

Seward Slips on Sophomore Night

The Seward County Lady Saints wrapped up their 2013 regular season home schedule Tuesday night in the Greenhouse against Otero. Seward had hoped for a warm sendoff for their two sophomores, Morgan Riley and Annelise Sanchez, but instead got a rude awakening at the hands of the Lady Rattlers. Seward came out of the gates slow, losing the first set 25-17 but bounced back to take the second 25-19. The Lady Saints held a lead much of the all-important third, but Otero stormed to the finish line to win 25-20. In the fourth it was all Lady Rattlers as Otero jumped out to an unbelievable 14-1 lead before taking home the 25-12 win to end the match.

Following a pregame ceremony for their two sophomores, the Lady Saints and Lady Rattlers got underway in the Greenhouse Tuesday night. Otero, coming off of a hard fought five set win over Garden City in the previous match, showed no signs of fatigue against Seward, using a 6-0 run early in the first set to take a 10-3 lead. Seward struggled to find any rhythm on the offensive end and following three straight attack errors midway through the set, they found themselves down big 16-6. The Lady Saints slowly crept back into the set and were down just four at 17-13 after a kill from Carolina Freitas in the middle, but again Seward shot themselves in the foot with three consecutive errors to allow Otero to go back up 20-13. The Lady Saints would get no closer as Otero finished out the set with a kill to take the first 25-17.

After a pair of kills and an ace had Seward up 3-1 early in the second, the Lady Saints fell flat once again. Otero used a 7-1 run to take an 8-4 lead before Seward bounced back to tie the set up at 9 on a solo block from Morgan Riley. The teams jostled back and forth to 13-13 when the Lady Saints used a pair of Carolina Gasparini kills and an ace from Nacole Miller to go in front 16-13. The Lady Saints never trailed again. Seward extended their lead to four on back to back kills from Annelise Sanchez and Kristen Anderson and benefitted from three straight Otero hitting errors to finish the set as they went on to win 25-19 to even the match at 1.

The third set was plugging right along and the Lady Saints looked in good shape again as they led 4-1 early and 14-8 later on after Gasparini finished off three kills in a span of four points. Seward remained up six at 15-9, but three straight Otero kills had their lead down to 15-12 and it was a bad omen of things to come. A service error broke the Rattler run, but Otero was right back at it after that, rolling off three more straight to tie the set at 16 and their run continued with four more in a row after that to make it 20-16 Otero late in the set. Otero continued to let the Lady Saints stick around with another service error and a kill from Gasparini and a Rattler attack error later, Seward was back to within one 20-19. The Lady Saints couldn't keep momentum on their side as Otero picked up a sideout to get the ball back and finished the set on a 5-1 run to put Seward away 25-20.

Looking to wash away the roller coaster third, the Lady Saints took the court in the fourth trying to get back on track and force a fifth set. What happened couldn't have been further away from that wish. Otero got kills on six of the first seven points of the set, and an ace on the other to take a 7-0 lead right off the bat. They ended up picking up the first nine points before Seward finally got a sideout to make it 9-1. The Otero dominance continued as the Lady Rattlers opened up a 14-1 lead on the Lady Saints midway through the set. It didn't get any better for Seward as they found themselves down 19-3 after being called in the net and 20-5 after an attack sailed long. The Lady Saints showed some fight to close the set, but the atrocious start was far too much to overcome as Seward fell 25-12 and Otero took the match 3-1.

As expected, the numbers were not pretty for the Lady Saints in the loss. Seward hit just .065 as a team in the match, their lowest mark since hitting .055 against Colby in an early September loss. The lone offensive bright spots for the Lady Saints in the loss came on the outside as Gasparini again led Seward with 12 kills while Sanchez chipped in 10 on her sophomore night. Gasparini also tied for the team lead in digs with 12 for Seward, matched by teammate Kari Anderson who had a

dozen as well. Gasparini's double-double was her 12th of the year and her 12 kills extends her streak to 12 straight matches with at least 10 kills. Miller notched 27 of the Lady Saints 28 assists in the loss while Riley had 6 blocks in her final regular season home match as a Lady Saint.

The Lady Saints fall to 20-14 on the year while Otero picks up the split sweep on the night to improve to 24-12 going into their biggest match of the season Wednesday. Seward won't have much time to worry about Tuesday's loss as the Lady Saints are back at it on Thursday when they make the return trip to Otero where they will play the Lady Rattlers once again, as well as a non-NJCAA matchup with Adams State JV. Seward returns home for their final home match of 2013 on Tuesday when they host Garden City in the first round of the Region VI Tournament at 6:30.

SCCC/ATS Roy Allen