

Pratt Spoils Otherwise Heavenly Weekend for Saints

After going 3-0 and looking nearly flawless on day one of the 2009 Lamar Runnin' Lopes Invitational, the Seward County Lady Saints Volleyball Team had a little tougher task on day two but got through it as Champions, Co-Champions, or something like that, we will get to the details later.

Seward opened up Saturday's Championship bracket play with Seminole State, a team who went 2-1 during Friday's pool play. The two teams played close for most of the first set but Seminole took advantage of a little bit of sloppy Lady Saints play to take a late 21-16 advantage. Seward fought back and threatened taking set number one as they closed to within 23-20 but the Trojans from the Show Me State captured the sets final two points to take it 25-20. The teams again jostled the lead back and forth in the second set and were forced to extend past the normal 25 points to win before Stacie Carver and LaKendra Sanders combined on a block to give the Lady Saints the 26-24 win and force a third and deciding set. After winning the second set, the Lady Saints came out with fire in their eyes in the rubber game and quickly took a 6-3 lead, then 13-7, and finally finished the match win off with a 15-9 victory to move to 4-0. Diana Castrillon and Sanders led the charge with 7 kills apiece and came up big on the defensive end with a combined 8 blocks. Lindsey Miller was up to her usual solid all-around play as the Texan put 4 balls to the floor and prevented 11 Seminole kills with digs. Amanda Savage was tied for the team lead with Miller with 11 digs and also recorded 21 passes on serves without an error.

After a quality win in their first match, the Lady Saints had no time to celebrate as they had to prepare for a Laramie County team looking for revenge after the 25-15, 25-16 Seward win against the Golden Eagles Friday. It looked as if the Lady Saints might let down as they fell behind 7-1 to LCCC but back to back kills from Sheina Fernandes midway through the first set brought them to within one at 13-12. Laramie countered by putting together a run of their own and taking a 20-15 and then 23-18 lead late in the match and threatened to give the Lady Saints their 2nd straight 1st set loss. That's when the gals in green came alive and with a fury of offensive kills and defensive blocks took a 25-24 lead before finishing it off after a timeout with a 26-24 win. The Golden Eagles from Laramie wouldn't give up however and took another early lead in the second set at 8-3. Sophomore captain Lindsey Miller finished off back to back kills to bring the Lady Saints to within two at 10-8 and after being down 15-10 and 20-15 another burst by Seward knotted the game at 20. A pair of shanked passes from Seward County gave Laramie a 24-23 lead but with the game on the line the Lady Saints fought back to force extra points, where to the happiness of the Seward contingent in Lamar, came back to win the match 29-27. The Lady Saints international crew led the offense as Fernandes finished with a team high 11 kills while fellow Brazilian Kelen Ricardo had 6 and Columbian Diana Castrillon had 10. Both Lady Saint setters did a marvelous job against Laramie as the duo combined for a .516 set percentage on 19 assists from Maddy Taylor and 13 from Taryn Westerman. Amanda Savage recorded a season high 16 digs while Miller had her third straight game with at least 8 digs with a 10 spot in this one. The win set up a much anticipated matchup between the Lady Saints and Jayhawk West Conference foe Pratt in the nightcap and final game of the 2009 Runnin' Lopes Invitational.

The match lived up to its billing as the teams traded points in game number one but the Beavers of Pratt seemed to be just a step of head through the first part of game one but Sheina Fernandes sparked a 4 point run for the Lady Saints to tie the first set at 19 apiece. In the end, Seward service

errors and passing killed them as they fell in the first set 25-21. To say the least, the second set was just a tad different story. Behind stellar setting and precision attacks from the Lady Saints outside hitters, Seward stunned Pratt by coming out and taking a 19-7 lead. The shock and awe wouldn't stop there however as the Lady Saints closed out the match on a 6-1 run to finish off a 25-8 win and force a third and deciding game with the rival Beavers. The momentum wouldn't carry into the third set as Seward remained close but just couldn't get over the top, trailing by 2 points most of the match and eventually losing by that two point margin 15-13 as Pratt hands them their first loss of the season. In the defeat Fernandes again led the Lady Saints with 10 kills while Diana Castrillon recorded 9 without an error to go along with her 9 digs and Lindsey Miller notched a season high 8 kills alongside her 10 digs. The Taylor/Westerman setting combo again did a nice job for Head Coach Bert Luallen as they successfully put the ball on the hands of their hitters 22 times in 28 chances. Now all that is out of the way, we can discuss who won, didn't win, tied, shared, or whatever you want to call it, the tournament championship.

The tournament was set up in two pools to start Friday. The top two teams from each of those pools after pool play would make a new pool while the bottom two teams from each pool would make their own pool for Saturday. So for what we are concerned, the Lady Saints "Championship Pool" consisted of them, Pratt, Laramie County, and Seminole. Seward, Pratt, and Laramie all ended up 2-1 in Championship Pool play while Seminole was 0-3 which knocks them out of contention. Now this is where it gets complicated. Seward lost to Pratt, Pratt lost to Laramie, and Laramie lost to Seward so the head to head conversation is a draw. Pratt lost 4 games (sets), Laramie lost 4, and Seward lost just 3 in Championship Pool which would give Seward the advantage there. Head to head on the weekend with the three teams in question, Seward was 2-1, Pratt was 1-1, and Laramie was 1-2 which would seemingly give the advantage to Seward there. In the end, there was no real explanation from tournament staff, therefore you can look at it in pretty much anyway that you want to and I'm sure each team has their argument of why they feel they deserve the title.

After the tournament, three Lady Saints were named to the All-Tournament team as Sheina Fernandes, Diana Castrillon, and Kelen Ricardo picked up the honors in their first tournament with Seward County. Seward will next travel to Clarendon on Wednesday before making a trip to El Reno, Oklahoma to play in the Cougar Classic against a pair of teams ranked in the NJCAA top 25.

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