of earning one of the two spots that advance to “Championship Week.”

The NBC doesn’t call the first week “Challenger’s Week.” They call it “The First Week.” I hope they didn’t invest in a consulting firm to come up with that. Challenger’s Week makes more sense.

The Broncos and the Bee Jays have a collective 10 national championships between them, and they finished in third and fourth place in the Jayhawk League this season.

Should the Broncos lose their opener, they could be playing at noon on Saturday in an elimination game before Liberal takes the field at 4 p.m.

To this point, I have yet to make any judgments on the new format. It has its pros and cons.

But I want to see how it plays out and if it has any effect on attendance at the games.

While there is talk about wanting to increase attendance with a national draw, it seems ironic that the teams scheduled in prime time are still Kansas teams.

A fact that I believe is lost on the NBC organizers is how these teams are made up of players from around the nation. I believe they are misguided if they believe a team from San Diego or Houston will draw more fans than Liberal or Hays.

Those cities have other options — the Padres and Astros.

If the NBC truly wants to make the tournament great, they should find the cities where their summer league team is the focus of the community as a whole.

It’s that support that will lead to a strong tournament, fan base, and provide great entertainment in Wichita.