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From left, Leslee Smith, Edson vila, coach Bryan Zollinger, Jabari Peter and Kaheem Ransom discuss moving on to Div. 1 schools Wednesday in the All-American Room at Seward. L&T photo/Earl Watt

Ransom takes show to Sam Houston State

By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Kaheem Ransom was a little-known high school basketball player out of Wichita Southeast before coach Bryan Zollinger extended a scholarship offer and brought him to Seward.

Since then, Ransom has been a part of two Jayhawk West championships, a Region 6 championship and a third place finish at the national tournament.

Ransom will move on to play at Sam Houston State, a Div. 1 program in the Southland Conference.

“I continued to get in the gym and work hard on my game,” Ransom said. “I took a few pointers from coach Z and coach Sautter of course, but I continued to work hard. I was blessed to score a lot of points. It feels good to be in this position.”

The size of Sam Houston State was a draw.

“I felt comfortable,” Ransom said. “It was a good fit for me at a mid major. I am looking for to go there and give my all.”

Seward added a key component for Ransom.

“Being tough, mentally tough and physically tough,” he said. “They harp on it every day. I wasn’t that tough in high school. I added that to my skill set and it worked out pretty good.”

Seward coach Bryan Zollinger said that Ransom brought the ability to work and play.

“He might be a little bit of a split personality,” Zollinger said. “When it is time for business he is good at that, too.”

But Zollinger was emotional about his prize recruit from Wichita.

“If there has ever been an example of why Winston Churchill said never give up, that’s the guy,” he said.

Peters moves on to Sam Houston State

By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Jabari Peters only played one season as a Seward County Saint, and now he will make the move to Sma Houston State.

“When I first got recruited, I fell in love,” Peters said. “They came to a lot of games. They called me after games. When I went on the visit, players treated me like a brother. They told me they were all in to winning.”

Peters became a part of a team that gelled at Seward to win the Jayhawk West for the third consecutive season.

“In the nonconference we weren’t as together as we should be,” Peters said. “We lost a couple of games early. One day coach had a meeting, after that everyone put their egos to the side, we went to practice after that and worked hard, and we won games. Coming out of Texas Southern and coming to Seward is what I needed. I had two coaches here that were tough and wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

Seward also provided exposure for Peters.

“I got an opportunity to show my skills to many D-1 coaches,” he said.

Zollinger said Peters was a product of the system that helped develop well-rounded players.

“With coach (Jason Sautter) and I, you don’t have a choice about defense,” Zollinger said. “It is what we do, our identity as a team. No one had put it to him the way we had, but we had a good

scorer and he was willing to buy in on the defensive side. He actually held one team's leading scorer to zero points in a game. That was incredible. We knew he could score. With Sam Houston, they need scoring. They have 30 points coming in. That should give them a boost. To be a part of something big, you have to give up me for we, and these guys did that."

From the Bronx to Seward to Sooner for Avila

By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

Edson Avila played the big man in th paint for the Saints, and after two years of hard work in green and white, he will put on the crimson and cream for the Oklahoma Sooners next season.

"Last week I took a visit there, and as soon as I got there, I had a former teammate that is a player there," Avila said. "He took me in like I was family. He showed me around campus. The next morning I got to work out with some of the guys. I never met any of them, and as soon as I got there I felt like brothers and friends. They were cracking jokes on me, I was cracking jokes on them. It felt like the first day I got here at Seward. For that, I knew it was the right place for me."

Avila will join a porogam that qualified for the national tournament under coach Lon Kruger.

"With the coaching staff and the great players I will have around me an playing in the Big 12, every night will be a big game for me," Avila said. "So I will go in there and be Sponge Bob. I will absorb everything the coaches say. He coached the Knicks, Florida, K-State he has a good

history. All my career I've been playing under good coaches, like (Seward) Coach (Bryan Zollinger). I will be ready."

Zollinger helped develop Avila into a Div. 1 prospect.

"I was a goofy guy," Avila said. "Coach made me accept criticism better and made me get tougher every day. He pushed me. I would tell him I was tired, he said 'Don't give me excuses.' I just kept pushing, and he got me to where I am now, and I thank him for that."

Zollinger said Avila brought emotion to the game.

"Ed brings a lot of energy to the game," he said. "His biggest attribute is he has the ability to get people enthused."

Smith head to Big 10 after 1 season as Saint

By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

After one season at Seward, sophomore Leslee Smith will be playing for the Nebraska Cornhuskers next season.

Smith transferred to Seward from SMU.

"I felt disappointed in the way I was released," Smith said. "That was my drive. These coaches kept pushing me every day until I became that player."

Smith chose Nebraska after seeing how committed the school was to its entire athletic program.

"I chose it because of the atmosphere and the way they support their players and every sport," he said. "That's the way it is at Seward, so that excited me."

The push from coaches Bryan Zollinger and Jason Sautter is what Smith said helped him make the move back to D-1.

"They kept pushing me every day," he said. "They pushed every player. They got on everybody to make them play their hardest."

Smith will now play for coach Miles.

"I think he lets everyone play their game," Smith said. "He won't hold you back, and he will make you be the best you can be. He focuses on player development. I really like that."

Seward's Deverell Biggs became a Husker last season and red-shirted. Smith will meet him in Lincoln.

"I am excited to play with him," Smith said. "He is a really good guard."

Zollinger said Smith made Seward better.

“His development was key to our team development,” Zollinger said. “We kept pushing him, and that process takes the coaches to push, but it takes the player accepting to be pushed to a new level, and he accepted that.”

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