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By EARL WATT

- Daily Leader

Ryan Cornelsen's return to Redskin Field will be one he won't soon forget.

For the Redskins, Friday will be a game that slipped away after Liberal came up empty on four trips to the red zone and gave up a late kick-off return for a touchdown in a 21-17 loss to open the Western Athletic Conference Friday at Redskin Field.

Michael Cummins rushed for 111 yards on 24 carries to provide a strong running game for the Redskins, and the senior defensive end- turned running back also returned a punt 85 yards for a touchdown.

But two missed field goals and three turnovers were too much to overcome.

Head coach Wade Standley was still stinging from the loss in a game that slipped away in the final minutes after the Redskins had battled to take a 17-14 lead only to see it evaporate in about 12 seconds when Casey Sedbrook caught a line-drive kick-off and returned it 80 yards for the game-winning touchdown.

"We let this game slip away," Standley said. "I knew Hays had a good team, and we have a good team. We just have to eliminate mistakes, and we will win games."

Liberal shot out of the gate on the back of Cummins on its opening drive of the game. The Redskin used six plays to go 57 yards and a touchdown when Slader McVey took the ball on a quarterback sweep around the right side for the score.

Cummins rushes for 111 yards in 21-17 loss

Saturday, 19 September 2009 00:00

But the Indians responded with an 11-play, 69-yard drive that ended with Bryant Bombardier breaking loose on a quarterback sweep for 30 yards and a touchdown. Hays had to convert a fourth down on the play and used a hard count to get the Redskins to jump off sides to keep the drive alive.

Early in the second quarter, a Hays drive stalled, and Cummins received a punt at his own 15 yard line. Cummins headed to the home sideline, raced past the first wave of Indians, weaved around two more along the boundary, and sprinted the rest of the way for an 85- yard punt return for a touchdown to give the Redskins a 14-7 lead.

Liberal had three golden opportunities to score before half, but a fumbled exchange and an interception ended two drives.

Liberal had another shot just before half when Charles Turner ran up the middle for 24 yards and McVey completed a 50-yard pass to Jade Cathey in the final seconds to give the Redskins the ball at the Hays

16 yard line.

Liberal attempted a 33 yard field goal, but the attempt by Jesse Quintero was no good.

The Redskins again drove the ball down to the red zone to start the second half, and again Quintero came on to attempt a field goal. But the 35-yard attempts sailed wide left.

Hays used the quarterback sweep a second time to get Bombardier into the end zone to cap a six-play 49 yard drive to tie the game, 14-14.

The Redskins chewed up the clock in the fourth quarter with a 17-play drive that stalled at the

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Hays 15 yard line. Quintero returned for his third attempt, and this one sailed through to give the Redskins a 17

-14 lead with five minutes to play.

But the ensuing kick-off was a line drive to Sedbrook, and the junior headed straight upfield, made two Redskins miss, skirted to the visitors sideline and sprinted to the end zone to give the Indians the lead, 21-17.

Standley had no concerns about putting Quintero in for his third attempt.

“We believe in Jesse,” he said. “He did what we wanted him to do. He just came back with a line drive kick. They happen. The coverage doesn’t get set.”

Liberal had a chance with less than two minutes to go after Cummins had runs of 10 yards and two one-yard runs, and McVey completed a 28- yard pass to Cathey to give the Redskins the ball at the Indian 12 yard line.

But a short pass was tipped and Sedbrook came up with the interception for Hays to end the Redskin threat.

“Our offense did a good job on that last drive of managing the clock and driving downfield,” Standley said. “It was just one of those plays where Davis was open, but the ball gets deflected.”

Cummins had Liberal’s first 100-yard rushing game of the season, and he also scored his first touchdown as a Redskin. Cummins was a defensive end a year ago, but his speed and toughness have catapulted him into a running back position and punt returner.

“Michael is a champion,” Standley said of one of the few two-way players on the Redskins. “We asked him to do a lot.”

The win at Redskin Field was something Ryan Cornelsen, coach of the Hays Indians, did a lot as a player, but he wore the home jersey during his career in the 1993 to 1996 seasons. Each year, Cornelsen’s teams, coached by his father Gary, played in the state championship.

The victory was the first for Hays over the Redskins at home since Marcus Watts played for the Indians eight seasons ago.

Liberal (1-2, 0-1 WAC) will travel to Dodge City Friday to play the Red Demons (3-0, 0-0 WAC).

“We will get ready the same,” Standley said. “Will we do what we do to prepare, and we will be ready.” Kick-off is scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

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