By EARL WATT

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Down by 11 midway through the first half against the eighth-ranked Hutchinson Blue Dragons, Seward looked more like a seasoned four-year program than a two-year community college.

The Saints didn't panic, and they overcame a barrage of three pointers by the Blue Dragons and a height disadvantage in the paint to earn an 86-76 win.

The win gave Seward a two-game lead in the Jayhawk West over Hutchinson with seven games to go.

Even though the No. 16 Saints earned the win, Seward coach Bryan Zollinger didn't expect much change in the poll.

"I expect they will still be ranked ahead of us," Zollinger said. "That's how that works."

The student section didn't agree with the pollsters, either. The chant of "overrated" started with two minutes to play, and intensified as the seconds rolled off the clock.

Hutchinson tried to rally at the free throw line, sending the Saints to the stripe with 3:18 to play, but the Saints made eight of 10 down the stretch, and Hutchinson never got closer than seven in the final minutes of the game.

“We found a way to win,” Zollinger said. “We did some good things. We need to try to get better and keep winning games.”

Hutchinson used the perimeter shot early when the Saints were sinking in the lane to defend against the inside shot. The Blue Dragons made five straight three pointers to take a 26-15 lead.

Seward’s high octane offense kicked in, and with 2:49 to play in the half a three pointer by Rafriel Guthrie tied the game 30-30.
“We weren’t quite focused early in the first half,” Zollinger said. “We had to have more poise offensively and toughness defensively.”
Over the next eight minutes, Hutchinson and Seward traded the lead 11 times.
Markee Maczyks’ basket with 15:51 to play gave the Saints a 48-44 lead, and Seward never trailed again.
Despite a distinct height advantage for the Blue Dragons, the Saints did not play intimated. Irvin Hollinger had a slam dunk early in the second half and an alley oop to Jeremy Jones with 12:11 to play gave the Saints a 58-51 lead, brought the crowd to its feet and caused Hutchinson coach Steve Eck to take a time out.
Daveon Boardingham added to the highlight reel with a jam and a foul with 9:01 to play that put Seward ahead 64-55.
Hutch had the game back to seven with 4:58 to play, but Marquez Patterson shut the door with a three pointer.
The patience and the ability to make the extra pass were not always common in community college games, but the Saints have been exhibiting signs of a four-year program in the 2011 portion of the season.
“Early in the year we wer fighting the trend of taking the early shot,” Zollinger said. “We emphasized the extra pass at practice. These guys were all stars in high school, and it takes a while to get them to realize the benefits. We talk about KU and how they are one of the best at sharing the ball.”
Patterson came off the bench to score 11 for the Saints and help guide the second half surge.
“I didn’t realize that he only played three minutes in the first half,” Zollinger aid. “He has been a key for us this year. We started ’Quez the second half and he brought a lot of defensive energy. He was a big difference for us in the second half.”
Jones and Guthrie led the Saints with 16 points each, Boardingham had 14, Marky Nolen scored 12 along with 10 rebounds, and Patterson had 11.