

Saints Volleyball Preview

The Seward County volleyball program comes into this season led by 5 returning players off a 36 win team from last season. The 36 wins was the most since 2002 when the Lady Saints finished 6th in the NJCAA National Tournament. Three of those five returners, Lindsey Miller, LaKendra Sanders, and Amanda Savage, come back as sophomores with All-Region accolades after stellar freshman campaigns.

Again this season, the Jayhawk West will see a number of teams vying for the right to go to the NJCAA National Tournament. Last year's tournament champion Hutchinson returns just one player with significant experience but has six players coming back off of last year's team and a strong recruiting class to try and keep them on top. Upstart Pratt comes off their best season in recent years with Jayhawk Freshman of the Year Katerin Trejos and All-Region setter Juliana Chavez returning to the mix. Barton County is just two years off a trip to the National Tournament and should be much improved from last year's 4-8 squad. Dodge City, Colby, and Garden City round out the remainder of the West and should all be talented enough to throw a wrench in the top of the standings as the season moves along. This seasons schedule will see 14 less regular season matches for the Lady Saints, something that Head Coach Bert Luallen hopes will keep his team fresher come tournament time. Along with the always tough Jayhawk West teams on the slate, the Lady Saints will travel back to Lamar to defend their opening weekend tournament title before heading to El Reno, Oklahoma for the Redlands Labor Day Classic. Seward County will travel to Sterling, Colorado for the Northeastern Tournament in mid-September and then host the Ozfest Invitational presented by Landmark Real Estate Center the second weekend of October when Western Nebraska, Redlands, Midland, and Arizona Western will invade the Greenhouse. They will finish their tournament schedule with a trip to Missouri-West Plains where they will go toe to toe with some of the nation's best. After finishing up their conference schedule they will see a change in scenery for the conference tournament that will be played in Dodge City this season rather than the usual site in the Sports Arena in Hutchinson.

Hard work and countless hours in high school gyms around the region netted the Seward County program 6 solid recruits and a reigning All-American JC transfer that should help them contend for a conference title this season. Three middle hitters, three outside hitters, and a setter make up Bert Luallen's 2009 incoming class that should be fun to watch during their stay here in Liberal.

Taryn Westerman (Liberal, Kansas) will be at the center of the Lady Saints offense this season as she returns with a wealth of experience after playing in 157 games as a freshman last season. She racked up nearly 500 assists and led Seward County regulars with a .286 hitting percentage and 192 kills in 2008. Maddy Taylor (Denton, Texas) comes in with high expectations from coach Bert Luallen as he plans on using the freshman right away in the middle of his 6-2 offense.

Coach Luallen on his setters, "For our team to step up and get to the next level, our setters are going to have to come up big and lead us. They are going to have to outwork and out think everyone else

on the floor. Such a mental position, the setters have to be three plays ahead, yet focused on the task at hand. Taryn knows our offense and returning hitters which will help a great deal and Maddy is a very accomplished player who has played high school and club ball at a very high level. Her demeanor on the court should help her succeed against the competition we will see throughout the year.”

Usually when you lose an All-American at a certain position you look for the next year to be a little short in that spot. However, with the return of 2nd team All-Region player Lindsey Miller (Dumas, Texas) and the transfer of Honorable Mention All-American Diana Castrillon (Segovia, Columbia) the Lady Saints shouldn't miss a beat. The pair of sophomores will be joined by Kelen Ricardo (Sao Paulo, Brazil) and Stacie Carver (Holliday, Texas) which should give Seward one of the strongest attacks in the league on the outside. This group has high expectations being that 11 All-Americans have come out of Seward County in the past 12 seasons, all of which have been outside hitters.

Coach Luallen on his outside hitters, “This is typically the go-to position on the volleyball court. We have four young ladies who are all very capable of getting the job done. Lindsey returns after being a solid #2 hitter last season and gained a lot of experience. She improved even more on that in the spring so we are excited to see what she can do this season. We are really excited to see how the three newcomers perform when we hit the court. Kelen, Diana, and Stacie each have a lot of offer. Diana is an All-American transfer from Miami-Dade and will be very solid. Stacie has more size and can give us a better block on that side and will have a chance to play in the middle as well. Kelen, I believe, could be another Luana Cavalcanti (2004 All-American), we'll see!

LaKendra Sanders (Lewisville, Texas) will anchor the middle for the Lady Saints in 2009 after a very promising freshman campaign where she was named to the All-Region team racking up 375 kills and 181 blocks. She will be joined by newcomers Stacie Carver and Sheina Fernandes (Porto Alegre, Brazil) who bring versatility and a new dimension to the Lady Saints game.

Coach Luallen on his middles, “This position is very important to our team both offensively and defensively. Lala (Sanders) had a great year last season and we are excited to see her back on the court with another year of experience under her belt. Stacie and Sheina have different styles but both are very effective at what they do. I'd like to see more aggression on the defensive side out of this position this season.”

Seward County brings back arguably the best libero in the conference this season in Amanda Savage (Wichita, Kansas) after she was the lone player at that position to be chosen on either All-Region team in 2008. She is joined by Adriann D'Amico (Piedmont, Missouri) who saw action in 62 games during her first season with the Lady Saints last year.

Coach Luallen on his libero/ds's, “I'm an old school guy. I believe defense is what wins championships. That's why this position is so crucial to our success. For every dig our team gets, that's a point the other team doesn't score and it gives us the potential to turn around and score;

resulting in a two-point swing. This is an area that we work on every day. We have two really good passers that can help turn a match around.”

Seward County will rely on four different players seeing time on the right-side this season, all of which bring different attributes to the table for coach Bert Luallen. Along with her setting duties the Lady Saints will sometimes look to Taryn Westerman to slide to the right-side for a key block or attack. Lexie Baldwin (Wichita, Kansas) is the Lady Saints tallest player at 6’2 and will be a tough player to hit over during the year. Katie Thomas (Mountain Home, Arkansas) brings a tall athletic body into the mix and will provide some versatility for the gals in green this season. After a promising pre-season, Luallen will also likely call on the talents of Kelen Ricardo to move from the outside to the right-side this season.

Coach Luallen on his right-side hitters, “This position is a key element to our defense as it ‘sets’ the block. I’m confident in the four young ladies we have for this position. They have a strong desire to excel and they have the size and skills that it takes to be effective. If they improve and perform to the level we would like to see out of this position, we will be a very strong defensive team this season.”

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