

Bee Jays dominate Red Birds in 7-0 shutout

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By JEREMIAH WILSON

- Leader & Times

Seth Stevens and the Liberal Bee Jays put on a show for the hometown crowd Wednesday night in their final game before they head off to Wichita for the NBC World Series.

Stevens hit for the cycle, and four Bee Jay pitchers combined for a 7-0 shutout victory over the Denver Red Birds.

Liberal scored twice in the opening frame. Stevens brought in John Mestas from first on an RBI triple, and later scored himself on an error.

Lewis Guilbeau continued to light up the stat sheet with an RBI single in the fourth that scored Paul Garcia. Zach Reding also scored in the inning on a fielder's choice for a 4-0 lead. Jason Dahl was credited with the RBI.

Stevens came up big again in the fifth, launching a two-run homer over the right field wall, and the Liberal lead was 6-0. After three at-bats through the first five innings, Stevens lacked only a single for the cycle.

Guilbeau was the final Bee Jay to cross the plate when Darien McLemore smacked a double to right-center field.

Stevens completed the cycle on a bloop single to left in the sixth.

Austin King was the starter for Liberal. King did not allow a hit in four strong innings. Tyler Wiedenfeld, Tyler Buss and Justin Bethard also pitched in for the shutout.

“Our guys played well,” Liberal manager Brandon Kitch said, “and we swung the bats real well. We played pretty well, and competed all day.”

It’s been a chaotic final week of the regular season for the Bee Jays. Heading into Sunday, there was uncertainty surrounding Liberal’s chances of receiving an at-large bid to the NBC World Series. Their fortune changed Monday when an invitation was extended.

“This week has been an emotional roller coaster,” Kitch said. “These guys deserve it. They’ve worked hard and dug themselves out of a hole to get to .500 in the conference. Considering where we started, I thought they did a pretty good job. I can’t be more proud of this group. They’ve got a lot of heart and they get after it. I really appreciate what they did for me and Adam (Anderson) and (Ryon) Butts. I’ve got to give it up to Ryon and Adam too, they did a great job for me this summer. Like I said, it’s been a roller coaster all the way through. But they’ve stayed hooked up, and I can’t ask more of my assistants. I wish Adam luck on next year, and I look to see good things from him.”

Liberal begins tournament play at 4 p.m. Saturday at Lawrence Dumont Stadium in Wichita against the San Diego Force.

“From what I understand the San Diego Force is a really good club,” Kitch said. “We’ve got to let those guys know that we’re here to win it. We’ve got enough guys that were on the team last year that can tell these guys what to expect. If we play good quality baseball, get good quality starts, good quality at bats and field the baseball we’re going to be fine. If we can do all those things and put it all together, we’re a tough team to beat.”

The Bee Jays head into the tournament on a hot streak, having won six of their last seven games.

“I think this team is a team of momentum, as you can see as of late,” Kitch said. “If we get on a roll, put some two-out hits together and get after it we’re a tough team to beat. We’re going to be tough to beat.”

This was the final home game for Kitch as manager of the Bee Jays. Next season pitching coach Anderson will be taking over for Kitch. This was Kitch’s second season as manager, and has led Liberal to the NBC World series in both of his seasons with the team.

“I’ve enjoyed both summers here,” Kitch said. “I’ve always said this is one of the top five conferences in the country. I can’t ask for a better place. The people, the organization, the town of Liberal support this team. I’m going to miss it. I’m going to miss coming to the yard every day. I’m going to miss seeing the people — just everything about it. I can’t say enough about how well ran this organization is.”

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