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The day after a tough loss that ends the season is never a fair time to evaluate a team.

4th
& GOAL



EARL WATT

Yesterday, the Liberal Bee Jays were cruising against the Cape Girardeau Capahas through six innings, but it would be the final three that will stick in the minds of fans for a while, and it is human nature.

But those three innings cannot undo the positives that happened this season.

Liberal had a 2-0 lead after six innings, and Austin King had just pitched himself out of a bases-loaded jam.

In the top of the seventh inning, Liberal loaded the bases with one out, and it appeared the Bee Jays were about to blow the game wide open when Jason Dahl attempted a safety squeeze and popped up a bunt attempt. The ball lofted softly in the air and was caught by the Capaha catcher. One out later, Liberal left the bases loaded without scoring.

The rest is history.

The Capahas tied the game in the seventh and scored four in the eighth to rally past the Bee Jays 6-2.

It wasn't the first disappointing exit for the Bee Jays at the national tournament, and it won't be the last.

When you play in 50-plus national tournaments, and win five of them, there will be some losses along the way.

Liberal knows that better than anyone. The Bee Jays have finished second seven times.

But you can't lose sight of playing in 50-plus national tournaments, and what that means. This team added another number to that historic run.

Getting invited and participating was a big deal. Liberal may have been invited because the Alaska champion could not come, but the Bee Jays represented well, turning in a 3-2 record at the NBC World Series. That was proof that they deserved to be there.

Liberal cannot control the selection process, but when the invitation was extended, the Bee Jays did something with it and added three more World Series game wins to their already impressive resume.

This team also extended to six the number of seasons without a losing record. After a seven-year stretch from 2001 to 2007 where Liberal had its first ever losing record, and had four more since, the Bee Jays ended the worst period in the history of the program in 2008 and have not had a losing record since.

It may have taken a come-from-behind win over Dodge City in the last game of the regular season, but it happened, and this group of Bee Jays made it happen.

This was a group of young ball players that represented us all with dignity and class this summer — no off-the-field issues or distractions.

It's easy to second-guess the line-up or question the bunt attempt, but that is looking at the bark on the tree and missing the forest of the season.

This group overcame obstacles, even those they may have placed in their own path, and they turned in a winning season and a winning record at the NBC World Series.

As the fans, we always want more. We want to be the last team standing.

But when we give this season a true evaluation, when we examine the injuries, the departures and the additions, it wasn't a bad year.

Not bad at all.

For those who love the game, June 2014 can't get here quick enough, and when it does, Adam Anderson will be the new manager who has now been the assistant at the national tournament twice. He has a 6-4 record there, and he understands the expectations.

There is no doubt Anderson and the Bee Jay Board of Directors are already planning next year's team with an eye set on one thing, maintaining the lofty goals of producing a team that can compete in the Jayhawk and the NBC World Series — and be able to win both.

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