



By EARL WATT

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When Gary Cornelsen built a sports dynasty at Liberal High School in the 1990s, he created a new attitude about running.

He kicked off the new school season with “fun runs” as a way to get the athletes focused on working out and preparing for the upcoming season.

Since those glory years which included four state championships in football, 14 boys track titles and nine girls track championships, some coaches have organized the pre-season runs, and some haven't.

When football coach Cliff Abbott became the head coach in 2010, he brought the runs back.

“The kids that we've had there have been tremendous,” Abbott said. “We have asked a lot of them, from our camp in early June late May, we are putting together who made 90 percent in the weight room. Our kids love hearing about the past, but their past is now. Everyone right now is undefeated. I am so proud of them. Now they get a chance to show what they've been doing all spring and all winter.”

Last year's record may have been disappointing without a win in the Western Athletic Conference and finishing 1-2 in district play.

But Abbott said the player son the field were making an investment for this season.

"We played a lot of young kids," Abbott said. "A lot of them are back. In the first half we were leading, in the game or had a chance. The second half was a challenge. We need to be finishers — go four quarters. You have to push through that. You work on those in the summer workout, put yourself in a tough situation and battle through that. I am ready to see that pay dividends this fall."

To prepare for those challenges, the Redskins are jogging from LHS to Light Park, taking a short break, and heading back. They will run at 7 p.m. tonight, and Thursday they will reverse the course and run from Light Park to LHS and back.

"One of the greatest things about Liberal is they support their own," Abbott said. "Through the fun run, the cars following, runners and bikers, people we passed — I wouldn't want to be any other place. They will be in red and black. We want to pass that on throughout the program, to play as one unit. It's important to execute, but you also want to be able to depend on your team, and they need to know they can depend on you."