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The goal is a state title



When I first met McNary head softball coach Kevin Wise back in March before the Lady Celts played their first game and he said he was probably going to play as many as five freshmen, including starters at shortstop, catcher and right field, I was expecting a long season.

I could not have been more wrong.

The Lady Celts went 19-4 during the regular season, including six straight wins to finish as co-champions of the Greater Valley Conference.

Even with all the uncertainty that came with the freshmen, Wise said he thought McNary would reach the playoffs before the season started but his expectations grew after the Lady Celts defeated Gresham and narrowly lost to Jesuit in a spring break tournament.

Wise thought the girls began to believe early in league play when McNary came from behind to win 9-8 at South Salem.

As the No. 9 seed in the state tournament, McNary then defeated Grant and Liberty to reach the quarterfinals, where the Lady Celts faced No. 1 Oregon City.

Watching Morgan Hornback, a junior pitcher, committed to the University of Oregon, who struck out 25 batters in the first two rounds, warmup before the game, I thought McNary was in for a long day.

But again the Lady Celts continued to prove me wrong,

leading 4-1 with two outs in the bottom of the fifth.

Playing on the road, one of the youngest teams in the state (pitcher Faith Danner is just a sophomore) had the favorites to win the championship rattled and on the ropes. However, McNary was unable to finish the job and Oregon City fought back to win 7-4.

"They went way beyond my expectations," Wise said after the game. "I'm not trying to downplay anything but they just went way beyond what I thought they would do. Now next year coming into it, we know what the expectations are."

What are the expectations for next season?

"For me, the goal is state championship," Wise said. "I know that's where we should be."

McNary must replace seniors Hannah Carr and Nicole Duran, who were both leaders and two of the Lady Celts' best and most clutch hitters.

But with three freshmen, Alexa Cepeda in right field, Haley Bingenheimer at shortstop and Courtney Roberts catching, another freshman in Kendly Jennings, who started the season at second base before Carr took the job at South Salem and ran away with it, Danner in the circle, to go along with a talented junior class of first baseman Haley Ebner, left fielder Emma Kinler and Co-Greater Valley Conference Player of the Year Nadia Witt, all set to return, with an upcoming freshman class that Wise said is as good if not better than the crop before it, who is going to argue with him?

I know I'm not. The Lady Celts have proven this writer wrong enough.

Derek Wiley is the associate editor of the Keizertimes.



McNary sophomore Sabella Alfaro sparked a three-run fifth inning with a double to left field in the Lady Celts' quarterfinal playoff game at Oregon City on Friday, May 26.

Lady Celts fall in quarters

By DEREK WILEY
Of the Keizertimes

OREGON CITY—There wasn't a dry eye, including coaches, as the McNary softball team gathered in the outfield here after a 7-4 loss in the quarterfinals of the state playoffs on Friday, May 26.

"They love each other," an emotional head coach Kevin Wise said. "It's just a great group of girls. They kind of become like sisters. I think when you're family, you fight for each other. That's what they did."

"It's a tough one."

The Lady Celts led for most of the game, jumping on No. 1 Oregon City and University of Oregon-bound pitcher Morgan Hornback for a run in the first inning as Haley Ebner singled and then scored on a double by Hannah Carr.

The Pioneers tied the contest at 1-1 in the bottom of the third, drawing a walk and then laying down back-to-back bunt singles off Faith Danner, who didn't allow a ball out of the infield until there were two outs in the fourth.

McNary broke the contest open in the top of the fifth.

After Sabella Alfaro doubled, Ebner brought her home with a two-out single to right field.



McNary third baseman Nicole Duran tries to tag out an Oregon City runner.

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McNary senior Hannah Carr, with head softball coach Kevin Wise, has signed with Clackamas Community College.

Carr to play on at Clackamas

By DEREK WILEY
Of the Keizertimes

McNary senior Hannah Carr had to step back from the game she started playing as a 6-year-old to realize just how much she loved it.

Two years ago, Carr stopped playing softball in the summer.

It was expensive and she was never going to play in college. So what was the point?

"I think it was just playing so much because you play year-round basically," Carr said.

"If you're not playing, you're practicing. I started get-

ting injured. I had to sit out and it wasn't fun."

Carr even thought about not coming out for her senior year at McNary. But wanting one more season with her teammates, Carr decided to give it a try.

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McNary baseball team eliminated at West Linn

By DEREK WILEY
Of the Keizertimes

McNary needed to play a clean, mistake-free seven innings to upset No. 1 West Linn.

With two critical errors in the bottom of the fourth, the Celtics came up short, falling 10-1 on Wednesday, May 24 in the second round of the 6A baseball state playoffs.

McNary trailed just 2-1 after Jonah Geist singled and scored on a Tyler Covalt sacrifice fly to right field in the top of the fourth.

On the mound, Riley Hays got two outs with a runner at second in the bottom of the fourth.

But after an intentional walk and hit by pitch loaded the bases, a single and two infield errors then led to four West Linn runs.

"Against a really good team our margin for error in that game is just so small," McNary head coach Larry Keeker said. "We have to make those type of plays to win that type of game. That's really what it comes down to or at least give us a chance to win."

The Celtics also had a difficult time adjusting to West Linn's turf field.

"The turf is extremely fast so I think we had some problems adjusting to the speed of the ball on the turf," Keeker said.

"Balls that would get by us in the gaps to the fence would normally probably be cut off for a single and they'd turn into a triple. You just have to make adjustments and we knew that was the case. But until it actually happens to you live, you don't understand. It's super fast. The balls just fly on it."

At the plate, McNary had just three hits against Tim Tawa, who has committed to Stanford University.

Geist was 1-for-3. Jacob Jackson and Joshua Benson were both 1-for-2.

Caleb Kieftuk-Yates added a pinch-hit double off of a relief pitcher in the seventh.

"Their pitcher (Tawa) was really good," Keeker said.

"His fastball, he could basically throw it wherever he wanted to so he did a really good job of throwing his fastball on the corners. The umpire was generous not only on the corners but when the ball was down. I think his strike zone was a little bit lower than typical. That wasn't the differ-

ence but it makes him really tough to deal with. He's tough already."

West Linn has won 20 games in a row after defeating Gresham 8-1 Friday, May 26 in the state quarterfinals.

The Lions then defeated Beaverton 3-1 Tuesday, May 30 in the semifinals. They'll play Clackamas Saturday, June 3 at Volcanoes Stadium.

"They are certainly deserving of that No. 1 seed," Keeker said.

The game was the final one for McNary's 10 seniors.

"I'm extremely proud of the senior class," Keeker said. "One of the indicators to me was at the end of the game how emotional a lot of the senior were that they knew it was finally came to and end and the time they invested in the last four years in the McNary baseball program was certainly something they felt strongly about."

"A lot of these guys have been together for a long time so it was emotional for them. I was extremely proud of their efforts throughout the year. They were good teammates. They were good leaders. They have no regrets as far as I can see."