

Coaches Expect Three Peat from Saints

Following a season in which they captured the first back to back Jayhawk West Conference Championships in the illustrious history of the program, the Seward County Saints have been picked by the league's coaches as the top team once again as announced Monday at the annual KJCCC Basketball Media Day.

Seward was the trendy pick as the top team amongst the coaches after a season in which they went 31-7 and won the Region VI Championship before reaching the NJCAA National Tournament Final Four where they finished 3rd. The Saints return a trio of players from last year's team including point guard Kaheem Ransom, big man Edson Avila, and key reserve Briston White. Ransom, who was left off the All-Conference team a year ago because of a loaded 2012 backcourt class, returns as one of the top players in the conference this season. As a freshman, the lefty averaged 12.9 points and 4.9 rebounds per ballgame and poured in 25 points and had 12 rebounds for the Saints in the Region VI Championship a season ago. The 6'10 Avila, played in all 38, starting 25 games for Seward in 2011-2012. He averaged 6.1 points and 5.4 rebounds per game for Seward as a rookie and has already found his way onto the radar of major Division I powers recruiting list early in his sophomore season. White could be one of many x-factors for Seward this season. Playing just over 10 minutes per game last season, he is expected to have a larger role in this year's system and could surprise many teams with his versatility and athleticism.

Saints Head Coach Bryan Zollinger will have a stable of options to choose from this season when deciding which five players will be on the court as Seward has 18 players on their roster for preseason camp. The group of 14 newcomers will be led by transfers Leslee Smith and Jabari Peters, both of whom saw significant time at the Division I level as freshman last season. Three other second year players also join the bunch in Eric Adams who played at Bethany College last season, Thaddeus Smith who was a redshirt for Seward in 2011-2012, and the high flying Hendrix Emu who comes to the Saints after redshirting at Trinity Valley a season ago. The Saints true freshman class includes three of out of state guards in Jerry Cobb, Malcolm Hill-Bey, and Rockell Lee-Vaughn, as well as a trio of in-staters including Josh Sweet from Topeka, Kenlee West from Liberal, and Patrick Parker from Wichita. An impressive bunch of freshman forwards for the Saints includes 6'10 Brian Bridgeforth, 6'6 Quentin Purtue, as well as 6'5 local product Devondre Livingston.

In the polls the Saints were followed by the 2011-2012 runner-up Hutchinson who brings back four players from a 25 win team from a season ago, including 6'9 Alex Davis, an inside-out threat from Houston, Texas and a pair of impact guards in Rozell Nunn and AJ Spencer. Barton was the coaches choice as the #3 team in the league and for no other reason than point guard Algie Key. Key is the top returning scorer to the Jayhawk West this season and will be a focal

point of every opposing teams defensive strategy. Cloud County checks in at #4 on the list after nearly ending the Saints run in the Region Tournament a year ago, but the T-Birds will have to move on this season without a pair of standout guards in Richard Carter and Devon Branch that finished 1-2 in the league's scoring race last season. A team who struggled mightily in the second half of the 2011-2012 season, Dodge City was picked 5th by the coaches and will be under the direction of first year Head Coach Kyle Campbell this season. Another team who started hot but plummeted down the standings at the end of last season with six straight losses to close the year, Garden City, checks in at #6 in the coaches poll. The Busters will also be under new direction this season as former Division I Head Coach Rand Chappell takes over a team that returns only Liberal's Kowan Russell who averaged less than 1 point per game last season. Following a very disappointing 2011-2012 season, Butler comes in at #7 in the poll after being the only team left out of the Region VI Playoffs last year. Butler returns three good instate players including their second leading scorer Sean Osler. Pratt who was picked #8 brings back 12 points and 8 rebounds per game from Aaron Abram and hopes to have one of the top newcomers in 2012-2013 in 6'11 Lucas Stivrins from Scottsdale, Arizona. Colby rounds out the pack at #9 after a season in which a promising start to the season turned to disaster as they lost eight of their final nine games to finish in 6th place in the league. New Head Coach Rusty Grafel will have his hands full with just two returners this season, but will have plenty to choose from as the Trojans have a roster of 20 players to start camp.

On the East side of the conference, heavyweights Coffeyville, Cowley, and Independence were expectedly picked 1-2-3 with Neosho County, Labette, Johnson County, and Kansas City Kansas in the middle of the pack and Highland, Allen County, and Fort Scott rounding out the Saints opposite side.

The Saints kickoff their 2012-2013 campaign on Friday, November 2nd at home in the Pepsi Classic when they take on Fort Carson at 8:00.

SCCC/ATS