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By RUSTIN WATT

- Daily Leader

Out of character. That would describe the Lady Saints first half against Labette in the Region 6 championship. Seward shot five air balls and shot 24 percent from the field in the first 20 minutes. The Lady Saints were able to battle back. Their national tournament hopes rested on the final 45 seconds with Seward down three. Seward was unable to sink a shot in the time of desperation as their season came to close, falling 54-49.



“The first half they routed us,” Seward assistant head coach Penny Jones said. “We wanted to come out and be aggressive, get after it and take it to them. It was the complete opposite. They were taking it to us.”

Seward shot out of the gate up 4-0 in the first minute before Labette went on a 15-0 run in seven minutes to go up 15-4. It was all Labette the first half, as Seward was off the mark and was outrebounded 24-13.

Seward made it a two possession game quickly to begin the second half following a Sheila Washington steal she took coast-to-coast and Seward cut the Labette lead to 30-24.

A Nadia Rosario basket in the paint made it a two-point contest, 32-30 with a little over 14 minutes to play.

Seward kept it a one-possession game most of the way, answering nearly every Lady Cardinal basket.

Seward's shot at a national tournament berth came down to the final 45 seconds.

The Lady Saints were down three, 52-49, and had possession. Seward looked for a three as four offensive rebounds led to four opportunities, all off the mark.

With 11.1 seconds to play, Seward head coach Toby Wynn called for a timeout. Off the inbounds, Seward found their best outside shooter in Kendra Spresser in the corner. Rather than catch and shoot, Spresser went to the corner, contact was made, Spresser went to the floor, and Labette took over.

"I should have caught and shot," Spresser said. "I had their big girl coming out at me, and I didn't want it to get blocked, I shouldn't have hesitated. I got a little push in the corner, but you're not going to get those kind of calls that late."

Seward was forced to foul on the ensuing inbounds, and Washington immediately fouled a Lady Cardinal. A whistle sounded as referees huddled to discuss the play. Labette inbounded to a player whose toe was on the baseline, and Seward regained possession with 8.5 seconds to play.

Seward again had an opportunity to tie and inbounded from under their own basket. The Lady Saints got it to playmaker Rachel Barnes near the top of the key. Barnes pumped and got Labette's Kellindra Zachery in the air, paused till Zachary hit the floor and took the shot. The shot didn't catch anything but a Lady Cardinals grasp.

Again Seward was forced to foul and sent Labette's Satoria Bell to the line with just over three seconds on the clock. Bell sunk both shots in a one-and-one, and sealed the game for the Lady Cardinals as Megan Lassley took the inbounds and stormed up the floor and took a shot from half-court that came up short, and the Lady Saints season was over in the Region 6 championship.

"You put your whole season around one goal," Spresser said. "To make the national tournament, obviously it wasn't the outcome we wanted, but no one can deny that we had a great season."

Rachel Barnes led the Lady Saints with 13 points. Nadia Rosario played big and went toe-to-toe the whole night with the tournament MVP Zachary, and scored 11 along with seven rebounds. Lassley scored nine and Washington and Vaneza Junior both contributed eight.

"It wasn't in the cards for us tonight," Lady Saints head coach Toby Wynn said. "I'm very proud of our players, they had a great season, a great year. It just didn't end the way we wanted it to."

Wynn and the Lady Saints aim to get past the barrier next year, having fallen in the Region 6 championship back-to-back seasons.

"We have to go back and get to work," Wynn said. "We have to go out and recruit and find better players to get back here, get over the hump and get to Salina."

"It's definitely going to fuel the fire," freshman Spresser said. "Losing is not something we like at all. Next year we're definitely going to strive for more to get to the national tournament."

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