



By EARL WATT

- Leader & Times

Liberal won all six matches at the home tournament Saturday, but four of those went all three sets, and twice the Lady Redskins dropped the first game and had to rally for the win including the semi-final match-up against Dodge City and the championship game with Emporia.

Liberal finished first in their pool that included Meade, Wichita Southeast, Hugoton and Scott City before facing Dodge City for the second time in three days.

Semi-final, Liberal vs. Dodge City

The Lady Redskins won a 3-1 match against the Lady Red Demons in Dodge City Thursday, but fell behind early Saturday 17-7.

But the Lady Redskins started to rally, and while they came up short in the game, 25-22, they used the strong finish to blow by the Red Demons in the second game, 25-10. Megan Besecker helped the Lady Redskins by scoring six straight points during her serve.

The two teams traded points in the third set until Liberal was able to grind out a four-point lead and hold on for the 25-23 win.

Championship, Liberal vs. Emporia

Liberal faced an unfamiliar opponent in the championship. The Emporia Lady Spartans swept their poll and knocked of Hugoton in the demi-final to reach the championship against the Lady Redskins, and they were able to break a 6-6 tie with a mini-run to take a 12-8 lead.

Emporia protected the lead the rest of the way, and the Lady Redskins dropped the first set, 25-19.

Liberal dominated from there.

The Lady Redskins jumped out to an early lead in the second game and were able to avoid the big blocks from the Lady Spartans at the net by lobbing the ball to open holes. When the Lady Redskins did hit for kills, they cross-courted their shots at the net to avoid the blocks, and the Lady Redskins evened up the match with a 25-18 win.

The championship third set was all Lady Redskins. Liberal cruised to a 25-13 win to claim the tournament title.

Jai Chapman was the only Liberal player to be named to the all-tournament team.

“Jai makes a difference everywhere we go,” Liberal coach Thais Baziquetto-Allen said. “At Dodge City she had 19 kills, that pushed her through. Today when she was on the front row, she finds a spot. I wish we would have had a couple more girls on (the all-tournament team). They put the work in today.”

Liberal was 4-4 heading in to the final match of the Ark City tournament Sept. 14 and have reeled off 11 straight wins since.

“Our offense is gaining,” Baziquetto-Allen said. “We have so many hitters involved. When you have that kind of offense, even if you lack some other things, it makes you win games.”

The emotional moment of the tournament may have been the turnaround game with Western Athletic Conference foe Dodge City. According to Baziquetto-Allen, the game at Dodge Thursday was intense and involved more than just on-the-court activities.

“It was a big game out there,” she said. “It was a best of five. We won 3-1 with a lot of things going on outside the court, and it carried over to our game here. There was a lot of talking and moving on both sides of the court. The maturity level of our girls was great. We were able to pull through. The seniors make sure we are there. The freshmen didn’t crumble. They trust their training, they have done this, they can do it, and they go out there and do it.”

But they had to do it in come-from behind fashion, something Baziquetto-Allen wanted to improve.

“We start weak,” she said. “Sometimes you wait to see what they can do, and then we wake up. We are in our home tournament, we pushed through the next two. We need to be more focused and play our game early.”

Baziquetto-Allen gave the Lady Redskins Monday off after playing 16 matches in a week.

In the first match of the tournament, Liberal defeated Wichita Southeast, 25-12, 25-14.

Liberal needed three sets to defeat Scott City, 25-14, 22-25, 25-13.

Liberal against went to the third set against Meade, 25-15, 20-25, 25-23.

The Lady Redskins dispatched Hugoton in two sets, 25-21, 25-18 to complete the pool sweep and move on to the semi-finals.

“I told the girls after Dodge City, it will be intense WAC this year,” Baziquetto-Allen said. “It will be in Dodge City. We have to get back at Great Bend and Garden City. We turned around and played an Emporia team that is well coached, they move well, they serve well, they have two power hitters. The intensity was not as much, but we were able to perform at the level we needed to.”