

By EARL WATT

- Daily Leader

It may have taken longer than expected, but the Seward County Saints are finally playing like Seward County Saints.

After a disappointing sixth-place regular season finish, the Saints have shot to the top three of the Region 6 tournament, and a victory today would put the Saints in the championship game Tuesday.

Seward opened the tournament with an impressive sweep of Allen County and has added two more victories at Lawrence Dumont Stadium in Wichita.

Seward has been able to depend on strong starting pitching to climb through the tournament bracket.

Bobby Graham pitched eight-and-a-third Saturday against Hutchinson and earned the 5-4 win.

Corey Collins did just a little better by going eight-and two-thirds Sunday to lead the Saints over Cowley, 6-2.

In both games, Travis Parker came out of the bullpen to seal the deal.

"It was fun last night," Seward coach Galen McSpadden said. "We played pretty well. We had a

good pitching performance, we swung the bats better than we have, and we kept them from scoring. We knew these guys could do it all along, we just didn't put anything together through the year. I just hope they have two more in them."

Seward had little trouble from No. 15 Cowley County, champions of the Jayhawk East.

The Saints jumped on the Tigers early when Luke Campbell singled in the second and stole second base. Quay Grant moved Campbell to third on a groundout, and Kelby Tomlinson earned an RBI on a single up the middle that scored Campbell.

Seward added three more runs in the third on a Mikel Huston RBI single that scored Keegan Morrow.

After loading the bases, Grant walked and forced home Parker. After two outs, Todd Glime earned a walk which scored Huston and gave the Saints a 4-0 lead. Cowley scored a run in the fourth, and the Saints responded with one in the top of the sixth and another in the eighth.

Cowley scored one in the bottom of the ninth, but the Tigers couldn't rally against the Saints defense despite Seward committing four errors.

Collins allowed only six hits and two runs, both unearned.

"You can't ask for any more," McSpadden said of his starting pitchers. "Both gave us all they had for as long as they had. Bobby went to 129. Corey went to 132. I don't like going that high. We count pitches all season, and we felt we could extend just a little more last two weekends. Parker has come in two ball games and done his job. In 18 innings, we only used two pitchers."

That should leave the Saints pitching staff loaded for the remainder of the tournament.

Seward will battle Colby at 4 p.m. today. The two split the regular season meeting.

Austin Terhune will get the start for the Saints.

“Last year he was our best pitcher,” McSpadden said. “He’s not been on this spring, he hasn’t put anything together. He’s very capable.”

The winner has a distinct advantage. That team will automatically advance to the championship game while the remaining teams work through the elimination bracket the rest of today and early Tuesday.

“Colby is playing good ball,” McSpadden said. “They will come right at us. We are capable of winning or losing.”

But McSpadden hasn’t been looking ahead.

“Right now we’ll get through the first inning, and then the second and the third,” he said. “We don’t care who we play, if we go out and do what we are capable of doing. It was a good ball game last night.

We beat a good pitcher and a good team. Corey did a great job. We made a couple of key plays.”

One of those plays involved a diving catch by Morrow that ended a Cowley rally.

“He was fully extended,” McSpadden said. “He caught the ball six inches off the ground. Once that happened, it took wind out of their sails. Knocking their pitcher out was huge. We had a couple double plays.”

While the defense has been sharp enough, the offense has also done enough to earn the wins.

“I didn’t like our offense last weekend,” McSpadden said. “I didn’t like it until last night. You don’t know about this group. Whatever they give us is what we try to work with.”