



KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald
McNary senior Payton Williams is expected to return to the boys tennis team after battling cancer for the past nine months.

Boys put young squad on court

By **ERIC A. HOWALD**
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary High School boys varsity tennis team lost a number of their power players to graduation last year, but they won't have to look far for inspiration on the court.

At the end of the 2014 season, the team voted then-junior Payton Williams as captain of this year's squad. Since that time, Williams was diagnosed with cancer and had been undergoing chemotherapy treatment and surgeries to remove the malignant tissue for the better part of nine months. After all that, Lisa Reid, McNary head coach, expects him to be back in the saddle this season.

"I have no doubt that Payton will be a fully participating team member earning his letter just like the other guys. We really need him, he is a true leader. Payton enjoys tennis so much that you can't tell if he is winning or losing by his on-court demeanor," Reid said.

This year's squad will be one of the more inexperienced ones in recent years, but Reid said the new players are making up for lack of experience with enthusiasm and desire to improve.

"The new players bringing a lot of motivation to the team, which we lacked last year. I think that gives us a lot of potential," said Celt Alfonso Pacheco.

Sophomore Dante Garibay said the inexperience might pay off in ways unexpected.

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"It gives us a lot of diversity in playing style, and they bring new things to the court," Garibay said.

Control and serving are at the top of the agenda in the early weeks of the season, according to Reid.

"They have to learn to control the ball and not just hit it as hard as they can. If they make good serve returns and choices in practice, they'll be able to do it during matches as well," she said.

An expanded conference with three new teams is likely to add a different type of pressure as the season unfolds, but the Celts' biggest competition will likely come from South Salem and Sprague high schools.

"We have a lot to prove with all the new players, but we want to bring them something they haven't seen," Garibay said. "It'll make district competition different with so many new teams."

Reid said the variety will be a welcome change even if it makes earning spots in the state tournament tougher.

Despite all the change inside and outside the Celtic program, Pacheco saw nothing but good things ahead.

"Even though we lost some of our good players last year, I think we'll be even better this year," he said.

Help send wrestler to Reno

Keizer's Pacific Crest Archery is holding a raffle to help a Keizer 10-year-old attend the Reno World Championship wrestling competition this year.

Keizer Elementary School student Destiny Rodriguez, who has won multiple national and regional title, is hoping to attend one of the premiere events in the youth wrestling world. Pacific Crest is holding a raffle for a Mission Craze compound bow, a value of about \$300. The prize package includes several additional accessories. Proceeds will help fund Destiny's trip to Reno, Nev.

Tickets are \$10 each or five for \$40. The winner will be drawn Tuesday, April 7. Tickets can be purchased by calling 503-383-6518. Donations are also appreciated.

Girls tennis eyeing Greater Valley title

By **ERIC A. HOWALD**
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McNary High School senior Sandy Childress has had just about enough of second place in district tournaments.

"I'm tired of being first place loser, I want to be first place for real," Sandy said. "I'm shooting for gold."

Two years ago, Childress took second place in the doubles league tournament as a sophomore with a foreign exchange student Alex Henriques da Silva. She took second place in singles as a junior in 2014. Whether it's singles or doubles this season, Sandy might just end up making that goal.

This year, Childress' younger sister, Hannah, is a freshman and the pair plan on competing as a doubles team while Sandy may switch over to singles from time to time.

Hannah's already been

playing club tennis with Sandy for several years, but said she's been enjoying the larger team practices.

"It's cool to have a bigger group around you and supporting you," Hannah said. "We have a lot of new girls coming in that are really good."

In the bigger picture, the Lady Celts are thinking this season could be the one when they compete for a Greater Valley Conference title.

"I think we have a deep team with a lot of experience and we may have a good chance at a district title," Sandy said.

The Greater Valley Conference includes three new teams — Forest Grove, McMinnville and West Albany high schools — but none of them sent as many players to the state tournament last

year as McNary. In the new league, Salem's Sprague had more than the Celts' three players in last year's state tournament, and the Olys only had four. Still, Sandy said an expanded conference is going to make league play tougher.

"All three schools are pretty decent and we'll have to fight for it," she said.

In addition to Childress, seniors Ariana Neads and Sami Trowbridge went to state as a doubles team their junior year. This time around, they'll be expecting more of themselves.

"We got to go to state last year, but we had no idea what we were getting into and how great everyone was going to be. We kind of got our butts kicked, but we know where we need to be now," Neads said. The duo still managed three wins in

the state tournament.

At the very least, playing the Childress sisters is going to make them tougher, Trowbridge said.

"I think we're already getting better. Hannah is just a little fresher, but she's cool — and good — and going to make us better," Trowbridge said.

The two doubles teams are expecting to swing between the No. 1 and No. 2 doubles spot, but Neads and Trowbridge have no desire to just roll over and let the Childresses take it — even if it's taking a lot of hard work.

"Sandy has a killer serve and, even in the past week, we've improved on getting it in bounds rather than shanking it off some place," Neads said.



KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald
Lady Celt Cambria Rushton returns a volley in competition Tuesday, March 17.

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