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By EARL WATT

- Leader & Times

Seward did not appear to be suffering jet lag after returning from San Diego Monday and playing its fourth game in eight days. The Lady Saints defense bottled up Connors State and forced 25 turnovers in a 95-42 mauling.

Rebekah Hatchard made her Seward County debut after graduating from high school in Australia, catching a plane and working with the No. 7 Lady Saints for three days. The 17-year-old freshman fit the Lady Saints style of play with her intense defensive pressure that forced Connors State guards to make errant passes that resulted in steals. Hatchard reached double digits in her first game.

“The best thing about her, she hasn’t been scared,” Seward coach Toby Wynn said. “We have thrown her in the fire. We haven’t treated her any different — no special practices to catch up. She is a smart kid, she was coached really well in high school. She fits in really good with our team and what we do.”

A friend of Wynn's was recruiting Hatchard and another player in Russia. When his friend opted for the Russian player, Wynn approached Hatchard, and since she was graduating in December in Australia, NJCAA rules allow players to join rosters if they enroll immediately following graduation in the next available semester. Hatchard did.

"When we had our numbers down to eight players we needed another person," Wynn said. "We started the paperwork, we got her over here, she's been acclimated through tonight and tomorrow, more practice next week, and we will get her ready for conference."

Wynn put Hatchard on the floor, and she didn't disappoint, scoring back-to-back baskets five minutes into the game and giving the Lady Saints a 14-3 lead.

The Lady Saints defense continued to disrupt Connors State by intercepting passes, tipping the ball away from the Cowgirl guards, and forcing passes that sailed out of bounds and against the Greenhouse wall.

By the time Connors State reached double digits, The Lady Saints had a 33-10 midway through the first half.

Seward continued to push the ball in the paint, and by half Shanise Brooks had 10 points, Seward shot 65 percent, and the lead was 55-23.

Wynn started to work the outside game in the second half, but the Lady Saints struggled from the three-point line. The Lady Saints only made two of 14 attempts, but Wynn still wanted to work on the outside game in case Seward found themselves without Brooks or Korina Chapman in the paint.

"We are trying to gain confidence," he said. "We need Payton Fleming to be a scorer from the perimeter. Your mindset as a coach is to stick with this kid, let her make some shots and get some confidence. We wanted to put some of those kids on the floor in those moments to try to have opportunities to score and gain confidence. If they don't, they have to keep getting in the gym and taking shots."

The Lady aints had the luxury of working on the perimeter against Connors State by holding the Cowgirls scoreless for four minutes early in the second half while building a 70-25 lead.

Seward reached its biggest lead of the night with 7:37 to play when Alana Simon hit a runner in the paint for an 88-33 advantage.

Wynn took Brooks and Chapman off the floor for the rest of the game, and the Lady Saints struggled for a four-minute stretch. The Lady Saints missed eight shots and four free throws during the drought, and Connors State put together a 6-0 run to temporarily drop the lead under 50.

But Hatchard pushed hard to the basket, made a shot and was fouled on the play. Hatchard took a shot to the nose and due to blood had to be replaced by Brianna Scott who hit the free throw.

The Lady Saints coasted to the 95-42 win.

“I thought we shared the ball really well,” Wynn said. “They looked for each other and spread the ball around. Our main focus has to be on the defensive end, we weren’t very good in California. That’s been our focus on our three days of practice. I thought we did better. As long as we stay on that track we will be competitive.”

Seward (13-1) continued the Conestoga Classic Saturday against Northwest Kansas Tech (2-15), completing five games over nine days for the Lady Saints.

BOX SCORE

CONNORS STATE (42)

Godfrey 6-11 2-11 14, Major 1-3 2-5 4, Thrash 9-20 1-2 20, Dalman 0-2 0-0 0, Jones 1-7 2-3 4, McHenry 0-2 0-0 0, Grayson 0-6 0-0 0, Goff 0-1 0-0 0

SEWARD COUNTY (95)

Chapman 5-7 1-1 12, Brooks 9-15 3-5 21, Simon 5-5 4-4 14, Monte 6-13 2-3 14, Scott 4-8 3-3 11, Davis 3-6 2-4 8, Hatchard 5-7 0-2 11, Fleming 1-7 0-0 2, Tammen 0-3 2-3 2

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