

Defying odds: Lady Celts take 4th in state tourney

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Of the Keizertimes

All season long, the McNary High School girls varsity basketball team had occasion to let their emotions get the better of them.

When South Salem High School denied them the chance to capture a Greater Valley Conference title, they didn't break. When Jesuit High School ousted them from contention for a state title in the first round of the state tournament last week, they didn't even bend.

"This group has bounced back," said Derick Handley, McNary head coach. "We lost to Jesuit and it would have been easy to mail it in, instead they turned around and beat the No. 1 team in the coach's poll (Oregon City High School) entering the tournament by nine points."

The 55-46 win over Oregon City pitted the Celts against the second-ranked team in the state, South Medford High School, in a game for fourth place Saturday, March 12, at the University of Portland's Chiles Center.

The game went not only the distance, but an extra four minutes of overtime that saw McNary win 57-52. It was only then that the tears of joy began to flow.

"For us seniors, going out like this it's such a great accomplishment, because there is no other team we'd rather do it with. We got here together and we made it all the way to the end," said Lady Celt Madi Hingston.

It was a pitch perfect ending to a season in which the team had already made school history with the most wins for a girls basketball team. MHS ended the year at 23-6.

"It's kind of mind-blowing and surreal once it's all over to pick up that trophy. Now

it's ended on a good note and we're happy," added junior Sydney Hunter.

McNary's victory was never a sure thing in the match with South Medford. The teams knotted the score three times in the first frame alone before a two-pointer by Kaelie Flores put the Celts ahead before the buzzer.

In the second quarter, South Medford began making a strong offensive push and led by as many as five points before a trey by Hingston and a bucket by senior Reina Strand tied the game again, 27-27, going to halftime.

"Once we got to halftime, we finally started settling down and that's when I think the game began to change. We kept our composure no matter what," said Kailey Doult, a sophomore and the Greater Valley Conference's Defender of the Year.

In the first half of the third quarter, the Celts snapped a 7-0 run by the Panthers with a trip to the foul line by Strand, then Hingston hit another three-pointer to retake the lead 35-34. South Medford took it back on the next possession, but a trey by Flores and two-pointer by Hingston put the score at 40-38, McNary leading, as the fourth quarter began.

The Panthers tied the game and took the lead again at the beginning of the fourth period. They carried it until there was 3:19 left in the game. Then, Hingston hit a trey and a two-pointer to overtake South 49-47. With 16 seconds left in the game, Hingston made a trip to the foul line and sunk both shots making the score 52-49, but South Medford took the ball back down the court and hit a three-point shot to tie the game with seven seconds left.

The Celts were able to make it back down the court



ABOVE: the Lady Celts exit the court after winning a game against South Medford High School in overtime to take fourth in the OSAA 6A state tournament. RIGHT: The team with their trophy.



and get off a shot and two rebound attempts, but none of them fell.

All five of the points in the four-minute overtime were made at the foul line by Hunter, Flores and Hingston.

"We knew they were lacking depth, so part of the game plan was we wanted to wear them out. I didn't want to give up a three with seven seconds left to go to overtime to wear them out, but we knew that their energy would be an issue," said Handley.

The loss to Jesuit in the first game of the tournament served as a wake-up call for how McNary approached the next two games of the tournament.

"We knew it was going to be a struggle for us, but it showed us that we were going to have to come out even harder the next day and that's what we did," said senior Kaelie Flores.

In the first round of the consolation games with Oregon City, McNary got blitzed in the opening minutes and was trailing 12-0 by 3:41 in the first frame. The Celts regrouped and cut the lead to five by the first buzzer and had a 14-4 run that spanned the first two periods.

McNary never let Pioneers get that far ahead again. In the third period, after 23 minutes of Oregon City leading the game, Hingston hit a trey to

tie the game at 37-37 and then another on McNary's next possession to take a 40-38 lead the Keizer team would never relinquish en route to the 55-46 win.

McNary wreaked enough havoc on offense in the fourth quarter to cause three of Oregon City's starters to foul out

of the game.

"It's great to prove people wrong. We were the underdog coming into this and we were expected to come in and lose two games and go home," said Strand. "Instead we came in, hung around and we showed them what McNary is made of."



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