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Last year was not pretty for the Liberal Redskins. A 2-7 record was a far cry from the former Class 5A powerhouse that made a playoff run year after year for most of four decades.

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& GOAL



EARL WATT

On the surface, those losses appear to tell the story of a program with no desire and no focus on football.

Those who live in Liberal simply know that is not true, and anyone who has ever talked to head coach Cliff Abbott, who is entering his third season at the helm of the Redskin program, knows he is completely committed to the Angry Red.

Building a winner takes time and consistency, and after the long tenure by Gary Cornelsen, the Redskin football program has not had the same coach for more than three seasons at a time.

That has led to the results like last year — a 1-2 record and an 18-game Western Athletic Conference losing streak.

But a closer look at last year's games shows that there is definitely a chance to improve on that showing.

Let's start with an opening loss to Ulysses.

Liberal actually led at half 21-3.

But the Tigers made some halftime adjustments and scored 40 second-half points, and the Redskins only managed six.

This was a pattern last year and something Abbott said was a focus of off-season workouts.

“We have to be better in the second half,” he said.

If the Redskins are to be successful in 2013, they will have to improve in the second half.

Liberal also had a lead at Hays before three Redskin turnovers and two short field goals instead of touchdowns led to a 51-34 loss.

Those short field goals also pointed out a vulnerability in the shotgun approach inside the red zone.

Several times the Redskins had drives stall when the threat of the long ball was no longer present, but the Redskins were still in shotgun formation. Even on planned runs, defenses were able to stack the middle with the threat of deep passes gone, and drives ended with either three or no points despite successful drives inside the red zone.

The Redskins had a shootout with Dodge City and only trailed by a touchdown with less than two minutes to play when an onside kick led to a final Dodge City score.

But the game might not have been close if the Redskins did not commit four turnovers including three interceptions and a fumble.

Turnovers were rampant last year, and that will have to change for the Redskins to have a chance this year.

The Redskins were only five points behind Garden City at half, but another second half collapse led to a 37-14 loss.

Liberal was also in a competitive game with Great Bend, but frustration set in, and unsportsmanlike penalties contributed to a 37-20 loss.

Liberal will have to channel its energy in a positive way in 2013.

Three miscues against Goddard led to a 21-0 lead for the Lions, and a 45-21 loss for Liberal.

Turnovers, frustration and second-half lapses led to a 2-7 record.

The good news is that Liberal can learn from the mistakes in 2012. Turnovers and frustration penalties are completely in Liberal's control. Hold the ball and composure, and the Redskins will instantly be more competitive.

Second-half adjustments went to Liberal's opponents last year.

The Redskins will have to stop playing checkers and learn to play chess in 2013. What works in the first half may not work in the second. Teams adjust. They move over a gap. They find a weakness and exploit it. Football is a tactical game, and pre-game preparation many times favored the Redskins. But that will have to be something that comes out of the locker room as well.

What will it take to be successful in 2013?

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The three keys a month before the first game are simple, and probably something the Redskins have been talking about for a year: eliminate turnovers, channel emotion, and make second-half adjustments. If Liberal can do that, 2013 can be a winning season.

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