

By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Leading teams, even in the second half, has not been a problem for the Redskins this season. Holding on to that lead has been the issue.

But Friday in Great Bend, Liberal was able to jump out to a 17-point second half lead and hold on for the 47-39 win, the Redskins' first Western Athletic Conference season win.

Liberal jumped out to an early 7-0 lead and used a full court press to force the Panthers into turnovers. Liberal stretched the lead to 18-6, and in the third quarter the Redskins has a 31-14 lead.

At the end of the third quarter Liberal had a 36-20 lead.



The Panthers pushed hard in the final eight minutes, outscoring the Redskins 19-11 in the final period, but it wasn't enough to overcome the Redskins lead.

"This was a good team win," Liberal coach Drew Gruver said. "I am very proud of the way we played. We made some silly decisions there at the end, not taking care of the ball. We have to learn how to play in these situations, how to play with the lead. Hopefully we will be playing with the lead a lot more."

Liberal's defensive pressure made the difference, and when Gruver saw how effective his team was playing pressure defense, he decided to stick with it.

"We felt like coming in we could pressure them and get them sped up and turn the ball over" he said. "I was expecting to play zone, but we started in press. We stayed with man and finished out strong."

Senior William Ross also provided solid defense by taking two charges in the fourth quarter when the Panthers were pushing to rally.

"Those were big plays," Gruver said. "Charges are big momentum-changing plays. It's a foul on the other guy and a turnover, you go the other way."

The Redskin bench continued to encourage their teammates, and the unselfish play on the court was another positive sign if the Redskins want to turn their season around.

"We were not playing as individuals, we've been talking about that all year," Gruver said. "They bought in to that tonight."

Liberal (4-11, 1-3) will step out of conference play and travel to Guymon Tuesday to face the Tigers.

"When you cross the border it is a different environment," Gruver said. "We can't go in there thinking we just have to show up. We've seen what happens. We will enjoy this one on the ride home, then focus on that next game."