

Purtue's Putback Saves Saints

In a back and forth, highly contested battle between Seward County and Dodge City Saturday night in the Greenhouse, the first 44:57 wasn't enough to decide things between the two longtime rivals. It took a last second tip in by veteran sophomore Quentin Purtue and a buzzer beating miss by the Conquistadors to send the Greenhouse crowd into a frenzy as the Saints escaped with an 84-83 overtime win to remain on top of the Jayhawk West standings.

It was a defensive battle early on in the first half. With the game tied at 3, Raoul Mentor scored in the post for the Saints to put them up 5-3 and it sent Seward on a 9-0 run to open up a 12-3 lead with 14:07 left in the first half. But just when it looked like Dodge City's fate would be what Hutchinson's was one week earlier in the Greenhouse, the Conquistadors went on a 10-1 run of their own to tie the game up at 13 midway through the first half. The Saints offense was stagnant, Seward went over six minutes without getting a field goal and saw Dodge City take their first lead of the game 17-14 with 7:29 left in the half. After climbing back to within one, Quentin Purtue got an offensive rebound and scored to give the Saints a 20-19 lead with 5:35 remaining in the half and Seward clung to a one point, 22-21 lead with under 3:00 to go. The Saints pushed their lead to three before the break and went to the half on top 28-25.

Seward's lack of offense was more due to their poor free throw shooting than anything else in the first half. The Saints shot 42% from the field and held Dodge City to just 36% shooting, but it was an ugly 6 for 16 mark at the free throw line for Seward in the first 20 minutes that was the black eye on the stat sheet. Niem Stevenson led the Saints with 10 first half points while EJ Eaves and Larry Beckett combined for 22 of Dodge City's 25 first half points.

The Saints came out of the break with much more of a hot hand. After failing to make a single three pointer in the first half as a team, Malcolm Hill-Bey canned a pair of three's for the Saints early in the period to quickly give them a 34-27 lead. Dodge City kept clawing though and as the Saints struggled to build onto their lead, the Conquistadors got to within three and then got a bucket to make it a one point game, 35-34 with 15:13 to go in the contest. Dodge drew back to even with 14:05 to go at 39-39, but two Stevenson free throws put the Saints back in front 41-39 with 13:36 left. After Dodge tied it back up at 41, Purtue got a big hoop at the basket for the Saints and was fouled, where he completed his three point play at the line to give Seward a lead once again 44-41. Later on it was Stevenson slashing to the bucket for two straight finishes to push the Saints lead to 50-44 with 10:17 to go and it remained a six point game for the next five minutes as the game ticked under 5:00 with the score Seward 62 and Dodge City 56. A parade to the free throw line on both sides pushed the score to 67-63 before a Brian Bridgeforth dunk put the Saints up 69-63 with 3:26 to go. Eaves quickly answered for the Conqs with a pair of hoops, pushing his night to 30 points as Dodge City got back to within two, 69-67. It was still a two point spread at 73-71 with under 2:00 to go and after stops by both teams and a Dodge City free throw, it was 73-72 Seward with 46 seconds left in regulation. Dodge City's Brett O'Neil hit a huge three on the Conqs next possession to put them up 75-73 with 33 seconds left. Both teams scored on their next trips and it remained a two point game, 77-75 with under 20 seconds to go when the Saints turned the ball over and were forced to send Dodge City back to the line with 9 seconds left. Things looked bleak for Seward as Eaves stepped to the line for Dodge 7 for 7 on the night and 76% on the season. However, he missed both attempts and the Saints raced up the court with the ball in Hill-Bey's hands and for the third time in his Seward career, the sophomore point guard found a teammate with time winding down and the game on the line, this time Stevenson was the beneficiary, scoring with 3 seconds left to tie the game

at 77. Dodge quickly got the ball up the court and had a chance to win the game from six feet away and the buzzer sounding, but as fate had it, the shot was off the mark and the two teams went to overtime knotted at 77.

Neither team could score on their first two possessions of the overtime and it was the Saints Stevenson who got the first points of the extra period, driving to the basket and scoring to put Seward up 79-77 with 3:47 left in the period. Dodge City answered with a pair of free throws to tie the game with 3:30 left and the teams traded freebies to 82-82 with under 2:00 to go. With the pressure on both sides, the Saints and Conqs both battled hard, but were unable to come up with a big shot as a free throw by Dodge City put them back in front 83-82 with 26 seconds left. The Saints had the ball with the game on the line and it looked like their luck was finally up as an attempt in the paint bounded off to rim, but Purtue was Johnny on the spot, grabbing the rebound and putting it back in with 2.1 seconds left to give Seward an 84-83 lead. Following a Dodge City timeout, the Conqs got one last chance at the win, but a prayer at the buzzer was wide left and the Greenhouse erupted in cheers as the Saints held on to win 84-83.

Both teams saw their offensive production improve in the second half and overtime as Dodge shot an even 50% from the field and the Saints 49% while the Conqs hit on 5 of 9 three point attempts and the Saints on 3 of 7 after neither made a first half three. What kept Dodge City in the game despite losing three players to foul trouble, was their free throw shooting, where they capitalized on 73% of their foul shots compared to just 54% for the Saints who left 13 points at the stripe in the second half.

Stevenson led the Saints with 20 points and 7 rebounds while Hill-Bey and Secean Johnson combined for 29 for Seward. Bridgeforth notched a double-double in the middle for the Saints with 11 points and 12 rebounds while Saturday's hero, Purtue, played 34 big minutes, finishing with 11 points and 6 rebounds. Evan Allen played well off the Seward bench, going 4 for 6 from the field and finishing with 10 points and 7 rebounds.

The Saints remain the lead dog in the Jayhawk West standings, moving to 4-1 in league play and 14-7 overall. Dodge City drops a disappointing game, falling to 13-8 overall and 2-3 in conference action.

Seward will be home once again on Wednesday when they host Cloud County in the Greenhouse at 8:00. Free tickets are available courtesy of our buyout sponsor First National Bank, at any of their Liberal locations.

Roy Allen

SCCC/ATs