

By EARL WATT

- Daily Leader

The last time Galen McSpadden stepped on Lawrence Dumont Stadium's field, he was assisting Major League Manager Mike Hargrove to a fourth-place national finish with the Liberal Bee Jays. McSpadden will be returning with his Seward County Saints Saturday, and although the powder puff blue has been replaced with kelly green, the road to Wichita for the two teams was similar.

The Bee Jays were the last team to qualify for the national tournament a year ago. The Bee Jays had a mediocre regular season, but they caught fire late and knocked off some of the major contenders at the National Baseball Congress World Series before succumbing to a brutal schedule. Liberal knocked off the defending national champions in the first game of the tournament.

Likewise, the Seward County Saints did not turn in the regular season they wanted.

But after a first-round sweep over Allen County, Seward advanced to the final eight of Region 6.

"There's a saying in baseball that you are only as good as your pitching," McSpadden said. "We picked up a couple of kids late last year for the Bee Jays, Thomas Keeling being one of them. We went in seeded last with no expectations we would be a factor, that we didn't earn our way in. But we had a performance against Havasu on the mound from Keeling that set the stage.

"We beat Havasu, then everyone was shocked," McSpadden said.

After knocking off some of the elite teams at the NBC, the Bee Jays were caught in "Baseball

'Round the Clock," and had to play at 3 a.m., win, and then play at 5:30 p.m. the same day against a team with two-days' rest.

"If we had it to do over again, and hadn't got caught in the weather, and then play at 3 a.m. in the morning and at 5:30 p.m., I'm not so sure we wouldn't have finished higher than fourth. It was difficult.

We didn't have a rested staff like Beatrice (Neb.). Their No. 1 pitcher was rested and ready."

The Bee Jays used the strong pitching to lead the team to a better- than expected tournament run.

"We have a couple of good starters," McSpadden said. "Bobby (Doran) went in against Allen and set the stage. He pitched a great a ball game. Then (Corey) Collins pitched another unbelievable outing."

Seward's start to the post-season was just like the Bee Jays, getting a win against a favored opponent. Allen County had only lost four games at home all season, and despite poor field conditions refused to move the game to a neutral site.

The sixth-seeded Saints from the West played third-seeded Allen County, and with strong efforts on the mound earned the necessary wins.

A similar pitching tandem for the Bee Jays did the same thing.

"We have some arms that went out and did exactly what they had to do to get team rolling," McSpadden said. "That happened at the NBC."

Are there similarities between BJ and Saints runs?

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Even if a team has not had the success they wanted during the regular season, there is an undercurrent that can be powerful in baseball, even if it lacks the emotion seen in other sports.

“Some people question momentum in baseball,” McSpadden said. “It is silent, but it is there. We have two pitchers that can beat anybody.

If we can give them some defense and score some runs, we can make a pretty good run, and that’s what happened with the Bee Jays.”

“But it all starts on the mound,” he said. “If we can get a continuation of that, you never know.”