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Hutch Wins Grinder Over Lady Saints

t was everything it was cracked up to be. The marquee matchup on the NJCAA national schedule Saturday night in the Greenhouse as the #3 and 16-0 Hutchinson Lady Blue Dragons came to Liberal to meet head on with the 17-1 and 9th ranked Seward County Lady Saints. The game was never separated by more than six points and was back and forth all night. In the end however, it was Hutchinson's night, as they defeated Seward on their home court 61-55 to hand the Lady Saints just their second loss of the 2013-2014 season.

Seward got off to a shaky start in front of their packed home crowd Saturday night. A turnover on their first possession and a pair of easy buckets for the Lady Blue Dragons had Hutchinson up 8-2 three minutes into things. A 7-2 run for Seward over the next 2:15 got the Lady Saints back to within one at 10-9 and a spin move and score on the inside from Shanise Brooks gave the Lady Saints their first lead of the game, 13-12 at the 12:25 mark of the first half. As the pace began to quicken, the Lady Saints got caught sleeping on defense a few moments later, giving up a runout to the Dragons to put Hutchinson up 20-16 with 8:33 left in the half. The Lady Saints hung around with their tough defense however and a three minute stretch without a field goal for Seward was broken as Brianna Scott got a steal and score to cut the Hutch lead to just two 21-19 with 5:14 left in the half. After tying the game up with under 5:00 left in the half, Scott found Korina Chapman on a nifty pass to the post and Chapman finished, putting the Lady Saints up by two 23-21 with 4:19 to go in the period. The teams traded baskets to the half and at the break the Lady Saints held a one point, 27-26 lead on the Dragons.

Offense was at a premium for both sides in the first 20 minutes as Seward shot just 40% from the field and Hutchinson 35%. Scott led the Lady Saints with 8 first half points while Payton Fleming came off the bench with 6 and Chapman had 5.

To start the second half, the Lady Saints got about the least likely thing to spark them to a four point lead that they could possibly think of as on her first career three point attempt, Brooks nailed a three pointer from the wing to push Seward's lead to 32-28. A few minutes later, the momentum continued to roll in the Lady Saints direction as a pair of free throws from Brooks gave Seward its largest lead of the game at 38-32 with 15:15 remaining in the contest. Following a Hutchinson timeout, the Lady Dragons went on a quick 4-0 jaunt to get it back to a 38-36 game and with just under 12:00 to go, the game was all knotted up at 40. At the second half media timeout, Hutch had grabbed a two point advantage, but back to back steal and scores from Kyndal Davis tied the game and then gave Seward the lead 46-44 with 8:47 to go. A short time later the game was again tied and a free throw for the Lady Saints gave them a 51-50 edge as the clock went under 4:00 to go. A bucket by Hutch and an answer by Seward had the Lady Saints clinging to a 53-52 lead with 2:00 to go, but the Lady Saints got caught napping after a missed shot and the Dragons took advantage with an uncontested layup in transition to put themselves back on top 54-53. Seward couldn't execute on their next possession offensively and Hutch got a pair of free throws to push their lead to 56-53. The Lady Saints never got any closer as the Dragons extended their lead to five and then iced it with a free throw with under 10 seconds to go to take home the win 61-55 in the hard fought battle.

The Lady Saints struggled to find the basket in the second half, shooting just 31% from the field to finish the game at 36% shooting while Hutchinson heated up to 42% in the second half, but still finished the game shooting just 34%. Both teams struggled from downtown as Hutch shot just 13% on 1 of 8 while the Lady Saints were 4 of 21 for 19%. The difference in the game came at the free

throw line where Hutchinson outscored Seward 20-7, hitting 63% of their attempts to just 54% for the Lady Saints, a bad time for their worst free throw shooting night of the season.

Brooks led the Lady Saints offensively with 17 points, 13 of those coming in the second half while Scott was the only other Seward player to reach double figures, finishing with 10. Jen'Von'Ta Hall topped her season high by 8 points in the win, scoring 22 and also grabbing a career high 15 rebounds for the Dragons.

The Lady Saints fall to 17-2 on the season and suffer their first Jayhawk West loss of the year, dropping to 2-1 while Hutchinson remains perfect on the 2013-2014 campaign, improving to 17-0 overall and 3-0 in league action.

Seward will hit the road once again Wednesday, playing their third road game in the first four of the Jayhawk West schedule as they travel to Barton to take on a Lady Cougars team in a 5:30 tip. The Lady Saints return home next Saturday when they host Dodge City on Homecoming night in the Greenhouse.

Roy Allen

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