

By ROY ALLEN

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The Seward County Lady Saints journey for a chance to play at the NJCAA National Tournament in Casper, Wyoming started on Sunday. They were one of four remaining teams in the 2013 NJCAA Region VI Championship Tournament.



First up for the third-seeded Lady Saints was second-seeded Colby, a team who stung Seward twice in five sets during the regular season.

Seward looked shell shocked out of the gates in the first, as Colby raced out to a 17-8 lead, and then took the first set 25-12, to take a 1-0 lead. The Lady Saints managed a season-low four kills in the set.

The second wasn't any better for Seward as Colby opened up a 12-7 lead midway through the set after a 7-2 run. Once again, Colby coasted to an easy 25-18 win.

It looked like the Lady Saints were going to go down without a fight as Colby once again controlled the pace early in the third, taking a 10-6 lead in the set. Down 19-13, and looking like they were done, the Lady Saints came back.

Lady Saints season comes to an end at Region VI Championships

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Seward scored three straight to make it 19-16, and then got all the way to within one at 22-21. Seward fought off a pair of match points, and came away with a 26-24 win to extend the match to a fourth set.

Early on in the fourth, a tough no call that went against the Lady Saints seemed to have them flustered as they watched a 4-4 tie turn into a 9-4 Colby lead in the blink of an eye. Seward regrouped though, and kept the score close, trailing 15-13 midway through the set.

Three points later, a block on the outside by Nacole Miller and Morgan Riley gave Seward their first lead of the set at 16-15. The Lady Saints used the momentum to go on a 9-0 run and take the set, 25-21.

For the third time this season, Seward and Colby were set for a dramatic fifth set finish. Colby jumped out to an 8-1 lead, and continued to pummel the Lady Saints to open up an 11-1 lead. Seward came back swinging, but the early damage was just too much as Colby finished out a 15-8 win to take the match 3-2.

The Lady Saints finished with just 37 kills as a team, led by 11 from Carolina Gasparini and eight each from Morgan Riley and Annelise Sanchez. Miller dished out 38 of Seward's 39 assists on the night, while Kari Anderson led the Lady Saints with 19 digs. T

he Lady Saints finished with 14 blocks as a team, just two off of their season high of 16. Riley had nine of those blocks, while Sanchez had four.

Seward then faced the fourth-seeded Barton Cougars in the first elimination match of the tournament.

Seward fell behind the Cougars 9-3 right off the bat. The Lady Saints fought back, and tied the set at 14-14. Barton continued to push, and finished off the Lady Saints 25-19 to take the first set.

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The second set was a tight one throughout. Two straight Barton errors early on broke a 6-6 tie, and gave the Lady Saints an 8-6 advantage. The Cougars came back to tie the set at 11-11 midway through, and used the momentum to grab a 17-15 lead later on in the set. The Lady Saints remained close, but couldn't get over the hump as Barton carried a 22-19 lead into the later portions of the set before finishing Seward off 25-21.

While down 2-0 to the Cougars, the Lady Saints were not in an unfamiliar spot, as just two months before Barton had Seward down 2-0 before the Lady Saints stormed back to win three straight sets, and the match 3-2.

Barton jumped out to an 8-4 lead in the third. The Cougars led 13-10, and pushed their lead to four at 21-17. The Lady Saints gave it one last push with their season on the line, and scored four straight points to knot the set at 21-21. However, Barton scored the next four points of the set, finishing strong to win 25-21, and sweep Seward out of the tournament with a 3-0 victory.

Gasparini once again led the Lady Saints in kills, this time with nine in the loss while, Riley and Sanchez finished their Seward careers with six kills each against the Cougars. Miller had all 28 of the Lady Saints assists in the defeat, and Kari Anderson was the only Seward player to reach double figures in digs with 17.

The Lady Saints were the first team eliminated from the tournament, and finished fourth. Seward ends the 2013 campaign with a 22-17 overall record.