

Lessons for gridgers amid struggles

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary High School varsity football team ended its season with a 42-21 loss to Central Catholic High School in the first round of the state playoffs Friday, Nov. 6.

The Celtics experienced a fair bit of success in the season's early going, but ran into the buzzsaw of its schedule four weeks ago. McNary ended up losing its last four games of the season.

Jeff Auvinen, McNary head coach, said the season's pivotal game proved to be a 10-7 loss to McKay High School in the fourth week.

"It really hurt us in the power rankings and gave us a loss that we couldn't really afford, but it also woke us up a little bit. It spurred us into some good efforts with the



McNary's Hayden Sader turns up the field en route to a first down in McNary's game with Central Catholic High School Friday, Nov. 6.

teams after that," he said.

McNary won its next two outings against McMinnville and Forest Grove High School. The latter was the Celtics' most dominating performance of the season and ended with a final score of 51-28.

After losing the next week in a 43-40 squeaker hosting West Salem High School, the boys seemed to lose a bit of confidence as the league leaders in the Greater Valley Conference took their positions on the opposite side of the field.

Still, McNary finished fourth in the league.

"The thing was is we were in a tough league this season and we finished near the top," said Celt LaCroix Hill.

Even as the season was ending Trent Van Cleave, McNary quarterback, said some things had survived the team's late-season struggles.

"We definitely didn't fulfill our potential, but we're still a family," he said.

In hope of getting closer to fulfilling that potential in 2016, Auvinen planned to start offseason workouts in the coming weeks.

"We need to get a little stronger and tougher physically and mentally. The big thing is getting stronger. The younger kids are pretty excited to be doing their jobs," he said. "It's a total cooperative effort and, when we were doing those things, we were a pretty good team. I'd like them to learn from those moments about the value of cooperation and teamwork. It makes us a lot stronger when we work together."

For the team's departing seniors, Auvinen said he would like them to take away lessons of cooperation and teamwork.

"Football is the ultimate game of everyone doing their job. That means doing your job and trusting everyone else to be doing their jobs," he said. "It's a total cooperative effort and, when we were doing those things, we were a pretty good team. I'd like them to learn from those moments about the value of cooperation and teamwork. It makes us a lot stronger when we work together."

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where-to and how-to from them. George, who had lived there all his life, warned me, "Opening weekend is always a mess. Too many hunters, too many dogs and lots of confusion. You have to know most of the farmers to get permission to hunt. A high percentage of the hunters will not hunt again the rest of the season."

My trusty book had warned me not to hunt my young dog in a crowd with other dogs. So, opening weekend I slipped out, not letting Rusty see me leave. I was thankful for the guidance of the book. As George had said, "it was a mess." We had big aggressive dogs out of control, dog fights, birds going in all directions, cripples down and running, and lots of shooting and yelling. I learned a lot about what not to do. All weekend I kept thinking that Monday after work, Rusty and I would be out there for a quality experience.

So, here we are, and he's locked on point. He doesn't flinch as I ease up to him in the ankle deep alfalfa.

I think to myself, "I have to kill this first bird for Rusty."

The rooster explodes into the air with a loud cackle as he heads straight away. The 12-gauge Ithaca swings into place and, as coach had taught me, I whisper, "shoot-him-in-the-butt." The rooster is dead in the air at 30 yards.

This is a totally new experience for Rusty. The bird hits the ground and he is on it in a heartbeat. The next minute or so becomes one of the greatest experiences I have ever had in

the field.

Rusty grabs the rooster, drops it, wheels, lets out a "yip" and charges at me in a dead run. My first thought is he has grabbed a sharp, broken wing bone. At about three feet, he leaps straight into my chest, and almost knocks me down. I try to hug him with one arm, but it's like trying to hug a freshly landed 40-pound salmon. He squirts out of my arm and heads back to the rooster. He flips it in the air, streaks out in a 30-yard circle as hard as he can run, ears flying in the air, and a "yip, yip, yip" each time he hits the ground! I put the shotgun aside just in time for him to jump into my arms again.

I have never seen such uncontrolled joy in an animal. He repeats his circling routine again. I sit there in the cool autumn air, tears of joy rolling down my cheeks.

Rusty's first rooster will always occupy a special place in my heart.

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"Undefeated? I still can hardly process it. I remember our first practice like it was yesterday," said T. Larimer. "Eleven of my 25 players had never played football before, and half of them took one look at Junior and Fowler and Young and were scared to death. But my staff—Marcus and Coach Barker, as well as my main assistant Angel Ochoa and line coaches Jason Walling and Zach Drake (another former Whiteaker and McNary captain) were amazing from day one—they created a culture based on technique, teaching, repetition and pure positive reaffirmation, and the kids completely bought in."

"Before the game tonight I asked my kids if they cared enough about their teammates to give their very best on the biggest stage—and that's exactly what they did."

J. Walling added, "This season is the result of players and coaches who are fully committed to a common cause."

Submitted by Tom Larimer

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