



Jamel Horton dribbles the ball against the Hutchinson defense Saturday in the Greenhouse. The Saints took a six-point lead at half but No. 1 Hutchinson battled back in the second half to knock off the Saints 76-69. L&T photo/Earl Watt

By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

After last year's disappointing 9-22 season, the Seward County Saints have shown marked improvement early, and despite a seven-point loss to the defending national champion Hutchinson Blue Dragons Saturday, the competitiveness of the game has provided hope for the season.

The Saints battled the Hutchinson to a 16-13 lead midway through the first half before going on a 12-2 run that included for three from the Saints from Hegel Agustin, Mohamed Selmi, Devin Bethely and Isiah Small, and the Saints had a 28-15 lead.

But Hutchinson answered right back with a 12-0 run while the Saints went on a five-minute drought, and with 1:37 to play in the first half, Seward's lead was reduced to 28-27.

Augustin ended the drought with an old-fashioned three-point play, and the Saints finished the half on a 7-2 run to take a 35-29 lead.

But Hutchinson started to use their size advantage and aggressiveness, forcing the ball to the basket and getting fouled early in the second half to spark a 9-0 run that included five free throws, and Hutchinson had a 38-35 lead.

The lead changed hands five times in the second half, but after Seward's Bethely hit a three to give the Saints a 47-43 lead with 12:56 to play, Hutchinson put together a 7-0 run that included two three pointers, and the Blue Dragons had a 53-47 lead.

The Saints kept the score close and cut the lead to 59-55 after a pair of Anthony Thomas free throws, and a basket by Ke'Sean Davis with 2:44 to play kept the difference at four, 66-62.

But Hutchinson's JJ Rymes continued to push to the basket and scored the next four points, and another Hutchinson bucket by Devonte Badoo gave the Blue Dragons a 72-62 lead with 1:14 to play.

Seward cut the lead to seven by the time the buzzer sounded for a 76-69 loss.

Bethely led the saints with 21 points. Isiah Small came off the bench to score 12, and Davis had 10. Augustin had 12 rebounds.

Seward (4-1, 0-1) will host Butler (3-1, 0-1) at 8 p.m. Wednesday.

Free tickets are available at Hutch's and Pizza Hut locations courtesy of Conestoga.