

By EARL WATT

• Daily Leader

WICHITA — Nick Cocking wasn't scheduled to play Tuesday night against Haysville. He watched for seven innings as the Bee Jays and Heat see-sawed back and forth. But when Sam Konnoff was ejected in the for a hard slide into third base, Cocking entered the game with the Bee Jays holding a one-run lead.

Haysville's K.C. Pfister led off the ninth, and he hit a line drive that headed to left center.

Cocking bolted on an all-out sprint to short left center and dove for the ball. He secured the catch for the first out, and Brandon Faulkner was able to close out the game for the 11-10 win and guarantee the Bee Jays at least a top four finish. Had Cocking missed, Pfister would have at least had a double and possibly a triple. But Cocking never doubted the attempt to make the catch.

"That decision was made before I ever stepped on the field," he said. "We play hard and lay it all on the line. I took a chance and it paid off."

While the crowd at Lawrence Dumont Stadium was awed by the play, Faulkner expected Cocking to make the catch. After all, he had seen Cocking make that same play with regularity while both played at Kansas State.

"It didn't surprise me," he said. "I've seen him make that play 30 or 40 times. I still thanked him after the game."

Liberal Bee Jay manager John Martin fought to keep Konnoff in the game when he was ejected, but choosing Cocking for the substitution may have been the best call of the game.

"That was a big play," Martin said of Cocking's diving catch. "They threw (Konnoff) out for something that happens every day in the majors."

Liberal may not have needed heroic plays on defense and an overpowering night of offense in the errors could have been eliminated. Liberal committed six errors that kept the Heat in the game and led to four lead changes during the game.

"We weren't doing the little things," Martin said. "You have to make the other team beat you. But we never backed down and we found a way to win."

Early on, it appeared the Bee Jays would win the game in a runaway by jumping out to a 4-0 lead.

But a passed ball and a critical misplayed ball at first by Blake Bergeron allowed Haysville to trim the lead to 4-3 after the third.

The Heat took the lead in the fourth when another Bee Jay error, this one by Richard Bohlken at third, gave Haysville a bonus out. By the end of the inning, Haysville had a 5-4 lead.

But two Haysville errors and a two-RBI single by Bergeron put the Bee Jays ahead 7-5 in the fourth.

Another error on Bergeron helped the Heat score another run in the fifth, and Haysville once again regained the lead in the sixth, 9-7.

But the lead was short-lived again when the Bee Jays broke loose for four runs in the bottom of the sixth with an RBI singlw form Joe Vaskas, a two-RBI single by Marc Gomez, and a sacrifice RBI from Kyle Borden.

Haysville cut the 11-9 lead in half in the seventh when Faulkner took the mound and did not give up a run the rest of the game.

"You are going to have some adversity," Faulkner said. "I just stay positive and focus on the next play."

Liberal will play again Wednesday, and a Bee Jay win would put them in the championship game Friday.

Either way, Liberal will finish no worse than fourth for the third consecutive season.