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By ROY ALLEN

- Seward assistant athletic director

For the second time this season the Seward County Lady Saints and Hutchinson Lady Blue Dragons locked up on the court in a game with first place in the Jayhawk West on the line. For the second time this season, both teams were ranked inside the NJCAA's top 10 at the time of the contest. For the second time this season, Seward held a halftime lead on the favored Dragons. And for the second time this season, it was Hutchinson coming out of the game with a win.



Seward was up by four at the half and by as many as seven in the second half, but on their home court, the Lady Dragons stormed back, downing Seward 81-71 in the Sports Arena Saturday night to remain perfect on the season while all but dashing the Lady Saints chances of a run at the 2014 Jayhawk West crown.

Seward got off to a great start in the highly anticipated battle between the Lady Saints and Lady Dragons. Alana Simon scored on each of the Lady Saints first two possessions to give Seward the early 4-0 lead, and Seward remained up by four as Shanise Brooks and Brianna Scott scored later on after Hutch tied the game.

However, an 8-0 run for the Lady Dragons erased the Seward lead and had Hutchinson on top 12-8 with 15:28 to go in the first half. A big three by Scott broke the Dragons momentum and a finish with the left hand for Korina Chapman with 11:01 left in the half tied the game at 16.

Hutchinson retook a five point lead with 5:28 to go in the period, but the Lady Saints kept on plugging, cutting back into the Dragon advantage before Fabiana Monte tied the game at 30 for Seward with 3:16 to go in the half. A Hutch free throw gave them the lead back but five straight points from Scott to close out the half gave Seward the lead and the momentum going into the locker rooms at the half with the Lady Saints in front 37-33.

Hutch was the first to score in the second half, but Scott started the half just where she left off the first, on fire, hitting a pull-up three from the wing on the Lady Saints first trip down the floor to make it a five-point game. Scott scored again with under 18:00 to go and it looked like the Lady Saints were in prime position for the upset as they led 42-35.

After Hutch got back to within three, a huge three from Simon pushed the Seward lead back to six with 15:44 remaining. In the next 3:39 Seward not only saw their six-point lead go up in smoke, but they also saw the Lady Dragons jump back in front by two, 53-51 with 12:05 left.

The teams traded baskets to the media timeout where Hutchinson continued to lead by two. Out of the timeout the Lady Dragons scored four straight and we were back to the point where Game 1 finished with Hutch on top 61-55. A bucket on the inside by Chapman and a three from the sophomore drew the Lady Saints back to within one, but once again, Hutch had an answer for the Seward run, going on a 5-0 jolt of their own to stretch the lead back to six, 66-60.

The Lady Saints got the lead back down to three after a pair of Kyndal Davis free throws with 3:04 left to make it 70-67, but the Dragons answered again and Seward simply looked like they ran out of steam. Hutch outscored Seward 11-4 down the stretch and the Lady Dragons kept their undefeated dreams alive, downing the Lady Saints 81-71 for their 96th consecutive win at the Sports Arena.

There were two main areas on the stat sheet that told the story of the game for Seward. Hutchinson finished with 14 offensive rebounds which led to 16 second chance points and Seward turned it over 20 times, leading to 21 points for the Lady Dragons. In those two areas, Hutchinson outscored Seward 37-18.

Simon paced Seward with 22 points, her second best output of the season while Scott stepped up with 19 and Chapman with 13. Brooks finished with seven points, 10 rebounds, and six

blocked shots for Seward.

The first time the two teams played, Seward was killed by Jen'Von'Te Hill's career night, Saturday it was freshman Kalani Purcell doing the honors. Purcell finished with 22 points, 16 rebounds, and six assists for the Lady Dragons in the victory.

The Lady Saints dropped their 10th straight to Hutchinson, falling to 22-3 overall on the season and 7-2 in Jayhawk West action. Hutchinson improved to 22-0 overall and 8-0 in conference play, all but wrapping up the Jayhawk West title for the fourth consecutive season.

Next up for the Lady Saints is a home date with Garden City on Wednesday. The Lady Saints and Lady Busters will tip off at 6 p.m. with free tickets available courtesy of buyout sponsor Billy's at their Village Plaza location as well as at Community Bank, KSCB, and North Hutch's.

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