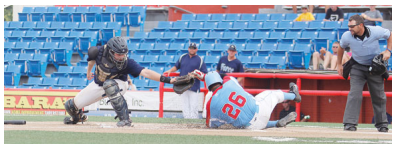

By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

If the Liberal Bee Jays are going to win their sixth national title this year, they are going to have to do it the hard way.

Liberal started the 79th NBC World Series with a heart-breaking 3-2 loss in 13 innings Saturday afternoon to the San Diego Force. The Bee Jays bounced back Sunday with a 4-1 win over the Albuquerque Diablos to avoid elimination.

Justin Bethard took the mound Saturday in the Bee Jays opener. Bethard did his part, providing Liberal with seven solid innings of work, giving up two runs on five hits while striking out seven and walking one.

The Bee Jays took a 1-0 lead in the top of the first when Luis Diaz scored on a Seth Stevens double.

The Force came right back in the bottom half of the inning, scoring two runs to take a 2-1 lead.

After the rocky first for Bethard settled down and contained the San Diego hitters and allowed only three more hits over the next six innings.

Liberal tied it up at 2-2 in the sixth when Diaz scored again, this time on a hit by Brady Capshaw. Diaz was able to avoid being tagged out at the plate and the Bee Jays were back in it.

Neither team managed a run over the next six innings.

Tyler Buss came on in the eighth and blanked the Force for three-and-two-thirds innings.

Chad Nack took over for Buss with two outs in the 11th.

Nack struck out the first batter he faced to end the inning, leaving a runner stranded.

After allowing only a hit in the 12th, Nack took the mound in the 13th looking to extend the game to the 14th for the Bee Jays.

Liberal never got that to see the 14th.

Nack walked the lead-off hitter and gave up a single to the next hitter, advancing the lead runner to third. After an intentional walk to load the bases, Nack gave up a single to center to end the game.

The Bee Jays managed only eight hits in the game, while leaving nine runners stranded.

“This team has showsn a lot of resiliency and toughness and always comes back when their backs are against the wall,” Liberla manager Brandon Kitch said. “Our guys showed a lot of heart. When we scored one in the first and they scored two, they could have laid down. I look for these guys to come back and answer.”

The tight game turned when Nack gave up a lead-off walk in the 13th that led to two hits that ended the game.

“Lead-off walks kill you,” Kitch said. “You preach that from little league to pro ball. When you walk the lead-off guy, especialy in extra inning games, it will kill you. They score 80-90 percent of the time.”

Newcomer Diaz put himself in scoring position during the game and was caught stealing once, but the Bee Jays had opportunities to end the game with runs before the 13th inning.

“We had our chances,” Kitch said. “Luis Diaz stole a couple bags. He guessed wrong right there. They pitched out and made a good throw. He did a good job for us, that guy could fly.”

After the loss, Kitch told his players that this position is nothing new.

“I told them, ‘You showed a lot of heart all summer,’” Kitch said. “‘you could have given up a long time ago, if you want summer over, lay down tomorrow, if not come in here and put up a win and give yourself a chance to play Monday.’”

The Bee Jays opted for the latter.

Liberal took the field Sunday in an elimination game against the Albuquerque Diablos that had a two-and-a-half hour rain delay.

Once again, the Bee Jays scored a run in the top of the first on an infield error by the Albuquerque shortstop for a 1-0 lead.

Pitcher Tyler Wiedenfeld gave up one run on one hit while striking out five in five innings of work.

Wiedenfeld put the lead-off hitter on in the fifth. The Diablos took advantage and brought him in to tie it up, 1-1.

Then came the rain.

After a lengthy delay, play was resumed in the top of the sixth, and gthe Bee jays put together thir best inning of the tournament.

With the bases loaded, Brady Capshaw scored on a wild pitch with Zach Reding at the plate. Reding then brought in Jason Dahl with a sacrifice fly.

Lewis Guilbeau, who did not play in the opener, nailed an RBI triple that scored Sam Pack and the Bee Jays were up 4-1.

Seth Davis came on in the sixth and shut out Albuquerque over the last four innings to give Liberal the win.

The Bee Jays managed only six hits in the game, but Wiedenfeld and Davis were so dominating that it did not matter. The two kept the Diablos off the base paths, allowing only two hits the entire game.

Liberal will take on the Houston Tuzos in their next game 4 p.m. today.