By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Trying to upset the No. 1 ranked team in Class 5A was a tall order for the Redskins Friday night when the private Catholic school Bishop Carroll came to Liberal, and the last thing Liberal needed was a slow start.

But that is exactly what happened, and after falling behind 27-0, the Redskins finally found the end zone in a too-little, too-late second half in a 53-18 loss.

While Liberal, and 27 other schools in Class 5A, had to face an opponent that is not constrainted to district boundary rules, coach Cliff Abbott made no excuses in the loss where tempers flared late.

Carroll scored midway through the first half after holding the Redskins to a three-and-out on their first possession.

Liberal forced Carroll to a fourth-and-8 at the 15 yard lie, but a pass play put the Gold Eagles ahead 7-0.

Britton Abbott threw an interception on Liberals next possession, and another pass for Carroll ended in the end zone for a 32-yard touchdown and a 14-0 lead.

Another Liberal turnover at the Redskins 29 yard line gave Carroll a short field when a pass was ruled as caught by Cristian Erives and then fumbled. Abbott protested the call that his receiver never had control, but he was overruled, and Carroll went 29 yards on seven plays that included a one-yard touchdown run to take a 21-0 lead.

An Eagle was flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct on the touchdown which backed up the ensuing kick-off 15 yards, and the Redskins started their next possession on the 39 yard line.

Liberal gained a first down with back-to-back runs from Rex Heronemus but could not convert on a fourth-and-six, the Eagles had another short field opportunity with the ball at the Redskins 47 yard line.

But the Angry Red defense forced a punt.

Liberal punted the ball back after an eight-play drive stalled, and Carroll only needed two plays to move the ball 47 yards for a touchdown and a 27-0 lead.

After a drought of six games without recovering an onside kick, the Redskins were able to catch the second-half kick-off before a Golden Eagle could cover it, and Liberal's offense finally found its stride with a five-play, 44-yard touchdown drive that ended with a nine-yard pass from Abbott to Nolan Larkin that cut the lead to 27-6.

But Carroll recovered the next onside kick and drove the ball 46 yards in four plays to take a 33-6 lead.

Later in the third quarter the Redskins recovered a Carroll fumble at their own 31 yard line and went on a nine-plat, 69-yard drive that ended with a 20-yard pass to Trenton Hammond for a touchdown that cut the lead to 33-12.

Carroll recovered the onside and drove the ball 51 yards in 12 plays that included a fourth-and-six conversion midway through the drive, and a 20-yard run for a touchdown gave the Golden Eagles a 39-12 lead.

Liberal started the next drive at their own 9 yard line and after eight plays, Abbott attempted a punt that was blocked and recovered by Carroll in the end zone for a touchdown and a 46-12 lead.

Liberal punted on its next possession, and Carroll scored its final touchdown of the game to cap a six-play, 46-yard drive that ended with a one-yard run and was aided by an unsportsmanlike penalty for a 53-12 lead.

Liberals final score came on the next possession with a 14-yard touchdown pass to Hammond that capped a 65-yard, 10-play drive for the 53-18 final score.

Abbott ran the ball 20 times for 31 yards and completed 22 of 36 passes for 234 yards.

Hammond caught 10 passes for 136 yards and two touchdowns.

The loss dropped Liberal to 5-4 on the season and District 8 runner-up.

Liberal qualified for the playoffs with the second-place finish in the district and will likely travel to Wichita to face Kapaun Friday.