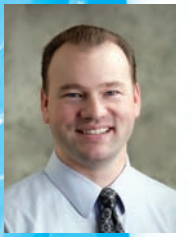


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Coach Nick and the final dance



File
Craig Nicholas, a teacher and coach at McNary High School for nearly 30 years, celebrates a baseball state title win with fellow coaches in 2009. Nicholas retired from both the classroom and field two weeks ago.

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

In 1999, the McNary High School varsity baseball team made it to the state title game with Lakeridge High School and lost 6-3.

It was Craig Nicholas' first year as head coach. "We beat some really good teams and we did some really good stuff, but we got to the game and lost. I felt terrible about that game," said Nicholas, who retired from the school two weeks ago after 29-and-a-half years as a teacher and coach in everything from football to wrestling and baseball at McNary.

In the minutes after the game, someone walked up to Nicholas and asked how he was doing. He responded that he was trying to breathe.

"The thing is, you get on a run in baseball and suddenly you lose and you're done, but it was more than that. I felt like I'd let the city of Keizer down," Nicholas said.

One of the things that becomes clear when talking with Nicholas about his career is that it was never about a single game or a single title.

It's always been about representing the city of Keizer well.

It was a decade before the Celts returned to the final dance in baseball.

"That was group of kids I knew were going to be pretty special even as freshmen," Nicholas said. "But then, in their senior year, all but two or three players ended up with some weird injury."

Nicholas said the Celts were "damn lucky" to finish third in league that season, but then everyone on the roster started getting healthy. For the rest of the season, the Celts would only be behind another team for one half of one inning and took the state title for the first time since 1992.

One of Nicholas' former students flew all the way in from New York to watch the game, another called him from Africa. However gruff some might perceive Nicholas as, he inspired loyalty among his athletes.

"Winning it was a monkey off my back," Nicholas said, then added. "Coaching baseball

Please see NICK, Page A13



KEIZERTIMES/ERIC A. HOWALD
McNary's Cade Goff looks for a shot around a South Salem High School defender in the game Tuesday, Feb. 3.

Loss to Saxons knots up first place in GVC

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

Prior to a big game with the South Salem High School Saxons, Ryan Kirch, head coach of the McNary High School varsity basketball team, wanted three things from the Celts: guarding well, guarding without fouls and the ability to slow down the pace of the game.

He got one of three. The resulting 71-62 loss means the Celts drop from the top of the Greater Valley Conference into a tie for first with the Saxons.

"They're really not like anybody else we face," Kirch said.

Throughout the game Tuesday, Feb. 3, McNary's athletes played a relatively clean defensive game while the Saxons racked up fouls. But South never let up on offense and, even when the Celts were trying to slow things down, they would end up rushing shots or outrunning dribbles creating turnovers that played right into South's ability to score quickly.

South also locked down McNary's top shooters Tregg Peterson and Harry Cavell. Peterson, who had been averaging 16 points per game, experienced long droughts in his 11-point total for the night.

Cavell managed only 13.

One of bright spots in the game was a stronger start for the Keizer team than it has had in a while. The Celts edged South to take a 15-14 lead by the first period buzzer, but South spent the rest of the night in the driver's seat.

On a 10-2 scoring run in the fourth period, McNary drew within six points of the Saxons. However, from that point on, South had an answer

"We can't come out thinking we're going to roll anyone over."

— Tregg Peterson

for every bucket or missed opportunity by McNary. Senior Devon Dunagan led the team in scoring for the night with 16 points.

The prelude to McNary's game with South Salem was a game with Forest Grove High School Friday, Jan. 30, and it was another sluggish start for McNary.

After McNary edged the Vikings 24-22 in the first period, Forest Grove put out a monster second frame outscoring McNary 18-7.

"They shot the ball really, really well. We shot the ball well, we just didn't guard as well as we needed to," said Kirch. "They had a kid hit five threes, two of them from NBA-range."

Slow starts have plagued the Celtic team for much of the season, but it's not as though the team is in denial.

"We need to get a lot better at the start of the game," said Peterson. "We can't come out thinking we're going to roll anyone over. We have to play like every team is going to push us like South Salem."

Per usual, the Keizer team hit the court with a renewed sense of urgency and turned the tables. McNary outshot Forest Grove 16-8 in the third frame, cutting the Vikings' lead to 48-47. A 19-point fourth period gave the Celts a 66-58 win.

"It wasn't a sloppy game, but it was physical and we got to the line and hit our shots there. We survived it," Kirch said.

Junior Harry Cavell led the team with 19 points; Peterson

Please see LOSS, Page A14



KEIZERTIMES/ERIC A. HOWALD
Celt Michael Phelps wrangles for an escape in his West Albany match Thursday, Jan. 29. Phelps won 7-5 on a night when much of the team struggled.

Dawgs chain up Celts

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary High School varsity and junior varsity wrestling teams both took a beating in a dual meet with West Albany High School Thursday, Jan. 29.

On a night when the Celts struggled to find any sort of momentum, both teams lost.

The varsity squad fell 42-31, the JV team fell 51-30.

"I feel like, as a team, we're dwindling. Our heart for wrestling was there earlier in the season and we were losing it," said Taran Purkey, a Celt senior. "On the other hand, we redirected ourselves at practice the next day and focused on wrestling rather than

talking to each other."

The varsity Bulldogs took a hefty lead in the lighter weight classes, but there were some bright spots even in the losses.

Junior Joey Kibbey, at 113 pounds, had a lead over West Albany's Connor Schaffner going into the final round and held onto it despite impressive

Please see WRESTLE, Page A14