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Seward Softball Splits in Odessa

The Seward County Lady Saints Softball team got their 2013 season started early this year with a February 1 kick off in Odessa, Texas where they played a pair of split double headers, going one up and one down in each against the Odessa Lady Wranglers and the Murray State Lady Aggies. Friday Seward opened the year with a 7-6 win over Murray State before suffering their first loss of '13 to Odessa 9-1 in the back end of the double dip. On Saturday they dropped their second straight to the Lady Wranglers 8-3, but bounced back with a 13-9 win over the Lady Aggies to finish the weekend 2-2.

The Lady Saints struck first in their opening game of the season against the Murray State Lady Aggies, as Jenna Keen walked to start the Seward 2nd and Samantha Phelps doubled to set the table for Rachel Shockley who picked up her second hit of the game with an RBI double to right center to clear the bases and put the Lady Saints on top 2-0. Marissa Chavez singled behind Shockley, but the Seward catcher was gunned down at the plate trying to score and the Lady Saints remained in front 2-0 after two innings of play. Lady Saint starter Brittany Sharkey worked out of trouble in the 3rd and the Seward offense made some noise in the bottom half but left the bases loaded and it stayed a 2-0 game after three. The Lady Saints added to their lead in the 4th as Phelps and Shockley got things going once again and this time it was Stephanie Mark coming through with a two out single to put the gals in green on top 3-0. Seward blew the game open in the 5th as Keen doubled behind a single from Becky Allen to start the inning to make it 4-0 and Ashley Kirkes rapped a double of her own to make it 5-0. Later in the inning Chavez launched a sacrifice fly to score Kirkes to give the Lady Saints a 6-0 advantage. Murray State finally cracked the scoreboard in the 6th as they put together four straight hits to start the inning to plate a pair of runs and a groundout cut the Seward lead to 6-3. After a pair of flyouts killed a Seward chance to pad their lead in the bottom of the 6th, the Lady Aggies jumped right back on the Lady Saints in their final at bats. Murray State took advantage of two Seward errors to make it a 6-5 game and a single later in the inning tied the game at 6. The Lady Aggies had a chance to push across the go ahead run but relief pitcher Katelyn Craker got a big strikeout followed by a pop out to end the threat and keep the game tied. In the Seward 7th Shockley got the Lady Saints going with a one out double and a single from Chavez put runners on the corners. An error loaded the bases and after a lengthy at bat, Michelle Duford drew a walk on a full count pitch to push the game winning run across as Seward took the game 7-6 in true WALKoff fashion. Shockley had a big day for the Lady Saints, going 5 for 5 with a pair of RBI's while Keen and Phelps each had 3 hits for Seward. The Lady Saints picked up 19 hits in the game and 6 of the 9 Seward starters had 2 or more hits in the victory.

SEWARD COUNTY/MURRAY STATE BOX SCORE
<http://www.scccsaints.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6396:2113-vsmurray-state&catid=57:Softball&Itemid=199>

The road got tougher for the Lady Saints in their second game of the day as they took on a perennial power from the Lone Star State, the Odessa Lady Wranglers. It looked good for Seward right off the bat as Shockley once again doubled to start the game for the Lady Saints and later scored on a double from Mark to make it 1-0 Seward. The Lady Saints put two more runners on to load the bases but a double play ended the Seward threat and kept it a one run game after a half inning of play. Odessa wasted no time in striking back. The Lady Wranglers put two runs on the board in the bottom half of the 1st on a one out double and for the first time in 2013 the Lady Saints trailed 2-1. Both teams went in order in the 2nd and Seward put two on in the 3rd for the middle of their order before another double play squashed their chances at scoring to keep the score 2-1 in favor of Odessa. In the Odessa half of the 3rd the Lady Saints were not so fortunate. The Lady Wranglers used back to back two out walks to set the table for a three run home run to push their lead to 5-1 and four straight batters reached base after the long ball to score another run and after three the Lady Saints were in trouble trailing 6-1. Seward had traffic on the bases once again in the 4th inning as Kirkes and Phelps singled with one out but a pair of ground outs kept them from scoring and kept them in the rear 6-1. Odessa loaded the bases on just one hit in the bottom of the 4th and with two outs, a double to the wall cleared the bases to make it 9-1 and just like that the Lady Saints were in the shadow of the run rule as they stepped to the plate in the 5th. For a third consecutive inning the Lady Saints had two hits in the frame, but for the third time in the game, their chances of scoring were cut off by an inning ending double play and just like that the game was over as the run rule was enforced with Odessa winning 9-1. Odessa only outhit Seward 8 to 7 in the game but the Lady Saints left 8 runners on in the 5 inning game and grounded into three double plays in the loss. Chavez and Mark each had 2 hits for Seward while Mark drove in the Lady Saints only run of the game.

