

Heading in to Friday's game between Hays and Liberal, I called it a pick 'em with one key factor — the onside kicks would be the difference.

After studying Hays' offense, I believed they would probably score every time they touched the ball, and I also believed the Redskins would score every time they touched the ball.

The difference, then, would be turnovers and special teams.

**4th
& GOAL**



EARL WATT

Neither team committed a turnover, so that leaves it to special teams.

Of Liberal's six attempted onside kicks, they didn't get one recovery.

And one was all they needed.

One onside recovery, and today is a much different story.

But they didn't.

Is it time to abandon the onside kick approach?

No, and here's why.

Hays was able to drive the ball at will. Our defense just isn't there yet, and other teams are going to find ways to score. As the season progresses, the defense should get better. But there are a lot of young faces gaining on-the-job experience.

Opposing defenses are not much better. In this day and age, offenses are scoring machines, particularly in the WAC.

Something has to break the stalemate, and it is a commitment to the onside kicks and the willingness to keep drives alive on offense by going for it on fourth down.

Liberal's commitment to the plan will pay off this season, and they only needed one of those six kicks to go their way Friday.

Next week, or the week after that, or after that, Liberal will recover one or more of those kicks. And when they do, it will make the difference in the game.

If the defense progresses ahead of schedule and is able to get more stops, that will accelerate the success for Liberal, but for now, assume Liberal will score just about every time they touch the ball, and assume the opponent will do the same.

Something has to give.

You can't keep trading points.

While I was a skeptic early on, and the temptation is always rearing its ugly head to abandon the plan, I have come to embrace the onside kick and fourth-down attempts and see their advantages.

Did it help Friday?

No.

Did it hurt?

No.

Stick with the plan, and it will pay off.

And for Nolan Larkin and his remarkable receptions late, wear one size larger shoe the rest of the season, just in case we need that toe in bounds again.