

### Seward Hammers #12 Hutchinson

Last season when Seward County and Hutchinson clashed in the Greenhouse on the final night of the 2012-2013 regular season, it was a nip and tuck battle that the Saints won 62-60 to capture their third straight Jayhawk West Conference Championship. Saturday night in the Greenhouse the game was expected to be much of the same between the two teams who have battled for the past three conference crowns. Unfortunately for the folks looking for drama in the Greenhouse, there was none this time and that was because the Saints came out and took it to the 12th ranked Dragons, grabbing an early lead and never looking back in a 98-76 win over their foes from Hutchinson.

The action was hot and heavy early on between the Saints and Dragons as Seward jumped out to a 9-4 lead after just three minutes as Hutchinson had trouble finding a way to slow the Saints down. Five minutes into the half, the Saints lead was down to one, but a dunk in transition by Quentin Purtue put Seward back in front by three, 15-12 with 14:44 to go in the first half. Seward wasted no time in going right at the teeth of a vulnerable Hutch defense, extending their lead to seven on a drive and score from Niem Stevenson and stretching that lead to 29-20 on their next trip down the floor as Brian Bridgeforth got a putback with under 10 minutes to go in the half. Seward took their first double digit lead on a pair of Stevenson free throws and a high arching three from Tyreke Sharp pushed the Saints lead to 42-28 with under 4:00 left in the half and the route was on. The Saints went up by as many as 17 before settling for a 50-34 lead as the teams hit the locker rooms at the half.

The normally defensive minded Saints scorched the nets for 51% shooting in the first half while the high-flying Dragons made just 10 field goals and finished the first half shooting just 35%. Three Seward players had 10 or more first half points as Secean Johnson led the way with 12, Stevenson added 11, and Malcolm Hill-Bey pitched in 10.

It was more Seward County as the second half opened. Five straight points from Hill-Bey pushed the Saints lead to 58-36 early in the period and Hutch was unable to cut into the lead much without being able to get a defensive stop as Seward remained up big, 62-43 with just under 12:00 to go. A 9-2 Seward run over just a 1:50 span midway through the second half blew the game wide open as Stevenson left a drop pass for Evan Allen who soared to the rim and scored to make it 71-45 Seward County with under 10:00 to play. As they had all night, Seward found a way to get to the hoop once again moments later, this time it was Sharp knifing through the Hutch defense to score to give the Saints a 30 point lead, 77-47 with 7:38 remaining. From there, the final score was the only formality to be decided as the Saints played keep away from the Dragons to go on to win easily 98-76.

Against the statistically worst defensive team in the Jayhawk Conference, the Saints had no problem finding points Saturday night. Seward shot 63% in the second half and finished the game shooting 57% from the field en route to the 22 point victory. Hutchinson on the other hand, a team that had had no problem scoring this season, was held to just 38% shooting on the night and a season low 21 field goals by the rugged Seward defense.

Stevenson came up big in his first Seward/Hutch rivalry matchup, posting his second double-double of the season with 21 points and 11 rebounds. Hill-Bey and Johnson each finished with 19 for Seward while Bridgeforth added 14 and Sharp pitched in 11 of the Seward bench. Hutchinson All-American Kadeem Allen finished with 27 points for the Dragons, but made just 8 of 21 from the field and 10 of 17 from the free throw line. DeShawn Freeman was the only other Blue Dragon

player with more than 7 points in the game as he finished with 10.

Seward wins their 9th straight game, improving to 13-6 overall on the season and 3-0 in Jayhawk West Conference play while Hutchinson has their 9 game win streak snapped by the Saints, as they fall to 16-3 overall and 2-1 in conference action.

The Saints will hit the road once again on Wednesday, playing their third road game in their first four conference tilts as they head to the Kirkman Center in Great Bend where they will battle a Barton team who ended their season in the Region VI Semifinals a season ago. The Saints and Cougars tip at 7:30. Seward returns home next Saturday where they play their final Saturday home game of the season against Dodge City on Homecoming night in the Greenhouse.

Roy Allen

SCCC/ATS