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McNary's Cade Goff shoves past a Sprague defender in a game earlier this season. The Celtics lost to North Medford High School 63-56 in the second round of the state playoff tournament Friday, March 6.

Boys ousted in Medford

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary High School boys varsity basketball team ended its season with a 63-56 loss to North Medford High School Friday, March 6.

The boys duked it out with the Black Tornadoes until the final minutes of the game.

"It was a one-point game with two minutes to go," said Ryan Kirch, McNary head coach. "In the end, we just missed a few shots that we normally make and North Medford didn't. We missed 10-foot shots by our better shooters and North was 14-of-16 in the fourth quarter."

Kirch said the hardest aspect of the game, in which the teams traded leads for much of three quarters, was that it ended what had been

a restorative season for the Celtics.

"They are a tough team and our guys were well-prepared and fought hard. It was a good high school basketball game by two very good teams," he said.

In the four years since Kirch took over the program, McNary notched its first winning season last year. This year, they exploded onto the scene of an expanded Greater Valley Conference. The Celtics took a loss in early December to Tualatin High School and another to Lebanon High School later that month, but didn't lose a conference game until late January.

Earlier in the season, McNary took down the South Salem Saxons 67-62 in their own house for the first time in years. South bounced

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Lady Celt Jaylene Montano guards against a Sprague player in a game earlier this season. Montano is one of several players who will return for the Celtics next season.

Girls' early lead crumbles in final minutes at Clackamas

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The Lady Celts began their first round state playoff game with a 13-6 lead, but a scoring drought in the fourth quarter led to a 56-43 loss to Clackamas High School in girls varsity basketball.

"We were up five at half-time and were able to stretch it to nine in the third quarter. Starting the fourth quarter we had a five-point lead," said Derick Handley, McNary head coach. "It was a 2 to 6 point game for most of the fourth quarter, but when we had to start fouling they made their free throws."

The loss ended the girls season, but Handley said the confidence the team entered the game with wavered in the final four minutes, giving the Cavaliers the victory and an advance to the second round.

While the game didn't fall in favor of the Celts, there were many good things happening for McNary in the early going. Sophomore Sydney Hunter had 12 points by the half and finished the game with 16. Junior Madi Hingston wasn't far behind with 14 points.

"Lauren Hudgins did an amazing job on the Clackamas post, Peyton Carroll. She was their leading scorer this season, and Lauren held her to

9 points, most of which were free throws at the end of the game," Handley said.

Handley, a first-year head coach of the program, was most disappointed that the season closed just as the McNary girls were reaching their full potential. He is the third head coach of the program in four years.

"They've bought in, and there is a lot of confidence in this group moving forward that we can be a competitive team at the state level. For the coaches, we really had the challenge of getting each girl to fully understand their role on the team.

For several girls, like Kaelie Flores and Madi Hingston, we changed their role from what they were used to in years past. Without Reina Strand, we needed both of those girls to become scoring threats, and they definitely did that for us," Handley said.

Strand has been sidelined with injury since last summer and was a powerful presence for McNary as a freshman and sophomore.

The team had a more-

than-rocky beginning. The season started with four losses, the last one to West Albany High School, which moved up to the 6A Greater Valley Conference this year. Since then, the team had six-win and four-win streaks in conference competition to finish third in the GVC. The team's four losses were to eventual league champs South Salem High School and second place West Albany.

Handley said losing the team's three seniors is likely to be a blow next season.

"Jasmine Ernest has developed into a floor general and a great defender. Emma Jones was one of the hard-

est, if not the hardest working players I've ever had the opportunity to coach. And Lauren was really starting to find her groove again after sitting out as a junior. We'll definitely miss her size," he said.

While those key roles will be vacated, the long win streaks allowed most of the up-and-comers ample time on the court. Not to mention, the team's leading scorers —

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"They've bought in... there's a lot of confidence in this group moving forward."

— Derick Handley, McNary head coach



Celt sophomore Mathew Ismay was named the Greater Valley Conference's Defensive Player of the Year last week. He was also an all-league honorable mention.

Celt 'Garbage Man' is league's top defender

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

Earlier this season, Ryan Kirch, McNary's head basketball coach, was watching film with the team and let it slip that sophomore Mathew Ismay was the squad's "garbage man."

"He gets offensive rebounds and put backs, easy lay-ins at the rim, gets to the free throw line. He does all the little things to put himself in those situations and he's incredibly smart. He's just a blue collar, hard working player — like a garbage man," Kirch said.

His teammates laughed, but the nickname stuck. From here on out, it might just be the nickname other players begin striving for. Ismay was named Defensive Player of the Year in

the Greater Valley Conference last week.

Ismay's name is infrequently mentioned among the team's top scorers, averaging a little less than six points per game. Take a look a little further down the line and the big picture becomes clearer. Ismay had 88 rebounds this season, 38 assists and 24 steals.

Ismay said defense has been his focus since joining the Celtic ranks.

"It's the part of the game that's overlooked. If you let the person you're guarding score more than you do on offense, it's all for nothing," Ismay said. "Part of it is athleticism, but most of it's effort. One slip up and that's it."

His approach and attitude have bred respect among team-

mates and opponents, even though his role on the team could easily be overlooked.

"The older players appreciate how he competes. Coaches in the league consistently commented on how tough he is and how hard he works," Kirch said.

Ismay was also an honorable mention in all-league selections, but he had his sights set on the defender award.

"It means a lot to me. It was a surprise, but if there is an award I wanted that was the one," Ismay said.

As far as the future goes, he'd like to win it again, but he remains focused on being part of the team.

"Being league champions again is more important right now," he said.