

DeMello coming home

By **DEREK WILEY**
Of the Keizertimes

With its third volleyball coach in three years, McNary athletic director Scott Gragg wanted someone who was committed long term.

In Crystal DeMello, who grew up in Keizer and played for the Lady Celts, he found that coach.

"The last question I asked her: 'Why do you want to coach at McNary?' and she said 'these girls deserve the commitment of a coach that's going to spend the time and energy in building this program,'" Gragg told the McNary volleyball team after school on Tuesday, May 16. "She remembers this program when it was special and she knows what it takes to get it to there. She's committed to doing that and she wants to see this thing through."

DeMello played three years of varsity volleyball for McNary under Dan Borresen. The Lady Celts placed fifth in the state her senior year.

"Crystal defined McNary

volleyball at its finest," Borresen said. "She grew up in McNary's gym coming to camps and practices with her older sister. As a high school player, she worked tirelessly to become one of the best players on one of McNary's greatest teams. A team that went undefeated in league—never losing a single game—and continued on to bring home McNary's first state tournament trophy.

"She truly loves the game and all the lessons sports provides for participants. I'm looking forward to watching her lead McNary volleyball. Her passion and tremendous work ethic will be contagious."

After graduation, DeMello accepted a Division-II scholarship to the University of Charleston in West Virginia. She was a starter at middle and right side for two years before transferring and finishing her playing career at Willamette University.

DeMello was an assistant coach at St. Mary's Academy from 2007-2012 and has since coached on various club teams.

She became the director of Southside Volleyball Club in Salem in 2015.

"I felt like I wasn't done yet with the sport," DeMello said of getting into coaching. "The sport had given me a lot and I wanted to give back so when the opportunity presented itself and someone who I was playing with asked me to coach, I fell in love with it."

DeMello, who has a full-time job as a payroll tax analyst, has been waiting to get back into high school coaching and her alma mater was the perfect fit.

"I've been waiting to come back to this school," DeMello said. "I've been waiting for the opportunity. Now that I was back in Salem, this is the school I wanted. It's a great program and it's a great community. I grew up in the community and they were always very involved. It just made sense, for a program that's had a couple of coaches in a couple years, it was time and I knew that the community would support the growth of the program."

While St. Mary's played at McNary in the state tournament when DeMello was an assistant, she hadn't been

through the front door of the school since she was a student.

"The day I interviewed was the first time I had walked back in the front of the school and that was a rush," DeMello said. "I'm really excited for my volleyball career to come full circle and bring me back home. This program gave me so many memories and life lessons. I want this team and all the teams that follows to have the same positive experience."

DeMello said the Lady Celts will play "technically clean and disciplined volleyball."

"When we execute a play offensively, defensively, it's going to look clean," she said. "That's how I design a play-book and we'll take it one step at a time."

DeMello replaces Bruce Myers, who left McNary after one season to take the same job at West Salem.

The Lady Celts finished fifth in the Greater Valley Conference last season with a 7-9 record and were 13-14 overall, losing in the first round of the state tournament.

Samantha Van Voorhis, an incoming senior who returns at setter next season, was im-



KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley
New McNary volleyball coach Crystal DeMello addressed the team after school on Tuesday, May 16.

pressed by DeMello, especially her philosophy of developing the entire student athlete to be successful in the classroom and on the court.

"I like that she focuses not just on the volleyball aspect of everything, how she wants

us to do other sports and be successful in the classroom and wants to prepare us for life because that's the way it was here when she played," Van Voorhis said. "I think it's really cool that she's trying to bring it back."

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The state meet is May 18-20 in Eugene.

McNary had 10 more athletes get on the podium at the district meet.

Lucas Garvey placed sixth in the 400 and high jump. Alyssa Looney finished fifth in the long jump and eighth

in the 100. Casey Toavs set a new personal record of 16.93 to take seventh in the 110 hurdles. Caitlyn Kiefiuk Yates placed sixth in the 100 hurdles.

Victor Zavala and Brycen Boucher finished fourth and eighth in the javelin. Alex

Sharabarin and Angie Martushev took fourth and fifth in the boys and girls pole vault. Alexa Strand placed eighth in the high jump.

Despite missing nearly the entire season with a stress fracture, Kailey Doult toughed out seventh place in the 400.

West Salem had the highest boys and girls team scores to sweep the meet.

McNary's boys finished seventh and the girls placed ninth.

"With a young team, we weren't in a position to come into the meet and score a bunch of points," Gauntz said. "We were hoping to get kids to finals and make sure they're running their best at the last meet and we accomplished that."

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"Last week they were on fire. That's the hope this week is that we keep that intensity in practice and roll that into next Monday."

The Lady Celts scheduled a game at Franklin for Thursday, May 18 to stay fresh entering the postseason.

McNary could see the Portland Interscholastic League champs in the second round of the state tournament.

"They're not going to see our full lineup," Wise said. "We'll hide it a little bit."

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