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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

For six inning, the Bee Jays pounded out hits but was only able to build a 2-1 lead.

Wellington erupted for three runs in the sixth and eight runs in the seventh, and the Bee Jays found themselves two games out of third place after a 12-4 loss to the Heat.

“That was a tough one to swallow,” Liberal manager Brandon Kitch said. “We played well offensively, and defensively we played well early.”

But not late.

After Chad Nack was relieved, the bull pen took a pelting from the Wellington batters, and the defense fell apart, committing three errors in the seventh inning.

“We couldn’t put anyone away on the mound,” Kitch said. “We would have their batters down 1-2, 2-2, and they fouled off some pitches and got hits. We couldn’t put them away.”

The Heat were able to get the clutch hits with runners in scoring position, something the Bee Jays had a chance to do early but left runners stranded at second and third.

“When they are hitting your No. 1 guy, it is tough to beat them,” Kitch said. “Chad (Nack) was doing a good job getting out of innings. He left a couple pitches up that they got a hold of to tie it up. Our bullpen has been decent, and I thought we could hold them and score a couple more.”

But that wasn't the case. Jose Rosales-Rodarte couldn't stop the bleeding in the seventh, and the defense didn't help.

“Jose got the bad end of the deal,” Kitch said. “It is frustrating. You need someone to make a play and get out of an inning.”

Tanner Kirk hit his first home run of the season, and Tanner Rainey also contributed at the plate. Tyler Floyd was three-for-four. But it was the seventh inning debacle that proved to be the difference.

With only 10 games remaining in the season, the Bee Jays still have room to make up ground, but the room for error is gone. Trailing Wellington by two games, the next two games against the hit are virtually must-wins to stay in the hunt for a bid to the NBC World Series.

“If we go on a run here, we are not out of it,” Kitch said. “These guys are capable of beating people 12-4. I told them, ‘This is up to you guys. We are at the time in the summer where it's not what the coaches do, it's you guys. You have to execute and compete. If you compete, you will be fine.’”

Tonight's game in Wellington begins at 8 p.m.

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