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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Bryan Zollinger doesn't candy-coat his discussions with his players, and while the Saints may have knocked off Cloud County 82-74 Wednesday in the Greenhouse, Zollinger spent much of his time barking at his players for plays they should have made.

It's that drive that has kept Seward competitive and three-time defending Jayhawk West champions, and even though the Saints were winning on the scoreboard, Zollinger made sure each player knew if they were not living up to expectations.

After one break-away opportunity ended with one pass too many and a turnover, Zollinger bellowed, "Make a lay-up."

And when Cloud was pushing hard to the basket late in the game in an attempt to rally and continued to be sent to the line for free throws, Zollinger yelled, "Stop fouling."

All obvious, but perhaps his players needed to hear it again.

It's the Zollinger standard to play to a higher level despite what the scoreboard says, and Wednesday night in the Greenhouse was a night where the Saints players learned that defeating a team like Cloud by eight that has struggled was not the goal.

And it was a game that Seward never trailed.

Niem Stevenson began the evening with a three-pointer to spark his 21-point night. Malcolm Hill-Bey added an old-fashioned three and two more free throws to put Seward ahead 10-4.

Cloud went on a 5-0 run to cut the lead to one, but Stevenson knocked down another three against the Cloud zone that sparked a 13-2 run and included another Stevenson three and a Secean Johnson three.

Midway through the first half, Seward had built a 23-11 lead.

The Saints continued to outpace the Thunderbirds for the next five minutes including a five-for-seven performance at the free throw line to double up Cloud, 34-17 with 1:24 to play in the half.

Cloud was able to trim the lead to 37-24 at half, and Seward would never get the lead back to 17 in the second half.

And the frustration set in for Zollinger.

With 16:02 to play, Cloud cut Seward's lead to nine, but back-to-back baskets by Evan Allen kept Seward's lead in double digits, 44-33.

The 10-point cushion was the best the Saints could do for most of the second half.

The Saints extended the lead to 15 with 9:09 to play with a pair of free throws from Quentin Purtue and had another 15-point lead with 8:12 to play after a Johnson basket.

Cloud's next five points all came at the free throw line, and the Saints missed four straight at the line.

With 4:15 to play, Seward again had a 15-point lead, but Cloud hit a three and a free throw to narrow the lead to 11, 68-57.

Lorenzo Dillard hit two free throws with 2:23 to play, and Cloud narrowed the lead to 10, 71-61.

Seward pushed the lead back to 74-61 with 2:04 to play with a basket from Stevenson, but three straight baskets from Shaun Stewart in the next 40 seconds narrowed Seward's lead to seven.

Cloud cut the lead to six with 29.9 seconds to play, and after Stevenson missed two free throws had a chance to cut the lead to one possession, but a defensive stop and foul allowed Purtue to make two free throws with 13.2 seconds, and a final defensive stop secured the 82-74 win.

Stevenson led Seward with 21 points. Johnson added 18, and Purtue scored 17.

The Saints (15-7, 5-1) will travel to Pratt (14-8, 4-2) Saturday.

Saints roll past Cloud, remain on top of West
Thursday, 30 January 2014 13:56

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