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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Cliff Abbott started to answer the question about coaching his son Britton for the final time with the same control he had exhibited at many post-game talks.

And then his voice cracked, and he needed a moment.

“You got me,” he said. After a short pause, he explained that rare chance to coach Bram and Britton over his three years at the helm of the Redskin program.

“It is very special, and I am blessed to have the opportunity to coach two of my boys and have one coach on the staff with me (Bo). It is something that you never forget. It’s hard to explain the bond you get to make, not only with them, but 16 other seniors that are at my house. I wouldn’t trade it.”

The Redskins had several chances to throw in the towel against the Crusaders, but until the final time out was used, Liberal believed they could come back.

“I am proud of our senior leadership and the underclassmen that responded,” Abbott said. “At halftime we came out, and turnovers hurt us, right at critical times. They kicked to us and we didn’t capitalize on that. They never quit competing. We had one time out left late, and they thought we would get the ball, and we would get 15 points. They believed that until the end.”

For Abbott, this was another building block to establishing a winning program and restoring the legacy in the storied program that has five state championships since 1980 including four in the 1990s.

“This is not the end of the journey,” Abbott said. “Especially for the underclassmen, this is another step to take this and go beyond.”

While Trenton Hammond did not make the stellar catches Redskins fans have seen all season, Abbott said his presence on the field forced Kapaun to commit and sometimes three players to the state's leading receiver. That allowed other receivers to come open.

“Everybody all year has double and triple teamed Hammond,” Abbott said. “What that does is it allows someone else to be free. Britton has to read, and he found Nolan (Larkin), and I was proud of the way he competed.”

Kapaun's Devin Dempsey hurt the Redskins by picking up key first downs and gashing the defense for big plays. But Abbott said that was a trade-off in limiting other Kapaun weapons.

“We knew (Dempsey) was a good player,” Abbott said. “He would ride the wave and then explode. He did a great job and made a difference. We knew Ross Puritty and Michael Lickteig) were good players, and we did some things there, and that allowed another player to shine.”

Abbott said the 2014 campaign begins with adding to his base of players.

“It goes to our underclassmen,” he said. “We are traveling with a solid 40 that really believe and have a hunger for that. We need to keep getting kids out and let them know it was a good season but it is just a step, they get a chance to do something even more special.”

The base is set to improve in 2014.

“One guy we only had for two quarters was Jared Hasik,” Abbott said. “Our line will be better next year. There is a good base to build on, what is exciting is there are kids behind them. We will have a chance for several years, this is not the end, we are building.

“We are just now hitting stride,” he added. “So stay with the Skins. We will be alright.

“Go ‘Skins.”

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