By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Slowly but surely the Lady Redskins are making the better teams in Kansas compete for longer periods of time.

Friday was another step, and while the Lady Redskins fell 56-39 to the fifth-ranked Lady Panthers, they forced a tie early in the second half.

Liberal did not let Great Bend run away in the first half, and Great Bend needed two threes to keep close with the Lady Redskins in the first quarter.

It appeared that the Lady Panthers were about to push the game beyond reach late in the first half with a 20-12 lead, but the Lady Redskins fired back by scoring the last four points of the period to only trail by four at half.

Jada Mickens was fouled on the first possession of the second half and made a free throw, and Chapman drained a three after a defensive stop, and the Lady Redskins tied the game, 20-20.

But the Lady Panthers responded with a 13-0 run.

The Lady Redskins ended the three-minute drought with a Megan Besecker three-pointer, and Mickens added two free throws to cut the lead to eight.

But the Lady Panthers put together a 6-0 run to stretch the lead to 14.

Liberal handled the Great Bend pressure through the first half and to start the second half, but Liberal attempted to pass over the pressure rather than work the ball up the court, and the turnovers mounted. By the end of the game, the Lady Redskins committed 28 turnovers that contributed to the 17-point loss.

Chapman led the Lady Redskins with 15 points, and Mickens added nine.

“You have 28 turnovers you won’t be successful against any team,” Liberal coach Bill Baird said. “Especially a team that brings heat and pressure like (Great Bend) does.”

When Great Bend went on its run midway through the third quarter, Baird said the Lady Redskins lost their focus.

“We lost our composure,” he said. “They attacked the rim. Our defense got a little slack, and we stopped rebounding.”

But playing into the second half against the first-place Western Athletic Conference team and top five team in Kansas was a sign that the Redskin program is showing improvement.

“If we can get to where we can compete against a team like that for four quarters, we are right there,” Baird said. “We just aren’t there yet.”