The Saints bench reacts after Robert Sigala slam dunks the ball in the final 12 seconds to give the Saints a six-point lead. Seward defeated the first-place Butler Grizzlies 80-75. Daily Leader photo/Rustin Watt

By EARL WATT

Daily Leader

A team that seemed to have lost is focus in a season filled with drama on and off the court, and after dropping a conference game to Garden City, the Seward County Saints proved they could compete with anyone in the league with an 80-75 win over Jayhawk West champion Butler.

Instead of limping into the Region 6 tournament, the Saints will host Kansas City Tuesday with newfound confidence after a gritty comeback led by Robert Sigala who was a perfect five for five from beyond the three-point line against the Grizzlies.

Sigala cemented the victory with 12.4 seconds to play when Marcus James hit the deck after a loose ball that he fumbled to Marky Nolen. Nolen tussled with Butler's Josh Gibbs for the ball,

and as Nolen lost his balance and landed on the hardwood, he rolled the ball forward to a wide open Sigala at mid-court. Sigala headed to the goal, launched himself toward the rim, and slammed the ball home to give the Saints an 80-74 lead.

The jam was the exclamation point on Sigala's standout performance that raised the eyebrows of his teammate Latiq Agard who also had a big night.

"Rob is playing well," Agard said. "I knew we had it when Rob looked at me and said, 'I got this.' Marky is scrappy like a junk yard dog. When he rolled it to Rob, I knew he was going to dunk it."

But the Saints had to come back, twice, to get the much-needed win.

Seward fell behind early 4-0 before Agard got on track to score Seward's first six points that gave the Saints a 6-4 lead.

Butler came back to take a 16-13 lead, but Sigala hit back-to-back threes followed by another Agard jumper that put the Saints up 21-16.

Sigala added another three before halftime, and a strong defensive effort gave the Saints a 34-26 halftime lead.

But the Gizzlies were able to erase the deficit and took a 66-57 lead after a three-pointer by Kyle Sloan with less than eight minutes to play.

Seward responded with a 10-0 run, with seven of those coming from Sigala.

After two more lead changes, Butler took a 71-69 lead, and Sigala put Seward back on top with another three with 4:24 to play.

Butler tied the game, 72-72 before Agard attempted a basket and was fouled by Dushawn Brooks. The Grizzly disagreed with the call and was whistled for a technical foul. Agard hit three of the four shots, and with 28.8 seconds to play Agard added another free throw to give the Saints a 78-74 lead.

Seward put the game out of reach with Sigala's slam.

"Our guys played hard on the defensive end," Seward coach Brian Zollinger said. "Latiq's free throws were huge. We weren't under the pressure of a one possession game."

Playing against first-place Butler, and losing the eight-point lead, it might have been easy for the Saints to fold. Instead, they stepped up to the challenge and found a way to win.

"We talk all the time that sports has ebbs and flows," Zollinger said. "You have to dig and scratch in the hard times. You can't just be enthusiastic when things are going your way."

Sigala and Agard led the Saints with 21 points each. Donte McCarter and Marky Nolen each added 10. Marcus James had nine.

"This was huge going in to the playoffs," Sigala said. "It's a big boost of confidence. If we play hard and as a team, we can go as far as we want."

Seward hosts Kansas City to open the Region 6 tournament at 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Green House.