

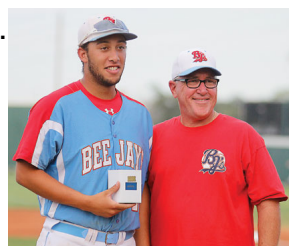
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By JEREMIAH WILSON

- Leader & Times

The Liberal Bee Jays made a strong argument for an invite to the NBC World Series with a pair of wins over the El Dorado Broncos over the weekend.



The Bee Jays thrilled the hometown crowd Saturday with a 3-2 walk-off victory. Liberal picked up another win Sunday night, 4-2 over the Broncos.

In both games, the Bee Jays had strong performances on the mound from their starters.

Justin Bethard went eight-and-a-third innings on Saturday, holding El Dorado to just one run. Tyler Buss came in and picked up the win after the Broncos scored the tying run with two outs in the ninth.

John Mestas gave Liberal a 2-1 lead in the bottom of the first with a towering two-run homer over the left field wall.

Neither team scored again until the ninth.

Tyler Buss came in to try and put the game away after Bethard hit two batters in the ninth.

With one out in the ninth and runners on first and second, the Broncos drove a hit to right field. The runner on second came around third and attempted to score, but Lewis Guilbeau threw a laser to home and the runner was tagged out at the plate.

The next batter tied the score with an infield grounder that shortstop Tanner Kirk couldn't handle.

Buss retired the next batter, and Liberal headed to bat in the ninth with the game knotted up at 2-2.

Catcher Tyler Floyd grounded out to start the inning. Jason Dahl was walked and that brought Zach Reding to the plate.

Reding took a 2-2 curve deep to right field, and Dahl came all the way around from first to score the game-winning run.

"You're only as good as the at-bat you're in," Liberal manager Brandon Kitch said. "Reding had a rough couple at-bats and comes up clutch for us in the ninth."

The combination of Bethard and Buss on the mound proved to be too much for the Broncos to overcome.

“He’s (Bethard) been solid for us all summer,” Kitch said. “He’s got progressively better each outing. He eats up a lot of innings because he throws strikes and minimizes his pitch count. He’s a gutsy pitcher. He throws strikes and keeps the ball down in the zone. He did a good job tonight for us.”

“I was just wanting to throw as many strikes I could,” Bethard said. “When you throw strikes, good stuff is going to happen. You’re going to get ground outs, fly outs, and hopefully you’ll get a couple strike outs in the process, too.”

Sunday night, Justin Schnedler, Cody Tillotson and Austin King shut down the El Dorado hitters, allowing only five hits in the 4-2 victory.

Liberal jumped out in front 2-0 in the first on a John Mestas one-out single that scored Kirk and Darien McLemore.

El Dorado scored on an error in the third to get within a run, 2-1.

McLemore answered with a lead-off home run in the bottom of the third to extend Liberal’s lead to 3-1.

The Broncos got a lead-off home run of their own in the fifth to make it a 3-2 ball game. That was the last run of the game for El Dorado.

Liberal scored again in the bottom of the fifth when Brady Capshaw scored on a single by Dahl for the final score of 4-2.

“It was a good performance,” Kitch said. “Schnedler came in and kept them at bay. I like to call him effectively wild. He threw enough strikes to keep them off balance. I couldn’t be more proud of that kid, he’s battled through some mechanical stuff all summer. He’s made some adjustments lately with Adam, and Adam has done a great job with him.”



The Bee Jay hitters provided enough offense to give Liberal a pair of big wins.

“Our hitters have been doing a great job the past three weeks of the season,” Kitch said. “Grinding away at at-bats and coming up with some big two-out hits, which we weren’t getting early in the summer. That’s key in this league. It’s fun to watch them square balls up and let ’em fly.”

With the Bee Jays out of contention for an automatic bid to the NBC World Series, the series win could weigh huge on the minds of those that decide which teams get an invite to the tournament as an at-large team.

“We lost a tough one on Friday,” Kitch said. “But we came back, and we’ve showed them that we deserve to be there. We’re not going to give up. This team has a lot of heart and a lot of bulldog in them. I can’t be more pleased with them. They just need to look at what we did the last half of the summer after what we did in the first half. We were there close to last place, and we crawled back into it to be not far out of third.”

Kitch believed the players have earned consideration.

“These guys have been working hard all summer and they’ve been playing for it,” Kitch said. “I think we deserve to go, and if we don’t, that’s just the way it is because they changed the format. Hopefully we can get in and make a run at it.”

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