

Lady Celts set to defend GVC title

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary High School girls varsity softball team learned a hard lesson at the end of its 2015 season.

The team won the Greater Valley Conference title, scored more runs than any other 6A team in the state, and then had to play two of three playoff games on fields at least five hours away. McNary won the first game, against North Medford High School, 12-2, but lost the second one – two

days later – 5-0 to Grants Pass High School. Having to travel for both games was the result of losing some contests against top opponents earlier in the season.

The takeaway? Early games count just as much as the ones later in the season.

“It’s easy for us to explain it this year and we saw when we had to go North Medford and then Grants Pass. Now we can say, ‘This is how it affects you,’” said Kevin Wise, McNary head coach. “They have to be in the

game from the start so that doesn’t happen again.”

The Lady Celts were actually scheduled for a rematch at North Medford Wednesday, March 16, and senior Kinsey McNaught said the pressure was already building.

“We want to set ourselves up well this season. Our first game is North Medford and we know they are gunning for us,” McNaught said. McNaught recently committed to continuing her softball career with Spokane’s Whitworth University after earning a first team all-state selection as a junior.

The good news, Wise said, is that the team is picking up right where it left off.

“We implemented some changes last year as far as getting the program aimed in a new direction and the returners have all been a part of that. It’s more about being good teammates and better teammates and the girls have really bought in, led by our seniors Kinsey and Madisen (Oliver),” he said.

Oliver was excited to see where the already-good chemistry would take the team this season.

“We seem to have some talent and the hitting is looking good again this year,” Oliver said.

Oliver will be sharing duties in the circle with fresh-



Celt Haley Ebner eyes first base before making a throw in a game during the 2015 season. Last season, McNary won the GVC and scored more runs than any 6A team in the state.

Boys tennis returns with fresh faces, new leadership

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Tennis can be an unforgiving sport, especially for newcomers. Fortunately, the McNary High School boys varsity team has some experienced leadership.

“The thing about starting tennis is that it can be really frustrating,” said senior Johnny Trinh. “You lose a lot of points and you lose a lot of matches. It was the most frustrating thing for me, but you have to take the small steps that will help win matches later.”

Trinh is co-captain of the team this season with Alphonso Pacheco.

“Right now everyone is working hard to get better. We have a lot of young kids who are going to be good, you can already see it,” Trinh said.

The team returns a dedicated core in addition to some new faces.

“The strengths are academics and we’ve added four freshmen who are all top students. I’m hoping it means they pick up the game quickly and understand the mental components quicker than they might otherwise,” said Lisa Reid, McNary head coach.

Another of the new faces is German exchange student Mats Schiefer, who will take over the No. 1 singles spot in

the early going. Trinh plans to partner with Schiefer in doubles matches later this season.

“He’s just getting back into the sport, but he’s played for five years in Germany. We both have some things to work on, but I’m excited to have the opportunity to play with him,” Trinh said.

Courts soaked by recent rains have largely kept the Celts indoors. While they’ve had brief respites, most of their live action came in a camp before regular practices began two weeks ago.

“The big thing right now is just getting everyone comfortable playing matches and scoring as much as possible,” Reid said.

While less than ideal, indoor practice for the Celts provided opportunities to focus on fundamentals.

“The things they can do inside are make sure they’re checking their grips and bending knees, all the little things that will help them improve faster,” she said.

Good habits will give even struggling players something to rely on when the going gets tough, Trinh said.

“You can’t give up when it’s nerve-racking and you’re making mistakes. You have to keep your head up and come back every day to get better,” he said.

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