

By ROY ALLEN

Seward assistant athletic director

It is no secret that the Seward County Lady Saints are a young team in 2013. It is also no surprise that they found themselves going through early season growing pains Friday as they opened their regular season with a pair of matches in Lamar, Colo. at the Little Caesars Classic.



In an error filled match, Seward lost their opener 3-1 to the host Runnin' Lopes, and despite winning the first set against Otero, fell by the same 3-1 score to the Rattlers to finish their day 0-2.

During their warm-ups before their 10 a.m. match with Lamar, it was evident that a few, if not all of the Seward County Lady Saints had some jitters going into their opening match of the 2013 season.

It looked early on at least that Seward had worked those nerves out during the pre game drills as they jumped out to a quick 9-6 lead on the Lopes in the first set of their battle. Lamar came back to tie things up at nine with three straight points, and the teams traded tallies to 17-17 later on.

With the score still tied four points later, the Lady Saints looked like they were ready to put their

foot on the gas and finish the set as they scored four straight points to take a 23-19 lead. But just when it looked like Seward was going to finish Lamar off and take a 1-0 lead, the Lopes stormed back, tying the set at 24 before scoring two more points to stun the Lady Saints with a 26-24 win.

The disheartening loss in the first set didn't seem to get the Lady Saints spirits down however.

The young group of just two sophomores to go along with nine freshmen came out like gangbusters in the second set, quickly taking hold of the set with an early 8-2 lead.

Seward held the lead through the middle of the set, but were unable to put Lamar away as the Lopes crept back to within three at 20-17 later on. A late burst gave Seward a 23-19 advantage and a block at the net from Morgan Riley and Nacole Miller gave the Lady Saints another chance to clinch a set.

This time Seward didn't give the Lopes a chance to come back as they finished off the set on their first try, getting a kill from Annelise Sanchez to end things, and give themselves a 25-19 win to even things at 1-1.

The third set was never a contest. Lamar came out aggressive, and took a 6-2 lead before using a number of Lady Saint errors against them to extend their lead to 18-8. The Lamar lead reached as many as 14 at 22-8 before Seward was finally able to get the ball back and stop the massive Runnin' Lopec rally.

The Lady Saints fought hard to cut the lead back to single digits at 24-15, but Lamar put the Lady Saints away on a reception error by the gals in green to finish things off 25-15.

Seward managed just 4 kills in the set, coupled with 8 errors meant that the Lady Saints hit -.174 as a team in the set.

Looking to bounce back and even things up, Seward came out much stronger in the fourth. They took an early lead, but the 'Lopes again had an answer as the two found themselves deadlocked at 13 midway through.

They continued to go back and forth, but Seward was able to take a one point lead late at 22-21, and it looked like they just might send the match to a deciding fifth set.

The Lady Saints had a chance to close it out, up 24-23, but Lamar came back to tie it at 24. In a drama filled next eight points, the two remained tied 28-28. In the end, the Lady Saints just couldn't get over the hump as a tip took Lamar to match point. The Lopes closed it out on the next play to win 30-28, and take the match 3-1.

The Seward offense struggled to ever get in rhythm as a unit in the match. The Lady Saints finished the match hitting just .127 as a team and hit above .250 in just one of the four sets (first). The concerning stat of the match for the Lady Saints was their 52 errors as a team. Seward committed 23 hitting errors, 11 reception errors, eight service errors, six blocking errors, and four ball handling errors in the loss.

"It is pretty tough to win when you have to try and battle through 52 errors," head coach Bert Luallen said. "That basically means that the other team starts up 13-0 in every set."

Freshman right side hitter Kristen Anderson led Seward with 10 kills in her debut. Miller filled the stat sheet in her debut as well with 24 assists, 17 digs, and six aces. Kelci Bedingfield had a team high 24 digs for the Lady Saints while Sanchez had 22 of her own.

Despite the loss in their first match of the day, the Lady Saints looked as if they were ready to get back on track in their second match as they battled against another Region IX foe in the Otero Lady Rattlers.

Seward jumped in front 14-7 in the first set against the Rattlers and never had to sweat as they went on to take the first 25-16. The Lady Saints offense was much better in the first set of this one as they hit .278 in the set with 12 kills and just two errors as a team.

The second set looked like a reverse negative, as it was Otero jumping out to an 11-6 and never trailing. The Lady Saints got back to within three later in the set, but the Rattlers stepped back on the accelerator and finished Seward off 25-15.

Again the Lady Saints offense left them for the set. Seward had just four kills as a team and committed five errors to finish the set hitting -.033.

The lull carried over to the third set as Seward once again found themselves down big early on. Otero jumped on the Lady Saints 7-2 before the gals in green knew what hit them. Like the second set, Seward continued to scrap though, and kept the Rattlers within striking distance as they trailed 17-14 before an Otero timeout.

The stoppage did its job as Seward's momentum was halted, and Otero went on to take the set 25-19 to take a 2-1 lead.

Continuing to struggle to put the ball on the hands of their setter, Seward found themselves in another hole right away in the fourth. A mini 3-0 run midway through the set put Otero up 13-8, and with the ball rolling downhill it was all Rattlers from there on out.

Otero took advantage of a number of Seward errors and the Lady Saints were never able to make a run to get back into it. The Rattlers closed out the match with a 25-18 win to come away with a 3-1 victory.

Seward was able to limit their errors in the loss, but their offense was less than effective for the second straight match. The Lady Saints hit .155 as a team and connected on just 34 kills as a team.

Riley was the lone offensive brightspot for Seward in the loss, finishing off a team high nine kills with just one error to hit .421 in the match. Seward's next highest hitter finished the match hitting just .200.

Libero Kari Anderson paced the Lady Saints with 14 digs and Sanchez posted her second straight double digit dig contest with 12.

The Lady Saints drop their first two matches of the season for the second straight year as they fall to 0-2 on the early season.

They will look to bounce back on Saturday as they take on two more Region IX teams as they lock up with Trinidad State at 11 a.m. and Laramie County at 3 p.m.