

Celt baseball team ready for sunshine

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

In 2015, the McNary High School varsity baseball team made it all the way to the second round of the state playoffs before getting ousted by Sheldon High School.

Repeating that feat will mean the Celtics will have to answer one big question early on: who will be the go-to players on the mound?

"The pitching is our biggest question mark. We have lots of kids that pitch, but we don't have the experience factor with a lot of varsity innings," said Larry Keeker, McNary head coach.

Josiah Gilbert, a 6-foot-3 junior, will be the Celtic's No. 1, but it remains to be seen who will step up behind him.

"The problem is we don't know how the kids are going to respond to a live game situation yet," Keeker said.

Making matters worse is that the team has had limited opportunity to play on an actual field in the weeks leading up to the start of the season. Drenching rains have kept the team mostly confined to the gym for practices.

"We're definitely ready to see some sun," said Celt Collin Young, a senior first baseman. "But we've really focused on the fundamentals in the gym, breaking each step of every action down from swings to throws, but everything changes in a live game."

The Celtics were scheduled to face Cleveland High School in their first game of the season Monday, March 14, but it was postponed due to downpours.

The team's first home game after returning from spring break will be Wednesday, March 30, vs. Oregon City High School.

While the preseason games are, in part, a time to shake off the dust, they can also become a factor late in the season when rankings dictate which teams face each other and where.

"We definitely want to win those games, but we need to keep everyone healthy because it's a long season," said senior shortstop Matt Aguilar. Aguilar is already committed to continuing his baseball career at Lane Community College next fall.

In addition to Young and Aguilar, senior returners include Evan Alger, Davis Kaiser, Tan-



File
Celt Josiah Gilbert will return for his junior season as the Celtic's No. 1 pitcher on the mound. McNary finished second in the Greater Valley Conference in 2015.

ner Gordon, Isaiah Holt, Trevor Gilbert, Matt Koopman, and Trent Van Cleave, who is returning to the sport after two seasons away.

"It's a solid group of seniors and we've got some good talent in the junior class along with a couple of players from the sophomore class," Keeker said.

Taking the temperature of the team on defense has been difficult in gym practices, but Keeker said the team's offense was holding its

own.

"We'll have some speed at the top of the line-up and some good hitters in the middle," he said.

While the Celtics have finished among the top teams in the Greater Valley Conference in recent seasons, Aguilar said the team was gunning for a league championship this year.

"We haven't won the conference since 1999 and we want to hang another banner," he said.

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