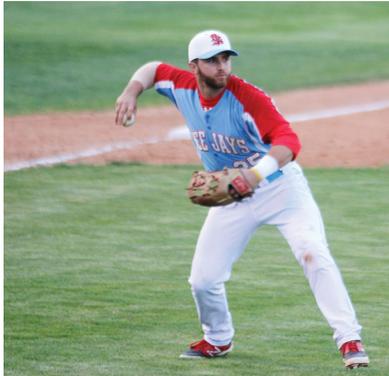


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By EARL WATT

- Leader & Times

Four solid innings and two quick outs in the top of the fifth for pitcher JB Olson sparked a dominating defensive night in the season opener for the Bee Jays, and a five-run fourth inning led to a 7-1 win for the Bee Jays over the Albuquerque Diablos Friday night at Brent Gould Field.

When Bee Jay Manager Adam Anderson headed out to relieve Olson, it was only because Olson had reached the pre-determined pitch count.

“We had a pitch count on them,” Anderson said. “We wanted them to get 65. I was hoping they would get a hit before I had to go get him. JB is a great kid. But we don’t win championships the first night. JB will carry us a long way. I didn’t want to burn him out in the first outing. I have to think of the betterment of the team, and it was the right decision.”

For most of the Bee Jays, Friday was the first time they took the field together, and Anderson wanted to see as many pitchers as he could while still winning the game.

Anderson was able to get four Bee Jays on the mound, and they combined for a three-hit, one-run victory.

They also gained nine innings of experience working together.

“I thought our defense, other than a couple plays here or there, we made good plays,” he said. “They don’t know each other yet. We have a shortstop from □ Minnesota, a second baseman from Pennsylvania, a third baseman from New Jersey — we have guys from all over the country. It will take some time to get to know each other on their part and our part.”

Liberal committed two errors in the game, but neither did much damage.

The Diablos didn’t get a hit until the sixth inning, a shot down the left field line just inside third, and they later scored their only run of the game with two more hits.

But those were the only hits of the game for the Diablos.

The Bee Jays belted out nine hits, and the big fourth inning happened with two outs.

Alec Isaac hit a key shot to deep right center that scored two runs with two outs and sparked the five-run inning.

“On offense, we struggled early,” Anderson said. “We couldn’t get some good at-bats back to back. The fourth inning we strung some things together. Alec got the big hit to keep the inning going, and we broke it open from there.”

Liberal faced a strong fast-ball pitcher early, but the Diablo struggled with location in the second and walked in the first run of the year and gave the Bee Jays a 1-0 lead.

After the big fourth inning, the Bee Jays had a 6-0 lead.

The Diablos had their only scoring inning in the sixth, but the Bee Jays added an insurance run in the eighth, and the momentum on the mound continued for two strikeouts and a short pop in the ninth to close out the win.

“I thought the pitching set the tone early and it carried us the rest of the way,” Anderson said. “Everyone we brought out of the bullpen did a great job. One thing I’m big on is not breaking the chain. They came in and didn’t break the chain.”

The Bee Jays faced a variety of pitchers from the Diablos, including a hard-throwing starter to a side-winding reliever.

“It was good to see,” Anderson said. “We saw a little of everything. It was good on our side to get some evaluation in — what they can handle, what they can’t. That will help us in the long run.”

The early-season evaluation continued Saturday night in the second game of the four-game homestand with the Diablos. Tonight, the Bee Jays will face the Diablos, and the series will conclude Monday.

“We will work at putting them in the right position to succeed and help the team win,” Anderson said.

For the first game of the season, the All-American combination worked.

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