By ROY ALLEN

• Seward assistant athletic director

Seward County Head Coach Toby Wynn knew that his team would have their hands full and that they would be in a grinding battle as they took the court Saturday night in Oceanside, Calif., in the Holiday Festival Tournament semifinals against Eastern Arizona.

Both of those premonitions were right, but unfortunately for Lady Saint fans, Seward fell 81-75 as the Gila Monsters outlasted them in what was a somewhat ugly battle between the two 10-plus win teams.

An athletic and physical Eastern Arizona team took the court Saturday afternoon at MiraCosta College looking to derail a well oiled machine in the 12-0 Seward County Lady Saints. The Gila Monsters got off to the better start, using an early 6-0 run to take an 8-2 lead three minutes into the game.

The Lady Saints continued to play from behind the entire first half, seeing the Eastern Arizona lead swell to as many as 12 at 23-11 midway through the half. Despite failing to score a field goal in more than five minutes, the Lady Saints found a way to keep themselves close enough to Eastern Arizona and slowly worked their way back into the game, using a late 14-3 run to close the Gila Monster lead to just one before the break at 33-32.

Seward actually outshot Eastern Arizona in the first half 44 percent to 39 percent, but the Gila Monsters took eight more shots than the Lady Saints, grabbing nine first-half offensive rebounds and turning them into 12 second chance points.

The Lady Saints were dreadful from the free throw line in the first half, going just 12-21 and also coughed up 13 turnovers.

The Lady Saints carried their momentum from the first half right into the second, wasting no time in drawing even with the Gila Monsters at 36 just two minutes in and taking their first lead of the contest moments later.

The Lady Saints started to roll, and they went up by as many as five at 47-42. It appeared they were smooth sailing to their 13th win of the year.

Eastern Arizona had different plans.

The Gila Monsters turned their intensity and aggression dials up a notch, driving to the basket at will, either finishing at the rim or drawing contact and getting to the line as the whistles seemed to change in their favor.

Eastern tied the game up at 54 and took advantage of helter skelter play from both sides to go back in front 60-57 with under 7 minutes to play.

The Gila Monsters extended their lead to 11, and just when it looked like the Lady Saints were out of it, they put together a 6-0 run to get back to within five at 73-68. An ill-timed offensive foul against the Lady Saints thwarted their chance to get the game back to a one possession contest, and Eastern Arizona milked the clock to come away with an 81-75 win to end Seward's undefeated run.

Korina Chapman gave it her best shot in the loss, scoring a career high 27 points for Seward while Alana Simon scored 17 and Shanise Brooks had 11.

The Lady Saints finished the game shooting 49 percent from the field as a team, but they turned the ball over 29 times and allowed Eastern Arizona 21 offensive rebounds, giving the Gila Monsters the chance to get off 10 more field goal attempts.

Eastern Arizona was unusually good shooting the basketball from the outside, finishing the game making 37 percent from downtown after coming into the game shooting just 23 percent. Shaunice Robinson scored a career high 30 for the Gila Monsters while Natalia Hausmann scored 10 over her season average with 17.

Seward fell for the first time this season at 12-1 while Eastern Arizona picks up their 11th win of the season, improving to 11-3.