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By JEREMIAH WILSON

- Leader & Times

The Liberal Bee Jays gave an inspiring performance in their last league game of the season Tuesday night at Brent Gould Field against the Dodge City Athletics. Down 5-0 heading into the home half of the seventh, Liberal rallied back for a 6-5 win.

Jack Mabe struggled early in his third start against the A's since joining the team in early July.

Dodge City scored two runs in the first including a lead-off home run. The other run came on an RBI double with two outs.

The Athletics struck again in the third for another run when they scored on an infield error.

After scoring two more runs in the fifth, Dodge City had what looked to be a commanding 5-0 lead.

The Bee Jay hitters struggled through much of the first five innings. It was not until the fifth inning that Liberal managed to get their first hit.

“The guy on the mound threw well for them,” Liberal manager Brandon Kitch said. “We didn’t make adjustments early enough to get to him. I kept telling the guys, ‘Stay in there and compete.’ We finally got our timing down on him and got a couple hits. Our hitters just competed at the plate. Our bullpen did a good job of coming in and holding them where they were at.”

Liberal came to bat in the bottom of the seventh still trailing 5-0. Seth Stevens smacked a double that scored Tanner Rainey, and the Bee Jays scored their first run of the game.

Tyler Floyd came to bat with runners on the corners and hit into a double play that scored Lewis Guilbeau, and the Bee Jays had cut the lead to 5-2.

Wigberto Nevarez started the scoring in the eighth with an RBI double that brought in John Mestas.

Jason Dahl came in as pinch runner for Nevarez, and later scored on a sacrifice fly by Floyd.

With two outs, Guilbeau came through with a two RBI double to put Liberal up 6-5.

The Bee Jays brought in Chad Nack for the ninth, and after allowing two runners to reach second and third, Nack was able to record the final out for the save.

“I knew if we could get a couple of runs and start getting some momentum that it would start working our way,” Kitch said. “These guys have got a lot of fight in them, and they’re gritty and gutsy. That was a fun win, and gives us some momentum going into the tournament.”

Nack, who has been one of the Bee Jays most reliable starters this season, had not seen any in-game action as of late.

“He hadn’t thrown in a week-and-a-half,” Kitch said. “And he had a little bit of shoulder tenderness. We just put him back on the mound to get some work in. It just happened to work out where we had a lead and you want one of you’re best guys on the mound when you’ve got a lead. He’s had some troubles in one-run games or tied ball games lately. It’s good to see him come in and compete like that after letting two guys on, and battling back to throw a good ninth inning for the save.”

The win gives Liberal a 17-17 record in league games on the season.

“.500 is good,” Kitch said. “You’d rather be on the upside of .500, but we dug ourselves in a hole early. We battled back. We were playing from behind all summer. We made some changes that helped us out — guys that wanted to come in and compete, and it worked out for us. To battle back like we have all summer and be on the winning side of those one-run ball games is a big feat. It says a lot about the character of this club.”

The Bee Jays will play their last home game of the season tonight against the Denver Red Birds before heading off to the NBC World Series. The starting pitcher for Liberal in that game has not yet been decided.

Against Denver, Kitch said several may pitch.

“We’re going to staff it on the mound,” Kitch said. “We’re going to get some guys some playing time that haven’t played much this summer. It’s a big ball game to me, I don’t want to lose the last game at home. We’re going to do everything we can to win that game, but we’re going to get some guys some work on the mound.”

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