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On day two the Lady Saints would take on the Lady Wranglers in the first game of their double header. As they did in their first meeting on Friday, Seward scored first. Kirkes drew a four pitch walk to start the 2nd inning and an Odessa error helped her around the bases before a passed ball plated her with two outs to put the Lady Saints in front 1-0. Pitching dominated the 3rd inning and the game stayed 1-0 into the 4th. Kirkes started another Seward rally in the top of the 4th as she led off the frame with a bunt single and after an Odessa error, the Lady Saints were in business with two on and nobody out. A sacrifice bunt moved the runners up 60 feet and Felisha Vogelaar picked the right time for her first hit as a Lady Saint, lacing a double down the line to score two and give Seward a 3-0 lead. As they did in the first meeting, the Lady Wranglers had a big inning in store for the Lady Saints as they came to bat in the 4th. After scoring three in the 4th on Friday, the Lady Wranglers one upped themselves on Saturday, plating 7 runs in the inning on five hits, two free passes, and two Seward County errors to erase the Lady Saints lead and push in front 7-3 after four. The Lady Saints had a chance to get back into the game in the top of the 5th as Mark doubled and Duford walked before moving up a base on a wild pitch with nobody away, but Seward couldn't manage a single run after three cracks at it and remained behind 7-3. Seward didn't help themselves in the 6th as an error helped fuel an Odessa offensive and Lady Saint pitching walked a run in to make it 8-3 before battling out of a bases loaded jam to keep the score there. In their final at bats, the Lady Saints again put pressure on the Odessa defense, loading the bases on singles from Chavez and Mark followed by a Lady Wrangler error to bring the tying run to the on deck circle. A fielder's choice kept the bases loaded with now one out, and the double play bug that bit Seward in Friday's loss to the Lady Wranglers appeared again as a 4-3 double play wrapped things up for Odessa in an 8-3 win. The game was quite sloppy on both ends as the two teams combined for 9 errors in the contest. Seward finished with 7 hits in the game including 2 each from Vogelaar, Chavez, and Mark, but left 10 runners on as they fell 8-3.

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In their final game of the weekend, the Lady Saints took out their frustrations from the losses to Odessa on the Murray State Lady Aggies. Seward bolted out to a 3-0 lead in the 1st as the first five batters of the game reached base and Mark and Phelps picked up RBI knocks to put the Lady Saints out in front. Murray State struck back in the bottom of the inning, taking advantage of a two out Seward error to score two runs and that is where the game went at 3-2 into the 3rd. Mark and Duford started the Seward 3rd off with hits and Kirkes came through with a single up the box to score them both to make it 5-2. With one out Carissa Hackett grounded out on the infield to plate another run and after 2 ½ it was Seward 6 and Murray State 2. The Murray State 3rd was a head scratching one for Lady Saints Head Coach Andrea Gustafson as the Lady Aggies managed to score two runs without a single hit to get back into the game 6-4. Seward added another run in the 4th on a one out single from

Duford but once again, the Lady Saints didn't help themselves as a hit by pitch and a walk helped Murray State get things going in their half of the 4th and after a passed ball and a groundout it was a one run game 7-6. The Seward offense kept on battling as the 5th inning hit. The Lady Saints loaded the bases with nobody out and a single from Chavez drove home one to make it 8-6. With the bases still loaded, Mark cracked a double to left center to plate two more and the Lady Saints lead opened to 10-6. Craker came in out of the Seward bullpen for a big 1-2-3 inning in the 5th, but for just the second inning all game, the Lady saints were unable to tack onto their lead in the 6th and it remained 10-6. More struggles in the circle for Seward helped Murray State out in the bottom of the 6th as a walk followed by a dropped third strike put two on and nobody out. A passed ball moved the runners up 60 feet and a two out single scored both runs to make it 10-8. The Lady Saints couldn't stop the bleeding as the next Murray State batter singled as well and in a matter of three pitches the Lady Saints went from the driver's seat up 10-6 to hanging on for dear life with the score 10-9. The top of the Lady Saints order did their job in the 7th as Shockley singled and Chavez walked to put two on for the Lady Saints biggest offensive threat, Stephanie Mark. On a 2-1 pitch, Mark launched the Lady Saints first home run of the season over the left field wall to give the gals in green some breathing room on top 13-9. In relief out of the Seward bullpen, sophomore Brittany Sharkey stepped up in the circle for Lady Saints in the 7th to shut down the Murray State lineup, disposing of the side in four batters to preserve the lead and give the Lady Saints the 13-9 win. Seward pounded out 17 hits in the win while Murray State managed just 5. Every Seward player had at least one hit in the game while five different players had multi hit contests. Mark led the way for the Lady Saints, going 4 for 4 with 6 RBI's in the win while Duford had 3 hits and Phelps and Kirkes each drove in a pair of runs.

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The Lady Saints start the season 2-2. It is the first time that Seward has not had a winning record through their first four games since the 2009 season. However, the 2009 season proved to be one of the best in Lady Saints history as the gals in green won the Jayhawk West, the Region VI Tournament, and finished 7th at the NJCAA National Tournament.

Next up for Seward is their home opener on Saturday, February 9th when they will take on Northern Oklahoma at 2:00 & 4:00 at Lady Saints Field in Liberal.

SCCC/ATS Roy Allen