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Daily Leader photo/Earl Watt

Latiq Agard sits with Seward County students behind the Saints bench Saturday night. Seward's leading scorer has been sidelined with an ankle injury and has had to watch his team struggle during his absence.

By EARL WATT

• Daily Leader

Missing a key player can be tough on any team.

But it just might be tougher on the athlete who is forced to the sideline.

The Seward County Saints have had to play the past three games without the services of the team's leading scorer and leader Latiq Agard.

He will be out of the line-up again Wednesday when the Saints host Pratt in an effort to even up the conference record at 2-2.

Prior to Agard's injury, the Saints were riding a wave of success, and Agard was the leading scorer during a 13-0 start to the season. Agard's last complete game was played right before the holiday break — a loss to No. 18 College of Southern Idaho at the Greenhouse. It was a competitive game with the Saints falling by five, 84-79.

But Agard strained his ankle, and although he attempted to play the conference opener on the road against Hutchinson, he couldn't complete the game.

Seward lost 76-69.

The Saints then hosted Barton County, another critical early-conference match-up without Agard.

But the Saints lost in overtime.

Seward rebounded Saturday with a 96-80 win over Colby with its star athlete relegated to sitting in the student section behind the Saints bench.

"This might be the toughest thing I've ever been through," Agard said. Agard might not be on the floor, but he has done what he can to support his teammates during a game.

"Right now I cheer them on to keep competing," he said. "We have a lot of talent, so I know we can compete."

Seward coach Bryan Zollinger has been working around the hole left by Agard, and the team has come together to make up for the missing offensive and defensive presence.

But Agard's natural leadership on the floor is missing as well, and

that can be a more difficult role to fill.

“My teammates look up to me, and they listen to what I have to say,” Agard said. “I tell them where we can score, where we can step it up on defense, where we can be a better team to win games.”

Both Agard and Antonio Smith have filled the role of on-court general, and while Agard has been in rehab for his ankle, other Saints are stepping up to develop the necessary confidence to hold down the fort until Agard returns, or to be prepared should any other injury or foul trouble sideline a Saint.

“The same expectation is there for everyone,” Zollinger said. “From the first to the 15th, whoever goes in has to perform at a high level.” To perform at that level requires self-confidence, something Agard has been trying to build in his teammates.

“I try to tell everybody they are good enough to fill the roles and score my points,” he said. “We tell each other to get up. Coach Z tells us it’s all about confidence.”

Agard may return as early as next week, but until then, Seward will have to continue to battle without their general on the court, and while the road was difficult at first, Seward has adjusted to life without Agard.

His return, then, should make the team that much more dangerous in the race for the Jayhawk West title.

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