

Gragg named McNary AD

By **DEREK WILEY**
Of the *Keizertimes*

When searching for McNary's next athletic director, principal Erik Jespersen only had to look within his own building.

Of the 19 applicants, which included athletic directors from other 6A schools in the state, Scott Gragg stood out and not because he's 6 feet 8 inches tall.

"I'm very excited because I think we've got a superstar," Jespersen said. "He's going to be amazing for us."

Gragg is used to being called a "superstar." After graduating from Silverton High School, he played college football at the University of Montana and then spent 11 seasons in the NFL.

Once his playing days were over, Gragg coached at his alma matters, first, as head football coach at Silverton and then as an assistant at Montana.

When the Grizzlies head coach retired and Gragg wasn't retained, the family decided to stay in Montana for one more year so his daughter, Anna, a senior, could finish high school.

Gragg became the principal of Fort Benton, a small K-12 school in Missoula.

Gragg, along with his wife Toni and son Brian, then moved back to Oregon without a job and hoping things

would work out. After interviewing at McNary, he was hired as an instructional coach before the 2016-17 school year.

"Erik and I have had an ongoing conversation for almost two years because he knew I've got friends and family on staff here and really like what's going on here at McNary," said Gragg, whose cousin is married to head football coach Jeff Auvinen.

Assistant Brad Emmert was also on Gragg's staff at Silverton.

The athletic director position will be Gragg's third at McNary in less than a year as he has also filled in as interim assistant principal in charge of discipline while Jay Crystal has been on leave. Gragg will replace Ron Richards, who is retiring in July.

"Everyday that I come to work and every time I get to interact with Erik and Ron and (Assistant Principal) Rhonda (Rhodes) and (Activity Director and Dean of Students) Dan (Borresen) and (head football coach) Jeff Auvinen and (assistant principal) Susanne (Stefani), this is a great admin team, a great teaching staff, great kids. It makes it very rewarding to come to work everyday."

Gragg said his greatest experience for becoming an athletic director came during his final two seasons in the

NFL when he traveled from Salem all the way up the I-5 corridor to Seattle as part of Coaches Time Out, a national organization that provides support to coaches.

"We stopped in almost every school, met with the FCA director and they got us in touch with coaches and I can't think of one school where a coach didn't appreciate us asking how they were doing, being encouraged and giving them resources to become a better coach," Gragg said. "It was a huge eye opener to me that we've got these people that are in the lives of student athletes that are hungry to be better leaders and I had an opportunity based on my experience and the coaches that I was around to provide that. That's my hope with all of our coaches at McNary and everyone at McNary is that I can be an encouragement to them."

While Gragg is known for his work on the football field, he has some experience or knowledge in nearly every sport, with the exception of maybe tennis and wrestling. But Gragg said one of the tennis coaches has already helped by placing a glossary of terms on his desk.

"The kids are the same and you don't need to be an expert in technique or fundamentals of tennis to be a good encourager of a tennis

coach and be a connection with the students, the coaches and the community and their parents," said Gragg, who also wants to be proactive with parents. "That's really important to me is to open that line of communication. I feel very passionate about protecting coaches and encouraging them, feeling like they've got an ally and not an adversary. Those are the things I wake up every morning thinking about, how can we improve those."

For a kid that grew up in the area, the McNary AD job is a blessing.

"To be able to come back to the Willamette Valley and work in a community and a school that are doing things the right way, it's a dream come true," Gragg said. "I'm really fortunate and happy to be here."



KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley
Scott Gragg will replace Ron Richards, who is retiring effective July 1, as McNary athletic director.

CELTICS

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"That was kind of what swung it there midway through the third."

Heating up from behind the 3-point arc, McNary battled back, even stealing the ball with 25 seconds to go to set up a chance at a game-tying 3 but the shot didn't fall.

"At the end, I think our guys just ran out of gas," Kirch said. "I think we were 4-for-13 from the free throw line and that hurt us. But our

kids played hard. They battled right until the end and never quit. It's just two really good basketball teams and they made a couple more plays than we did."

Cade Goff led the Celtics with 20 points.

Ismay, who fouled out with three minutes to go, and Chandler Cavell, who played through an ankle injury, each had 12.

The loss was the third year in a row that McNary's season has ended in the second round of the state tournament.

"It's always emotional at the end because you never

know when it's your last game and all of the sudden you're one win away from this great goal and you fall a little bit short and you don't really envision that being the case," Kirch said.

"It's tough but they're a veteran group, they're mature. They're everything that's right about high school athletics, just good friends who love playing together and representing their school and families and I think when they look back at the experience throughout the years that they've been here, they look at it through a positive light."



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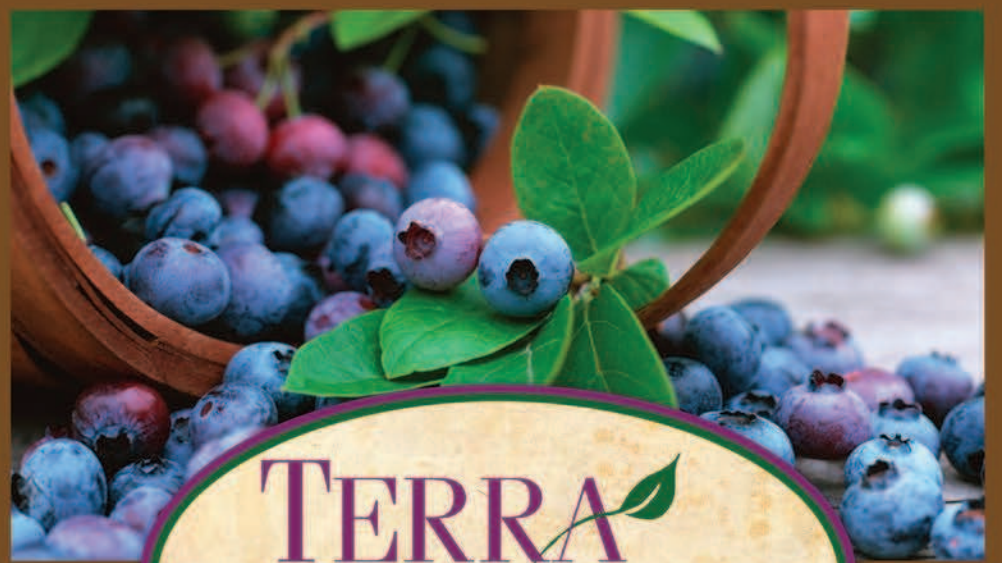
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