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By EARL WATT

Daily Leader

The Lady Redskins watched a 17-point lead dwindle to three points before a key rebound and free throw put the game out of reach in a 29-25 Sub-State victory over Winfield in the final game at The Big House.

Kayla Varnes made the key rebound with 5.4 seconds to play when Justice Norah missed two free throws. Varnes was fouled with 2.9 seconds remaining in the game. She made the first free throw, missed the second, and the Lady Vikings attempted a three point-shot just after the final buzzer. It went in, which indicated just how important Varnes' free throw would have been if the Winfield shot would have been a fraction of a second sooner.

The Lady Redskins built the big lead in the first half with a tenacious defense that did not give any easy looks at the basket for Winfield.

The Lady Redskins scored the first 10 points of the game, and a buzzer-beating three-point shot by Kayla Payton put Liberal ahead 13-2.

Payton's three started an 11-2 run that gave the Lady Redskins a 21-4 lead midway through the second quarter.

But Justice Norah was whistled for her second foul when she bumped into a Winfield player setting a pick.

While Winfield only scored three more points by half, the Lady Redskins didn't score any, and

Liberal had a 21-7 halftime lead.

Norah returned to the floor and hit two baskets in the third — Liberal's only four points in the quarter.

Winfield's Brittany Estrada sparked the Lady Vikings to a 7-0 run to cut Liberal's lead to eight.

Liberal had its chances to extend its lead, but the Lady Redskins missed on six lay-up attempts after forcing turnovers.

With just under seven minutes to play, Norah was whistled for her fourth foul when she collided with a Lady Viking on another pick play at mid-court.

When Norah left, the Lady Redskins had a 25-22 lead.

When she returned four-and-a-half minutes later, the score was still 25-22.

Liberal coach Shane Stout wasn't looking for offense during those few minutes, he was looking to melt the clock.

"I told the girls to take a lay-up if it was there, otherwise, we just wanted to run the clock," Stout said.

Winfield had a couple of chances to cut into the lead, or to tie the game with a three, but shot after shot missed the net and ended up in the hands of a Lady Redskin.

Lady Redskins advance to Sub-State championship

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Malysa Williams gave the Lady Redskins a five-point lead with 44.1 seconds to play by hitting two free throws, and Norah made it six with a one-for-two effort at the line.

Winfield's Hannah Niederee hit a three with 6.6 seconds to play to cut the lead to three, and a quick foul sent Norah to the line with 5.4 seconds to play. Norah missed both, but Varnes came up with the big rebound and iced the game with a free throw.

Norah led the Redskins with 13 points, Kirsten Ross had six and Williams scored four.

The game gave seniors Nohemi Hernandez, Varnes, Williams, Payton, and Sherika Sanchez a win in the final game in the Big House.

"It felt amazing," Payton said. "It was nerve racking coming out. We lost our last three games, so we were ready to stop that streak and try to get to state."

While Norah was riding the bench in the second half, the Lady Redskins employed the same strategy as a hockey team trying to kill a penalty. The Lady Redskins played keep-away for about four minutes.

"We know Saturday we will have to stall a little bit," Payton said. "We were up enough that we could just run time off the clock."

The win sets up a Sub-State championship between Liberal and undefeated Andover at Andover Central at 5:45 p.m. Saturday.

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