By EARL WATT

• Daily Leader

Fewer and fewer are considering St. Thomas Aquinas the Class 5A champions.

The private school that draws students from a large area in northeast Kansas including the metropolitan area of Kansas City and its suburbs but competes in Class 5A athletically has won six consecutive soccer titles.

Aquinas outscored its playoff opponents 35-0 while most other games against public schools were competitive, as it should be at the highest level.

The truer battle seems to be between public institutions at the state soccer tournament, and that match-up went to the Liberal Redskins in the third-place game Saturday in Bonner Springs.

“I told my kids after losing to Aquinas we definitely have to make our own championship — the public school championship — in the third place game,” Liberal coach Lori Navarro said. “And that is ours. It’s a matter of making it a level playing field.”

Liberal trailed the Salina Central Mustangs 1-0 at half, but Cesar Jurado scored three goals in the second half to earn the win for Liberal. Shawnee Heights beat Salina Central 1-0 a day earlier, so the 3-1 win was the most impressive performance by a public school in the Final Four.

Aquinas knocked off Shawnee Heights 4-0 in the “championship.”

“When we pair up the public schools, we win the whole season,”

Navarro said. “No one was able to beat us, not one public school. We lost to Wichita Northeast but avenged that lost later. That in itself converts into our own championship. We were the best 5A public school. That was a big deal for us, it motivated us to prove a point that we are not making excuses. We are actually backing it up with the score, and we are the best. That’s how we keep it in our hearts.”

Navarro was disappointed that the state has not made any adjustments to even the playing field. So far this fall, Aquinas has won five of the six possible championships and came in second in the other.

“They keep taking it away from the kids who follow the guidelines and played each other on level ground,” she said. “You have someone who has all the advantages a college would have. You play kids going Division 1 and going there because of recruitment.”

The Redskins won the Western Athletic Conference and returned to the Final Four in Class 5A for the fifth time in six seasons.

Liberal has been the most successful public school in Class 5A soccer in the past five years, earning two second-place and two third place finishes, more than any other public school.

Daily Leader photo/Earl Watt

Cesar Jurado moves the ball against Great Bend earlier in the Class 5A playoffs. Jurado scored three gaols Saturday in the thrid-place game at the state tournament against Salina Central for a 3-1 win and third place state finish for the Redskins.