

By EARL WATT

- Daily Leader

HUTCHINSON — Nate Davis hugged his grandma Friday night, much like he had done many times earlier in the season.

This one was different. It was the last time he would do so as a Redskin football player.

The reality of the moment sat in on the Redskin seniors, and emotional bled through outside the locker room at Gowans Stadium after Liberal suffered a 55-14 loss to a powerhouse Hutchinson team.

Liberal coach Tom Schroeder could only say one thing after facing the Salt Hawk, and it was the same thing everyone who played them said.

“They’re good,” Schroeder said of Hutchinson.

Friday night, they were exceptionally good, rushing for 451 yards and throwing for 63 more in the playoff win.

“I feel like we just finished playing the championship team in 5A,”

Schroeder said.

It would be hard to argue that point, and many long-time Redskin fans may have felt like the Hutch team resembled the Redskins of the '90s that played in seven consecutive state championships and won four of them. According to Schroeder, the Salthawks were “bigger, stronger and moved us off the ball.”

Hutchinson was the recipient of favorable starting field position throughout the first half while the Redskins continually found themselves in a hole. Liberal's first eight possessions started on average at its own 27 yard line while Hutchinson's first seven possessions began on average at Liberal's 47 yard line.

Hutchinson scored for the first 36 points of the game on short-field opportunities provided by the defense. The Redskins only had three first downs in the first half while committing three turnovers.

Facing the huge deficit, Liberal made a decision on its last possession of the half.

“The o-line said we weren't going to halftime without scoring. Let's make a big one,” Liberal running back Nate Davis said. “They were right. They gave the blocks and we broke one.”

Davis penetrated the Salthawk defense and scampered 56 yards to the Hutchinson 3 yard line. Three plays later Justin Morgan plunged across the goal to make the score 36-7.

But the Salthawks scored on their opening drive of the second half and added another two minutes later after holding the Redskins to four yards on three plays.

Season ends with loss to Salthawks

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Hutchinson made offensive substitutions the rest of the way, and the two teams traded touchdowns in the fourth quarter. Liberal's came after a 78-yard run from Justin Morgan and a two-yard plunge by Tyler Sutherland who played quarterback the entire second half after Slader McVey suffered a clavicle injury late in the first half.

Liberal was held to 199 yards of total offense on the night, and 185 of those came on 18 rushes between Morgan and Davis.

McVey was dropped behind the line of scrimmage three times for 27 yards of loss.

Liberal did not complete a pass in four attempts.

Austen Pitts had six punts for an average of 36 yards.

The loss ended Liberal's season at 5-5, the best record for third- year coach Schroeder who shared some thoughts about next year.

"We've got to keep the young kids interested, keep them going," he said. "We had a good group of seniors the last two years. Hopefully how they've led, the younger kids will step up and keep them going."

Davis and several seniors felt the weight of the moment with the realization that they have worn their Redskin uniforms for the last time.

"It'll be hard to say goodbye to these guys, you always want to finish the best you can," Schroeder said. "When you finish like this it is kind of tough. I believe we just finished



playing the championship team in 5A."

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Nate Davis is wrapped up by two Hutchinson defenders with two more on their way Friday night in Hutchinson. Liberal's season ended in the first round of the playoffs for the fourth consecutive season with a 55-14 loss.