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KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald
 Lady Celt Lauren Hudgins holds off a Sprague defender in the game Friday, Feb. 20.

First time since 2009

GVC Champs



KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald
 Above: Tregg Peterson makes the first cuts to a net as the Celtics celebrated their co-GVC championship Tuesday, Feb. 24. Right: Devon Dunagan puts up a shot in the game with Sprague High School Friday, Feb. 20.

Girls finish GVC in third place

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary High School girls varsity basketball team started its game against Sprague High School with an unanswered 17-point run Friday, Feb. 20.

Despite the feat, neither players nor coaches were exactly thrilled with the play in the 70-25 win.

"We handled them well by going through the motions. It wasn't until the last quarter that we got the energy up," said Vanessa Hayes, a McNary junior. "We had a bit of a talk at half-time that changed things."

While the Lady Celts were never in danger, Head Coach Derick Handley wanted to see the team putting more pressure on the Olys.

"Our mindset has been too much what the other team is bringing to the game and not on being us and making the other team make adjustments," Handley said. "In the first half, we were relying on the other team to miss their shots instead of forcing them to miss their shots."

The lopsided score allowed McNary to clear the bench twice in the game. Sydney Hunter led all scoring with 25 points; Hayes had 11; Madi Hingston had six; Kaelie Flores had 10; Jasmine Ernest and Kailley Douitt put up four points each; Paige Downer and Lauren

Hudgins had three apiece; and Emma Jones and Kelsey Koenig had two each.

Jones said defense in the second half improved exponentially.

"We were communicating well and knew where the help defense was when we needed it," she said.

The Lady Celts are third in the Greater Valley Conference as the season winds down and will play their first playoff game Wednesday, March 4. Between Sprague and McKay High School, which the girls beat 61-15 Tuesday, Feb. 24, neither opponent was much of a challenge.

It meant that the girls will have to keep bringing their A-game despite the lack of pressure from recent opponents.

"We're going to have to work extra hard in practice. We've worked really hard to get to this point in the season and we want to be prepared to take it to the next level," Jones said.

Handley said there is room for improvement on both sides of the court.

"If we allow teams to do what they want to do on offense, they will. But, when we clamp down, we know what we're capable of," he said. "On offense, we've gotten selfish at half-court. We're trying to make shots that aren't great instead of looking for open teammates with better looks."

Kuch takes 5th in 100 free

McNary freshman Marissa Kuch took fifth place in the 100 yard freestyle race at the state swimming finals Saturday, Feb. 21. She was shy of first place in the contest by less than two seconds.

She also took sixth place in the 200 yard freestyle with a time of 1:54.67.

Kuch swam the lead-off leg of a 200 freestyle relay that included Sara Eckert, Jewel Boyd and Josie Ellis. The girls finished 12th in the state with a time of 1:46.35. The same Lady Celt team took 18th in the state in the 400 free relay in 3:54.07.

LAX funder Saturday

McNary High School lacrosse players will be hosting and serving breakfast at Applebee's south of Keizer across Salem Parkway Saturday, Feb. 28.

Visitors can stop by be-

tween 8 and 10 a.m. and get a breakfast and juice for \$10. Proceeds will benefit the team and help the program reach its goal of raising \$15,000 toward the McNary turf field. To date, the team has raised \$3,000.

By ERIC A. HOWALD
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The McNary High School boys varsity basketball players are league champs.

"It feels great. It's taken a while, but it's awesome to start as the last teams in the state and end up here ranked in the top 10," said Celt senior Devon Dunagan.

A 63-51 win over McKay High School Tuesday, Feb. 24, sealed up co-champion status for McNary.

The one footnote to what was a celebratory evening was sharing the Greater Valley Conference title with South Salem High School. McNary will enter the state playoffs ranked 10th. The Saxons will begin ranked No. 5 based on the strength of their schedule.

"It feels like everything I hoped it would, it's been a long time since we've had a league title and here we are," said senior Tregg Peterson. "This is where we wanted to be."

To their credit, McKay never gave up in the match Tuesday. Outsized in every way imaginable, the scrappy Royal Scot team cut McNary's lead to single digits in the last minute.

"When we put the seniors back in at the end of the fourth quarter, we were just sort of goofing around instead of locking down," Peterson said.

Knocking down shots from the foul line and a pair of shots in transitions put the game away. Dunagan laid in the final bucket as the last buzzer of league play sounded.

McNary is likely to host its first playoff game Tuesday, March 3.

"From now on, every single play, every single quarter matters. Every single game we need to come out in the first quarter a little better and then finish strong," Dunagan said.

"We've got to finish every game, if we're up 20, we have to keep going and get up 30 points. We can't slow down in the middle of it," Peterson said.

"We've played all season to hold on to first place"

— Ryan Kirch
 McNary head coach

Prior to the McKay game, the Celtics squared off against Sprague High School Friday, Feb. 20. McNary won 63-51.

Throughout the first quarter, the teams traded the lead. With about two minutes left, a bucket from Cade Goff knotted the game at 11-11, but the Olys hit a three-pointer to jump ahead on the next possession.

Another basket by Goff and a trey by VanCleave finally gave the Celts a lead they wouldn't relinquish. Cole Thomas came up with a big block at the end of the first period that prevented another possible three-pointer by Sprague. The next period started 16-14.



GVC Champs

"We played okay defensively. We had some miscommunication on our switches, and they scored 14 while we try to hold them to eight in the first period," said Kirch. "On the other hand, we outscored them 10-2 in the second quarter and got into a rhythm as the game settled down."

With league play in the rearview, McNary is now in a one-and-done situation.

They'll have until Tuesday to prepare for the first-round state playoff game, but they won't likely know who their opponent is until Friday, Feb. 27.

"From here on out, competition is going to be difficult, but we've played all season to hold on to first place. Our kids have shown their mental toughness in a long season and now there's just a little bit left," Kirch said.