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By EARL WATT

- Daily Leader

GREAT BEND — The Panther was all but off the Redskins' back Friday night when Liberal had a 19-14 lead with two minutes to play.

But a late touchdown by the Panthers and a failed fourth down conversion for the Redskins ended in a 22-19 loss.

Liberal out-gained the Panthers with 372 yards of offense to the Panthers' 317.

The Redskins were flagged seven times for 65 yards, with 40 of those coming on one drive, while Great Bend had one penalty for five yards.

The Redskins had an opportunity to put the game out of reach in the fourth quarter when the Redskins had a 19-7 lead and the ball at their own 34 yard line.

Slader McVey completed a pass to Blake Willimon and another to Jade Cathey to move the ball into Panther territory.

After an illegal motion play, the Redskins overcame the loss with a pass to Martin for a first down at the Panther 38 yard line.

But back-to-back penalties, including a chop block and holding calls, back the Redskins up 25

yards.

McVey attempted a short run on second down, and on third down McVey threw a deep pass that was intercepted and returned to midfield.

Liberal was flagged for an unsportsmanlike penalty at the end of the play, and instead of a score that could have put the game out of reach, Liberal's defense took the field at their own 42 yard line.

"We didn't get any help on that drive," Liberal coach Wade Standley said.

One play later, Great Bend's Greg Hildebrand hit Allan Holt for a 42- yard touchdown pass, and the Panthers were within five at 19-14.

The Redskins had another chance to add to their lead, but an eight- play, 30-yard drive stalled at the 50 yard line.

With 5:55 to play, Great Bend went on a seven-play, 80 yard drive that included a 42-yard pass reception by Holt and ended with a 16- yard touchdown pass to Jordan Basye that gave the Panthers their first lead of the night.

The Redskins could not get a first down on three tries, and on fourth and seven, McVey attempted a pass to Jade Cathey, and the junior had a chance to make the catch for a first down, but the ball floated out of his grasp, and Great Bend took a knee for the win.

Prior to that, Liberal dominated the contest.

The Redskins scored on two of their first three plays from scrimmage.

Lavondrick Martin took a hand-off from McVey on a wide receiver sweep at Liberal's own 9 yard line and sprinted 91 yards for a touchdown for an early 6-0 lead.

The Redskins held Great Bend to a second straight punt, and after McVey was dropped for a seven yard loss, Michael Cummins broke through the Panther defensive front and scampered 79 yards for a second Redskin touchdown in the first quarter and a 13-0 Liberal lead.

"The offense came out in some sets that caught them out of position,"

Standley said. "We out-executed them early in the game."

Liberal had two near-misses for either big gains or touchdowns when Tyson Deaton had a chance to make a catch with only one Panther between him and the end zone, but the ball bounced off his chest and fell to the turf.

Martin also had a break-away run down the sideline, but was whistled out of bounds after a short gain.

Great Bend had a chance in the first half to narrow the score, but the Angry Red defense stepped up on a goal line stand where the Panthers ran the same power-I formation and handed off to Basye four straight times. Liberal stopped him at the 1 yard line on fourth down.

Liberal's recorded three sacks and two interceptions (Blake Abbott and Bryce Johnson).

"They fought their tails off," Standley said. "It was a snap here or there. The miscues make a difference."

Liberal committed two turnovers, one interception and a fumble while Great Bend threw two interceptions.

Liberal led the entire game until the final two minutes, something Standley wants to fix before next week's district match-up with Valley Center.

"We have to put together four quarters," he said. "Not three, not, three-and-a-half, or three-and-three-quarters."

The loss was the third narrow miss in Western Athletic Conference this season. Liberal lost to Hays on a late kick-off return for a touchdown, and conversions led to a two-point loss against Garden City last week.

Friday's loss was another stinger for a team that has been competitive, and arguably outplayed some of its competitors, but has not outscored them.

"They are disappointed right now," Standley said after the game. "But they are ready to play. They are ready to play right now. They played good enough to win, we just made a few mistakes."

Liberal's struggles could provide the desire needed to make a serious run through district and into the playoffs. Liberal will host Valley Center next week before traveling to Wichita West and finishing out the season against Bishop Carroll.

Standley has been motivating his team to play its best by Week 7.

That is next week.

“We played our best game tonight,” he said. “We’re getting better. We will continue to do what we do until we get over the hump. Life will push against you and it will keep pushing you until you push back. We have to push through it.”

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