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By EARL WATT

Leader & Times

No one has to tell Seward Lady Saints coach Toby Wynn how important Saturday's game against Butler could be for his team this season.

After two road losses in the first six games of the conference, Wynn knows that a loss at home would make the climb back to the top of the Jayhawk West by the Region VI tournament almost impossible.

So far, the Lady Saints have wins over Colby, Pratt, Dodge City and Barton, all teams that Seward leads in the standings.

But Seward has lost to Cloud and Garden City, two teams that sit ahead of the Lady Saints, and Seward has yet to play Butler, who is tied with the Lady Saints in conference play. The Lady Saints also have two games against No. 1 Hutchinson. The undefeated Lady Blue Dragons have shot out to a 20-0 start which includes a perfect 6-0 run through the Jayhawk West.

Seward had a chance to stay within a game of the Blue Dragons Wednesday and had a

17-point lead in the second half over the No. 12 Lady Broncbusters, but the game slipped away, forcing the Lady Saints to look up at four teams ahead of them in the conference standings.

“We played terrible,” Wynn said. “ In the second half especially, the last 15 minutes. We completely lost focus, we forgot what got us the lead. We stopped executing and defending, and started fouling them like crazy. They are a good team. We had our chance and gave it away tonight.

Garden City’s Tamara Jones lit up the Lady Saints for 25 points, something that has been rare. Seward has been exceptional at limiting their opponents’ top scorers and forcing others to step up. But the all American has her way in the paint and also made 12 of 13 free throws.

“She is a good player,” Wynn said. “We knew he was. We knew she would make plays. We didn’t make the plays we needed to to win the game.”

With 19 games behind the Lady Saints, Wynn now expected his team to start living up to the expectations of one of the most successful women’s basketball programs in the nation.

“We played enough games now that nobody is really a freshman any more,” he said. “They have played enough now to know what is expected. When we go 5-25 from three, miss chip shots inside, it is frustrating to watch, we have opportunities but not making the plays we need to win a game on the road. It’s disheartening to throw this game away.”

While the loss at Garden City was a tough one to swallow, there is no time to “lick our wounds,” Wynn said. Butler will be coming to Liberal Saturday for a homecoming match-up that will be critical if Seward wants to stay in the race for the Jayhawk West title, or even a top two finish.

A win and the Lady Saints remain within striking distance of first, and they would head to Hutchinson Wednesday with purpose.

Lady Saints need a win Saturday to keep pace

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A loss, and the Lady Saints will be three games behind Hutchinson with a narrow path back to the top and the need for help from other teams to stay in the upper echelon of the conference.

“We either get over the hump or go on a tough losing streak like we have never seen at Seward County before,” Wynn said.

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