By ROY ALLEN

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HUTCHINSON — Despite Seward coach Bryan Zollinger's 0-6 record against Hutchinson in the Sports Arena prior to Saturday's Jayhawk West battle, the Saints completed a season sweep over the Blue Dragons on the road Saturday to take possession of first place with an 84-82 win.

Saturday, Zollinger left the monkey at the door, getting a conference high 28 points from freshman Niem Stevenson to lead a second half comeback against Hutchinson to win 84-82 to sweep the season series for the first time since the 2004-2005 season.

Early on it was a two-man show. For the Saints it was Niem Stevenson putting on the display and for Hutchinson it was Cincinnati signee Coreonte DeBerry that was doing the work. Both players put the ball in the basket on their teams first two possessions and after 1:30 of play it was 4-4. After 2:30 of play it was Stevenson 6 and DeBerry 5 before the other eight players on the court got into the action.

Following a Secean Johnson drive and score with 15:11 left in the first half to tie the score at eight, the Dragons went on a 16-5 run against the Saints in which Seward managed just two field goals to allow Hutchinson to take a 24-13 lead with 8:29 remaining in the half.

The Saints righted the ship on the offensive end, but couldn't stop the Dragons on the other end as they traded baskets until Hutch had a 30-17 lead with 6:06 to go in the half.

With the crowd getting louder and the Dragons gaining momentum, the Saints kept on fighting. Seward held Hutch without a single point over the next 2:44 as they went on a 15-0 run led by six points each from Brian Bridgeforth and Niem Stevenson as well as three from Evan Allen to put the Saints up 33-32. Hutchinson answered and went on a 5-1 run of their own into the halftime break to take a 38-34 lead.

The half featured eight lead changes and four ties with the Saints shooting 59 percent from the field and Hutchinson cashing in at the free throw line on 15 of 17 chances to hold the four-point lead at the break.

A Hill-Bey basket early in the second half had the Hutch lead down to one and Stevenson picked up an offensive rebound on the Saints next possession and scored to give Seward the lead back 43-42 with 17:56 to go in the game.

The two teams traded the lead back and forth five times in the next five minutes until eventually they found themselves deadlocked at 58 with 11:25 to go.

Hutch grabbed a three-point lead out of the media break, and the Dragons used the momentum to stretch their lead to seven at 71-64 with 7:30 remaining in the game.

Seward quickly went on a 9-0 run, led by a three from Hill-Bey and another acrobatic Stevenson display for a bucket to make it 73-71 Seward with 6:05 remaining.

Hutch tied it back up and took the lead before a tip-in by Johnson tied the game for the 11th time at 75 with just under 5:00 to go.

It was tied at 80 when a free throw from Hill-Bey broke the deadlock and gave the Saints an 81-80 lead with 2:09 left.

The Saints turned their intensity up on the defensive end and got a pair of stops before two

Purtue free throws stretched their lead to 83-80 with 47 seconds left. All-American Kadeem Allen picked up two free throws of his own for Hutch with 37 seconds remaining to make it a one-point game, and the Saints coughed the ball up on their ensuing trip down the court. On the fast break, the Dragons DeBerry came racing up the court and bowled over Johnson who had gotten position in the lane and an offensive foul was called sending the ball back to Seward County.

Hill-Bey was fouled and made one of two from the line with 24 seconds left to put the Saints up by two with the ball in the Dragons hands with a chance for the final shot. They wanted the final shot of the game and they got it to Allen, but rather than a drive, Allen went for the win, pulling up from the top of the key for a three that rimmed around and out with the Saints grabbing the rebound and holding on for the 84-82 win.

The game was tied 17 times on the night and there were 14 lead changes. The Saints shot 48 percent from the field while Hutch shot 42 percent and struggled to just two of 12 beyond the arc, good for 17 percent.

The Saints were good at the free throw line, an area of struggles at times this season. Seward went 20 for 26 to make 77 percent of their chances at the line while Hutch was good as well, hitting 26 of 31 for 84 percent.

Stevenson led all scorers in the game with 28 points and also tied for the team lead with eight rebounds. Johnson scored 14 points on five-of-10 shooting and Bridgeforth finished with 12 points and six rebounds before fouling out for Seward.

For Hutch, Allen was held to his fourth lowest scoring output of the season at 22 points, going just five-for-17 from the field and turning the ball over eight times. DeBerry finished a big night with 21 points, seven rebounds, and four blocked shots.

The win snaps a seven-game regular season losing streak for Seward in the Sports Arena. The Saints improve to just 5-41 all-time against the Blue Dragons in Hutchinson.

Seward is 17-8 overall and improved to 7-2 in Jayhawk West play where they re-take the lead in the conference race after Dodge City upset Pratt in the Beaverdome Saturday night. Hutch dropped their fourth game of the year and only their second in the Sports Arena as they fall to 20-4 and 6-2 in Jayhawk West play.

Next up for the Saints is a home date with rival Garden City on Wednesday in the Greenhouse. Free tickets are available courtesy of buyout sponsor Billy's at their Liberal location or at Community Bank, KSCB, or North Hutch's.