



By EARL WATT

- Leader & Times

If not for the fact that the infield at McDonald Stadium in El Dorado is artificial turf, Brandon Kitch may have worn a pattern in natural grass for the number of times he had to make pitching changes over the weekend.

Liberal dropped three one-run games to the Broncos and were swept while Kitch continued to find someone who could provide a quality start on the mound.

So far this summer, Kitch has spent just about as much time on the mound as one of his starters, which is too much time for a manager and not very long for a starter.

Justin Dellinger only made it to the third inning Sunday before he was pulled in a 10-9 loss.

In both Saturday's and Sunday's games, the Bee Jays found themselves trying to dig out of holes that were dug early in the game, and both times the Bee Jays rallied to tie.

Had they not dug the hole so deep early, the late scoring might have been enough for wins.

But instead, the rallies only delayed the inevitable.

Saturday, the Bee Jays had to score two runs in the ninth to force extra innings, and that is exactly what they did.

It took the Broncos four extra innings to finally earn the win when they scored in the bottom of the 13th inning for the 9-8 win while the Bee jays went scoreless in extras.

Sunday, Liberal fell behind 9-5 before rallying to tie the game in the seventh.

But El Dorado was able to get the lead-off batter in the ninth on base, and after loading the bases scored the game-winning run.

The losses had an additional sting in the standings.

While Liberal was being swept by El Dorado and slipped into a fourth-place tie with Derby, Hays was busy sweeping Wellington.

That combination pushed the Bee Jays five games out of first place with the league season nearly a third of the way complete.

The Bee Jays get a day off today and then get right back on the road for a two-game set with the first-place Larks.

While the season still has 24 games to be played, the two-game series is already crucial for the Bee Jays. With the new rules for participation at the NBC World Series, the Bee Jays need to

finish in the top three to earn a spot into the national tournament.

The worst case after the Hays series is the Bee Jays could be seven games out of first, and the best case is to be only three games behind the Larks after the three one-run losses in El Dorado.

A series split would leave the Bee Jays five games back. But the biggest question for Liberal right now is who can provide a quality start.