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graduation. It is great to have a talented player such as Kolby Barker to build the defense around, and Caleb Kieffuk-Yates, an honorable mention all-league performer, returns on the offensive line. For McNary to match last year's 4-4 league record a bunch of young players with little or no varsity experience will need to come through.

KT: What do the Celtics need to do in order to compete for the conference championship?

Gilman: Mistakes have to be minimal for McNary. Turnovers, broken coverages on defense, special teams breakdowns are the difference between being a contender and a pretender. The new starters will have to learn fast. They open the season against North Salem, but face powerhouses South Salem and Sprague in weeks two and three respectively.

Spivey: I know how competitive Jeff Auvinen is; he is going to tell his players that they will compete every Friday night with the goal of winning the conference. Honestly, a lot is stacked against the Celtics. As I said, a lot of young players will need to grow up fast. Nothing is impossible and high school football is very unpredictable, but it is a tough hill the Celtics have to climb.

KT: Where do you see McNary finishing

in the GVC?

Gilman: The Celts realistically look like a strong No. 4 team. The Celtic program continues to improve, but needs a few more positive seasons to match the tradition established at West, South and Sprague.

Spivey: I think it would be a successful season for McNary to equal that 4-4 conference record from a year ago. You look at Sprague, West Salem, and South Salem a step or two ahead of McNary. But after that top three, the field becomes very crowded. Best case scenario for McNary is to finish fourth, worst case seventh.

KT: How will the GVC stack up to other conferences in 6A?

Gilman: Usually, the Greater Valley is about the third or fourth best league in Oregon—behind the formidable Metro League and the Southwest Conference, and sometimes the Three Rivers League. I think that from top to bottom, the GVC will be third overall in power rankings this season.

Spivey: At the top of the league, Sprague and West Salem, I think stack up very well with the balance of the state and both have the capability of going deep into the playoffs. The balance of the league still has a ways to go to be competitive. In the 10 years of the 6A classification five GVC teams rank in the bottom 10 for wins, only one, West Salem, ranks in the top 10.

QUICK HITS

A look at all the teams in the Greater Valley Conference

By **HERB SWETT** *Of the Keizertimes*

South Salem Saxons



Many question marks follow a 10-1 season for South Salem last year.

In 2015, the Saxons beat West Albany 35-19 in Greater Valley Conference playoffs and North Medford 21-10 in the first round of state play. Oregon City whipped them 49-21 in the second round at state.

Twenty-eight of last year's Saxons have graduated. Five starters on offense and one on defense are returning.

Players lost to graduation include quarterback Gabe Matthews and running backs Francisco Ramirez-Perez and Alex Sanchez.

Scott Dufault, the head coach, does not like to name first-string names before the season begins. However, he noted that four starters on last year's offensive line and last year's tailback are expected to start again. One starting defensive lineman from 2015 is returning.

"So far," Dufault said, "the strength of our team will be the offensive line."

Inexperience on defense is what he sees as the weakest point.

Coordinators are Josh Vanlue for the offense and Chris Short for the defense.

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