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Saint Tennis Returns to Nationals

For the fourth straight year, the Seward County Saints tennis team will have a chance to play for the National Championship as following a 3rd place finish at the Region VI Tournament, the Saints qualify yet again for the NJCAA National Tournament in three weeks in Plano, Texas. The Saints were consistent throughout the weekend, racking up 14.5 points with five third place finishes and a pair of runner-up finishes at the region event. Luke Robertson led the Saints with four points in the event, finishing second in #4 singles and also finishing second in #1 doubles with Justin Pena.

The Saints top player this season, Justin Pena took the court in #1 singles for Seward. In the first round he lost a tough 7-5, 6-2 battle with Spartak Rahchou of Johnson County, but rebounded with a 6-4, 6-0 win over Barton's top player Samuel Araujo in the third place match to bring home 1.5 points for the Saints.

In #2 singles the Saints Donnersson Penna breezed to a 6-1 first set win over Hesston's Michel Oyer, but had to scrap to take a 7-6 decision in the second set to move to the semifinals. In the semis Edgardo Tapia of Cowley was too much for Penna in a 6-1, 6-2 loss, but Penna fought back to give the Saints 1.5 points with a 6-1, 6-1 third place match win over Rafael Sequiera of Barton who he lost to earlier this season.

A key piece to the Saints puzzle all season has been Daniel Alonte in #3 singles and this weekend was no different. Alonte fell 6-2, 6-0 to Josh Coleman of Cowley in his first match of the meet, but bounced back to blow Keenan Jensen of Hesston away 6-0, 6-0 in the third place match to give Seward another 1.5 points.

Luke Robertson was the Saints top performer in singles action. The freshman from Bloomington, Minnesota who lost a third set tiebreak to Olivier Nimmegeers of Johnson County just one week ago returned the favor on the Cavs #4 man, handling him with ease 6-3, 6-0 to move onto the championship round. In the title match Robertson had trouble with Ryan Hoverson of Cowley and had to settle for second place after a 6-1, 6-1 defeat.

In #5 singles it was Josh Hamilton taking the court for the Saints. Hamilton played Johnson County's Joe Rustemeyer close in the first set of their semifinal tilt, falling 6-4, but it was all Rustemeyer in the second set 6-1 as he won the match to move to the championship match. Hamilton didn't drop his head though and kept competing for the Saints in the third place match. Hamilton matched up with Drew Hostetler of Hesston and the two played the match of the tournament, splitting the first two sets 6-2, 6-4 before playing a 12-10

tiebreak that went in favor of Hamilton to give him a third place finish.

Seward newcomer Adrian Amado was not quite up to speed with his opponents yet in #6 singles, losing his opening match 6-1, 6-0 to top seeded Carlos Rodriguez of Cowley before falling 6-1, 6-2 in the third place match to Dominic Murray of Hesston to finish the tournament in fourth place.

The Saints most consistent duo during the regular season, Pena/Robertson, squared off in a good semifinal match against Sequeira/Araujo of Barton to get things going. Pena/Robertson won the first set 6-4 and grinded out the second set by the same count of 6-4 to take the match and advance to the finals. In the championship round the Seward pair narrowly missed a chance to take the first set, falling 7-6 (4) to Busby/Coleman of Cowley, but rebounded to win the second set 6-4 to even the match at 1-1. The third set went the way of the Tigers as Busby/Coleman won 6-4 to take the match and the championship to leave Pena/Robertson as the runners-up.

In #2 doubles it was Penna/Alonte for Seward against De Zamacona/Rustemeyer for Johnson County in the semifinal battle. The Johnson duo had no trouble with Penna/Alonte, taking the match in straight sets 6-2, 6-1 to drop the Saints to the third place match. In the third place match Penna/Alonte showed up ready to go and had no problem with Ermoian/Hostetler of Hesston in a 6-1, 6-1 win to pick up the 1.5 points for the Saints team standings.

6-1 was the unlucky number for Seward in #3 doubles as Hamilton/Amado dropped both of their matched by the count of 6-1, 6-1 to Keller/Rodriguez of Cowley in the semis and Oyer/Murray of Hesston in the third place match to finish fourth.

Seward finished with 14.5 total points as a team in the meet to put them 3rd overall and enough to earn a bid to the NJCAA National Tournament. Cowley won the tournament with 24 points while Johnson County was right on their tails with 20. The Saints finished well ahead of Hesston who was fourth with 7 points and Barton turned in a disappointing fifth place finish and managed just 3 points on the weekend.

The Saints will ready themselves over the next three weeks for the National Tournament which begins on May 12th in Plano, Texas. It marks the fourth straight year that Seward will compete at the national event. The Saints individual match record is now 58-85 on the season.

SCCC/ATS Roy Allen