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By ROY ALLEN

Seward County assistant athletic director

Following the Lady Saints Tuesday night win over Dodge City, ninth year coach Bert Luallen was greeted at center court by Athletic Director Galen McSpadden with the game ball that had the number 226 written on it.



Luallen heard over the public address system that he had just become the winningest coach in Seward County history, passing NJCAA Hall of Famer Pat Stangle with his 226th victory to stand alone at the top of the school's record books.

Luallen then smiled in astonishment and immediately handed the game ball to his team, who afterwards he gave all the credit to for achieving the milestone win.

With the Greenhouse turned pink on Dig Pink Night between Seward County and Dodge City, the Lady Saints got out to a hot start, going up 8-2 as they took control of the first set.

Seward stretched their lead to 13-5 midway through the first set. Up 10 late in the period, Seward went on a 4-0 run to finish the set, and came away with a 25-11 first set victory.

Dodge had no answer for the Seward attack in the first as the Lady Saints hit .524, getting 12 kills on just 21 chances with only one error.

Sloppy Seward play to begin the second put them in a 4-2 hole as Dodge took their first lead of the match.

The Lady Saints quickly came back though, and eight points later had a two point lead of their own at 8-6.

The Lady Saints continued to lead, but because of unforced errors, couldn't pull away from the Lady Conqs.

Dodge stayed close and traded points with the Lady Saints until getting a kill from Annessa Hannem to get back to within two at 22-20.

At 23-21, Seward turned to the Brazilian connection of Carolina Gasparini and Carolina Freitas, who finished off back-to-back kills with the set on the line to give the Lady Saints a 25-21 victory.

As part of Dig Pink Night, the Lady Saints went into the stands between the second and third sets, collecting donations for breast cancer awareness. With the generous support of a small, but spirited Greenhouse crowd, the Lady Saints were able to raise \$254 to donate directly to the Susan G. Komen fund.

Seward got off to a dreadful start in the third, as Dodge jumped out to a 4-0 lead before the Lady Saints knew what hit them.

Once they got settled in, they battled back into the set and before long, had their first lead of the third 6-5.

A see saw battle ensued, as the Lady Saints and Lady Conqs went back and forth to 13-13 midway through the set. An attack error by Dodge gave Seward the lead back, and spurred a 7-0 run by the gals in green, to put them up 20-13.

Up big, and with momentum on their side, the Lady Saints continued to cruise. They successfully spread the ball around and got kills from five different players in their final five points of the match as they went on to win 25-17 to take the match 3-0.

“Usually you have time to prepare for these questions,” Luallen said. “I had no idea I was even close to that record. I guess it is just an honor to be mentioned with some of the great coaches like Pat Stangle, who have helped build this program into what it is today.”

Seward’s offense was a balanced attack in the win. The Lady Saints had four players with six or more kills, including Gasparini who led them with 10, and Freitas who finished off a career high seven.

Nacole Miller led the Lady Saints with 28 assists, and had their only ace on the night.

Libero Kari Anderson paced the team with 17 digs, and Morgan Riley led Seward at the net with two blocks.

Gasparini had a pedestrian night with just 10 kills in the win, but the 10 kills put the Seward freshman in elite company in Lady Saints history. She has now recorded 10 or more kills in 10 straight matches, becoming the first Seward player to do so since first-team NJCAA All-American Yang Dan accomplished the feat twice for the Lady Saints in 2007.

The Lady Saints improve to 19-13 overall on the season and 9-4 in Jayhawk West Conference play, where they have wrapped up third place in the league, with one match to go.

Luallen becomes winningest coach in Seward history with 226 victories

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Dodge City drops to 4-26 overall and 1-12 in conference action, and is now assured of being the eighth seed for the upcoming tournament. They will travel to conference champion Colby in the first round.

Seward concludes Jayhawk West play Thursday at Pratt. Both teams are locked into their playoff positioning, Seward third and Pratt seventh. However, with a victory, the Lady Saints will secure their 10th conference win of the season, marking just the fourth time they would accomplish the feat since the 2005 season.

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