

By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Seward has never backed away from an early-season challenge, and Saturday's game against No. 9 South Plains was no exception.



Seward led by eight points late in the first half but could not hold on in a 76-57 loss.

South Plains had a 23-21 lead with 5:12 to play in the first half after a basket from Andre Spight, but William Benjamin tied the game with a pair of free throws.

Niem Stevenson followed with a dunk that gave the Saints a 25-23 lead, and after a missed South Plains shot, Stevenson followed with another basket in the paint.

Saints fade in second half

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Kevin Smith added two more free throws, and the Saints had a 29-23 lead.

Brian Bridgeforth followed with a basket with 2:17 to play, and the Saints had a 31-23 lead.

But South Plains responded with a 13-0 run that kept the Saints scoreless for four minutes, and by the time Malcolm Hill-Bey hit one of two free throw attempts, Seward trailed 36-32.

Hill-Bey added two more free throws to start another Saints run and after a three-pointer from Smith with 16:04 to play, the Saints led 41-38.

The Plainsmen took their turn at a run, and jumped out to a 55-49 lead with 10:46 to play.

Stevenson killed the run with a dunk to cut the lead to 55-51, but the Saints didn't make another field goal for eight minutes.

During the time, South Plains went on an 18-4 run, holding Seward to four free throws out of 14 attempts.

That stretch ended Seward's shot at an upset in the 76-57 loss.

Stevenson led the Saints with 14 points, and Smith added 11.

Seward (3-3) will travel to Dodge City Friday to face Butler and will play again Saturday in Dodge against Raleigh's Finest.