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Counting down the 10 sports stories of 2018



Conference titles for the McNary High School football and boys basketball squads highlight a banner sports year in the city of Keizer.

Celts win league title after 0-5 start

McNary has spent the last four years under head coach Jeff Auvinen focused on getting better, not just every season or even every game, but every play.

That work paid off in November with the football program's first league championship since 2005 as the Celtics defeated South Salem 40-33 to clinch the Mountain Valley Conference title.

McNary made no more progress within a single season than this one. After starting 0-5, the Celtics won all four of their league games — beating Sprague, Bend and West Salem in their first three league games.

"We stayed the course and got better," Auvinen said. "That's all you can do is play the next play."

McNary appeared like it would roll the Saxons over when the Celtics led 25-6 and recovered an on-side kick with 5:40 remaining in the first half.

But South Salem took advantage of a McNary fumble and a turnover on downs on the following possession to score 14 straight points. An 8-yard touchdown pass from Elijah Enomoto-Haole to Diego Fuimaono and then a 10-yard touchdown run by Enomoto-Haole with 27 seconds left in the second period helped the Saxons cut the lead to 25-20 at halftime.

South Salem took a 26-25 lead midway through the third period when Gabe Johnson returned an interception 89 yards



File
McNary linebacker Junior Walling pumps his fist in celebration.

for a touchdown.

"I think we might have come in a little over confident," McNary senior lineman Wyatt Sherwood said. "We tried to keep that out of us this week. It's going to happen. When they took the lead, I think we realized that we needed to step up and finish this."

McNary running back Junior Walling made sure that lead didn't last long as his 13-yard touchdown run late in the third quarter put the Celtics back on top.

Walling put the game on ice with his score from one-yard out midway through the final

period. He finished the game with 210 rushing yards.

Celtics quarterback Erik Barker had a big game on the ground as well, running for 124 yards and two scores. He also connected with Noah Bach on a 52-yard touchdown through the air.

"We knew we were the better team and if we just did our jobs and didn't make stupid plays, we'd come back and win the game," Barker said. "Our O-line was making big holes all day and Junior was running great and he blocked for me when I would run it."



File
Celtics running back Noah Bach avoids the reach of a South Salem defensive back.

Ebbs places third at final state meet



File
McNary' senior Brayden Ebbs (blue singlet) takes down an opponent at the 2018 OSAA State Wrestling Tournament

McNary High School's Brayden Ebbs heard from all of his coaches that the most honorable thing a wrestler can do at a tournament is place third.

At the 2018 state wrestling tournament, Ebbs took that to heart, defeating Oliver Myers of Newberg by a 13-0 major decision on Feb. 17 at Veterans Memorial Coliseum in the 160-pound third place match.

"After my semis match, I told myself I'm not taking anything less than third," Ebbs said. "I think it was supposed to be a close match but something flipped in my mind and

I wrestled what I think is my best match and I just put the points on the board that I needed to. 'Score first, score fast and keep on scoring' is what my club coach always told me."

McNary head coach Jason Ebbs said Brayden was as focused as he's ever seen him.

"I think Brayden did what you hope all your best wrestlers will do," coach Ebbs said. "He came out in the third place match and he was at the peak of his intensity and ready to roll. This is the first time that I've ever seen Brayden wrestle such a focused style,

in those last three matches, the semifinals, the consolation semifinals that goes into overtime, i've never seen him stay so focused on his technique and his strategy and what he needs to do instead of worrying about scoring and worrying about being ahead or behind. He matured really well this year and did some of his best wrestling here. I'm proud of him."

Ebbs earned an 11-2 major decision and two pins to reach the semifinals, where he lost to No. 2 seed Josh Grant of Century 6-3.

FOR MORE, see Pages A8-A9

Witt signs with Division 1 School

Nadia Witt knew that she would be playing softball in college before the start of her senior season in 2018.

After originally committing to Western Oregon University, Witt had a change of heart and decided to instead sign with the University of California Riverside — a Division I school that plays in the Big West Conference.

"I committed (to Western Oregon) kind of early, and once I got older, I decided that I wanted to change and get out of state, and I wanted to play D-I ball, so I decommitted," Witt said. "I went on a visit (to UC Riverside), and I kind of fell in love. The program has really rebuilt itself, and the campus is nice."

Even though she was excited to start her college career, Witt wanted to finish off her high school playing days on a high note.

Witt, ended the year with a

.602 batting average in her final season with the Lady Celts. She recorded 23 extra base hits, including 11 doubles, six triples and six home runs. She also had 29 RBIs, scored 46 runs, stole 17 bases and was named the Greater Valley Conference player of the year for the second straight season.

"Honestly, she's just an

all-around great player. She's super smart," McNary head coach Kevin Wise said. "She hits lasers. Her home runs are just rockets — they get out in a hurry."

Witt helped McNary win two league titles in 2015 and 2017 and led the Celtics to the playoffs in all four years of her high school career.



File
McNary's Nadia Witt will be playing college softball at UC Riverside in 2019.