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Middle school wrestling back for second year

By Derek Wiley
Of the Keizertimes

Following in the footsteps of his father and uncle, Cameron Parks started wrestling in kindergarten.

"I never really liked basketball, wanted to do something more physical," Parks said.

But after budget cuts took the sport out of Salem-Keizer middle schools, Parks wasn't

sure what would be available to him once he reached the sixth grade. Thankfully for Parks and 60 other kids at Whiteaker and Claggett Creek, wrestling returned to the middle schools last year and Parks took advantage of the opportunity, even qualifying for the middle school state tournament.

In its second season back, after a five-year hiatus, Parks

is one of 50 kids at Whiteaker that came out for wrestling in January. Coach Kelly Hafer said that is 20 more than last year and includes six girls, like sixth grader Destiny Rodriguez, who began wrestling when she was just five, has won multiple state championships and the Reno World Championships last April.

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KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley

Left: Claggett Creek wrestler Brandon Blanco won by pin fall in his first match of the season. Right: Whiteaker wrestlers Eoan Sharabarin and Cameron Parks work on moves during practice.

McNary halfway through league play

By DEREK WILEY
Of the Keizertimes

McNary boys basketball coach Ryan Kirch knew playing in the Greater Valley Conference would be tough.

He just didn't realize how tough.

"By far it's the best league in the state for a number of reasons," Kirch said. "One, there's some very good coaching. Two, there's some very good players. Three, there's a lot of different styles. You've got a McKay team who runs the ball up and down the floor. South Salem can slow it down on you with some really good guard play. Sprague's got a dominant post player. Forest Grove's got great coaching. Every game is mentally draining. It makes it fun but it's a real challenge to make sure you've got to be up and ready to go at all times or anybody can beat you."

The Celtics went 6-2 in their first run through league play with their only losses coming in low scoring contests against West Salem and South Salem.

"The tempo was not in our favor," Kirch said. "We recognize that teams might want to slow us down a little bit, which I would want to do the same thing if I was playing us. So we just have to do a better



KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley

Sydney Hunter is averaging 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Lady Celtics this season.

job of being able to execute in the half court and not become rushed. We get a little lost mentally and out of rhythm because things aren't coming so easily

for us. In that situation, we've got to be more mentally tough to get the shot we want. That's a point of emphasis."

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KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley

Matthew Ismay leads McNary in points, rebounds and assists as the Celtics are tied for the top spot in the Greater Valley Conference midway through the season.

Celtics drop duals to McKay, North Salem

By DEREK WILEY
Of the Keizertimes

McNary wrestling coach Jason Ebbs was pleased with his junior and senior wrestlers after duals against McKay and North Salem.

There just wasn't enough of them as the Celtics lost to North Salem 38-36 on Friday, Jan. 20, a night after falling to McKay 51-27.

"With the guys who understand wrestling, we're doing our job right now," Ebbs said. "The guys who are juniors and seniors we're putting out on the mat are doing good work but they also understand what

we're dealing with. We are extremely freshmen heavy. In an ideal world I have juniors and seniors in my varsity lineup and my freshmen and sophomores are watching my juniors and seniors and learning from them. I have four to six freshmen in my varsity lineup every week."

And with so many underclassmen, Ebbs is not only having to teach wrestling technique but also the importance of commitment, loyalty and time.

"You give all three and great things will happen, for you and the program," Ebbs said.

"We've taken it on as a coaching staff the idea of we're in the process of changing the culture on this team."

If a kid misses practice the day before a dual, they aren't allowed to wrestle in that dual.

McNary had to forfeit four weight classes against North Salem and three versus McKay.

"We're teaching these young kids what it means to be committed and loyal to a program at a very young age," Ebbs said. "We're having four, five or six forfeits every dual because kids don't understand their responsibilities to the program."

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KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald

A 106 pounds, McNary freshman Noah Gatchet pinned his McKay opponent but it wasn't enough for the Celtics to defeat the Royal Scots.