

By EARL WATT

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When Liberal started the season under returning head coach Scott Hinkle, there was a newfound optimism around basketball in Liberal.

Hinkle had been the athletic director for Liberal High School after assisting coach Jim Littell to a national championship for the Seward County Lady Saints.

Hinkle worked with the team during the summer and had success at a variety of tournaments.

The team had a mixture of experienced players as well as talented newcomers.

After sitting out a year, senior Nolan Larkin returned to the program.



Liberal's first loss came on the road at Holcomb, 55-43.

The Redskins rebounded with a 50-43 win over Guymon and then hosted the Conestoga Classic against two talented Oklahoma teams. Liberal lost to Lawton 60-46 before falling to the

three-point shooting Bartlesville, 87-54.

But it was the loss to Perryton that seemed to be the most disappointing for both the fans and Hinkle.

“We’ve got some soul searching to do over the break,” he said after the loss where the Redskins had a lead in the last six minutes. “We need to find five, six, seven guys that will go to war for us, and that is who we are going to go with.”

While the talent across the board is above average for the Redskins, there is no one stand-out, and that has forced the Redskins to score points by committee.

The Redskins have also fallen short around the perimeter.

“Right now we don’t have anybody that is really knocking down an outside shot,” Hinkle said. “We have to make them play defense for more than one pass. We have to be more patient. We have to make them play defense.”

Liberal’s offensive possessions have been short, either drives to the basket or very few passes before a shot is taken, and the shots that are taken are available any time. Hinkle wants to see his team work for the better shot.

One that has been driving inside and forcing the defense to work has been Larkin.

“He has a heart of gold, and he’s a fighter,” Hinkle said. “Sometimes it is not the most orthodox, but it is effective. I don’t mind if (the defense) steps over and he charges, I’m not going to fault a kid for that.”

Hinkle had a heart-to-heart visit with his team after the Perryton loss, but he also wanted them to get an understanding of their role on the team.

“I tried to be positive which was difficult,” Hinkle said. “I asked them if they ever heard of rank order. I told them their homework assignment was to come back, and if they don’t have it done they don’t need to come back, and rank order our 22 players. I want to see what they think. I know as coaches, we have our opinion — who should be playing, who do we trust. I want to see what they think.”

Effort has not been a problem, but execution has, and Hinkle said his team needs to start executing or building for the future.

“I told them we have some young kids dying to play and working hard,” he said. “I hope we wins some ball games. We play hard, but if we continue to lose games, I will lose with guys I will have for three more years. I don’t want to go to a youth movement, but we will challenge each other when we come back and see who wants to be a warrior next semester.”