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By EARL WATT

- Leader & Times

Liberal ran more plays and gained more yards than the Hays Indians Friday night at Redskins Field, they just couldn't score more points.

After trimming the Hays lead to six points with 2:33 to play, Hays recovered the onside kick and broke loose on a big run to set up a final touchdown that secured a 52-38 win and Liberal's 19th straight Western Athletic Conference loss.

Liberal had shining moments in the loss including Div. 1 catches from Trenton Hammond and Nolan Larkin. But they also had costly mistakes including a 15-yard unsportsmanlike penalty on Hammond on a third down play that the Redskins converted for a first down only to be backed up and eventually punted.

Twice Liberal was called for a low block while on defense, prompting head coach Cliff Abbott to refer to the rule book, which he shared with the sideline official.

Liberal took an early 8-0 with a 10-play, 80-yard drive that only took two minutes and 35 seconds and included passes to three different receivers (Larkin, Lorenzo Pando and Hammond) and runs by Rex Heronemus and Britton Abbott and ended with a three-yard dive by Abbott.

But Hays wasted no time tying up the score after recovering the onside kick at the Redskin 47 yard line. Hays only needed five plays and a minute and 14 seconds to score with a 21-yard run by quarterback Alex Delton.

After a Liberal punt, Hays went on a nine-play drive that ended with the second of five touchdowns for Delton who ran for 125 yards on 35 carries against the Angry Red defense.

Midway through the second quarter, Hays added another score with an 11-play, 71 yard drive and another Delton touchdown run from the nine yard line and a 22-8 Hays lead.

Liberal converted two fourth down plays on its next possession and put together a 14-play, 74-yard drive that ended with a 15-yard run to the end zone by Abbott to cut the lead to 22-14.

But Hays opened the second half with a four-play drive from the 49 yard line after recovering another attempted onside and took their largest lead of the game when Felton scored on an eight-yard touchdown run and the extra point sailed between the uprights for a 29-14 lead.

Liberal put together another long, sustained drive by moving the ball 78 yards on 14 plays and using four minutes and 38 seconds to cut the Hays lead to seven after a four-yard touchdown pass to Hammond and successful two point conversion, 29-22.

Three plays after Hays recovered the ensuing onside kick at the 50 yard line, Delton was back in the end zone after a 44-yard run, and the Indians stretched the lead back to 36-22.

Hays attempted an onside that was recovered by Liberal at the Redskin 39, and the Redskins

only needed one minute and 36 seconds to move the ball 61 yards on six plays to reach the end zone with an 18-yard touchdown pass from Abbott to Hammond who leaped above Hays defender Clayton Riedel who was assigned to guard Hammond the entire game.

Another successful two-point conversion narrowed the Hays lead to 36-30.

Hays recovered the onside kick at its own 32 yard line, and five plays into the drive it appeared the Redskins had stopped Hays on a third-down-and-three play when they piled up Preston Weigel at the line of scrimmage, but a penalty for a low block against the Redskins kept the Indian drive alive.

Three plays later, Hays had the ball at the Redskin four yard line, but back-to-back holding penalties moved the Indians back to the Liberal 28 yard line. A pass interference call against Mershek Wiltshire allowed Hays to get back to the Liberal 14 yard line, and on third-and-goal Delton made one of his three completions on the night to Haydon Kruetzer who was wide open on a seam in the end zone for a 14-yard touchdown reception. Hays started to match the Redskins by going for two points to take a 44-30 lead.

After Liberal failed to convert a fourth-and-19 at the Hays 21 yard line ended a 17-play drive, Hays could not get a first down and punted on its only three-and-out of the game.

Liberal took the ball at its own 43 yard line but after a 13 yard sack and a motion penalty, Liberal faced a second and 28.

A pass interference call against Hays moved the ball closer to a first down, but another sack of Abbott left the Redskins facing a fourth-and-14.

Abbott rolled to his right and found a double-covered Larkin on the sideline who got the tip of his toe in bounds for a 16-yard reception that kept the Redskin drive alive.

Seven plays later, Larkin reeled in a 14-yard pass from Abbott, and this time his whole foot was on the red turf for a touchdown, and with 2:33 remaining in the game, the Redskins were again within six points of the Indians, 44-38.

That's when Hays recovered the sixth onside attempt by the Redskins and broke a huge run. After a Redskin time out, the decision was made to allow Hays to score to get the ball back, but after four straight incompletions, Liberal's rally ran out of time in a 52-38 loss.

"We came out and got off a good start," Larkin said. "It was obvious we had to be able to stop them. Give them all the credit, they can run the ball, and we have to find a way to stop it."

Liberal (2-1, 0-1) will travel to Dodge City Friday to face the Red Demons (2-1, 0-0) looking to prevent the winless streak in the WAC from reaching 20.

"Dodge City is just as good as Hays," Larkin said "We have to have a good week of practice next week."

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

Liberal

Rushing

Abbott — 35-125-2

Heronemus — 4-17-0

Passing

Abbott — 23-54-280-3-0

Receiving

Larkin — 8-114-1

Hammond — 8-104-2

Pando — 3-32-0

Heronemus — 2-15-0

Erives — 2-15-0

TEAM STATS

Total offense — 93 plays - 422 yards

Hays

Rushing

Weigel — 24-175-1

Delton — 19-135-5

Whittington — 5-40-0

Passing

Delton — 3-8-44-1-0

Receiving

Klaus — 1-9-0

Whittington — 1-21-0

Kreutzer — 1-14-1

TEAM STATS

Total offense — 56 plays - 394 yards

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