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KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

McNary's Ivan Vallejo (blue singlet) tries to bring his opponent to the mat in the first round of the 145-pound bracket.



KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

Matthew Mehlhoff takes Mountain View's Keyshawn Mooers to the mat in the second round of his 152-pound bout.



KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

Gilbert Parra (black and white headgear) goes into attack mode in his 138-pound match.

Celts wrestlers battle at district meet

By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary wrestling team had 24 kids compete in the Mountain Valley Conference District Meet last weekend (Friday, Feb. 15 and Sat. Feb. 16) at Sprague High School.

Even though the Celtics placed seventh as a team with 97 points, they were able to get two wrestlers to the state meet at Memorial Coliseum in Portland.

Grady Burrows (113 lbs.) and Gilbert Parra (138 lbs.) each qualified for state by placing third in their respective divisions.

Burrows, who is a sophomore, started the meet off by receiving a bye to advance to the quarterfinals, where he defeated South Salem's Hunter Downs-Getchell via fall in the second round.

But much to his dismay,

Burrows was pinned in the first round of his semifinal bout, taking him out of contention for the district title.

Instead of getting down on himself, Burrows rallied back to dominate his next two bouts, winning his consolation semifinals match and third-place match by major decision.

"That semifinal match lit a fuse under me after I lost," Burrows said. "I knew that I needed to win this out so I could go to state."

This will be the second straight year Burrows will be heading to the state meet.

Winning the third-place match was especially sweet for Burrows, considering that he had lost to his opponent — McKay's Connor Everetts — earlier in the year.

"Grady did one of my favorite things there is to do in this sport. He beat a guy

that beat him earlier in the season," McNary head coach Jason Ebbs said. "He put together a really good match."

Parra also won his opening match via fall, and then got a 6-2 victory in the quarterfinals to advance.

Parra then took on Sprague's Luke Merzenich in the semifinals and gave the eventual district runner-up everything he could handle, but ended up losing a 12-9 decision.

"Gilbert really did an excellent job for himself in that match. I didn't know if he would be able to keep the score that close," Ebbs said. "He has really changed his game that last few weeks and changed the expectations for himself. He wrestled extremely well."

Parra faced tough opponents in his final two bouts, but the junior stepped up to

the challenge and won both matches via decision, earning his first ever trip to the state meet.

"It was a real dream come true," Parra said about his qualification. "At the beginning of the year, I didn't think I was going to be able to go. I'm really proud and excited to go to the state tournament. It's honestly one of the happiest moments of my life."

Both Burrows and Parra will be low seeds at the state meet — which takes place Friday Feb. 22 and Saturday, Feb. 23. But Ebbs, is greatly encouraging his guys to aim high.

"We got to shoot for the sky," Ebbs said. "The second you hand out too much respect for your opponent, you have already figured out that you're going to lose. We want to have high goals."

McNary also had three

other wrestlers make the podium over the weekend.

Cameron Parks (138 lbs.) Garrett Wampler (182 lbs.) and Aldo Villalvazo (220 lbs.) all finished in fifth place for McNary in their respective weight classes.

Parks started off in the consolation bracket and won his first three matches with ease (two falls and a forfeit). Even though he lost in the consolation semifinals, Parks came back to win the fifth-place match over Titus Nagle from Summit with a thrilling 8-7 decision.

Wampler, on the other hand, had an easy route to the semifinals in the championship bracket. After receiving a bye in the first round, the 182-pounder got a first round fall in his quarterfinal match.

Wampler lost his next two bouts, but the senior was able

to bounce back by pinning Sprague's Owen Scott in the fifth-place match.

Villalvazo reached the quarterfinals by receiving a bye in the opening round of the championship bracket. After losing a tough 6-3 decision to Jacob Lehnerr from Bend, Villalvazo won his next three consolation matches to make it to the fifth-place bout where he would face off against Lehnerr once again.

This time, however, Villalvazo was victorious, winning via 3-1 decision.

Out of the 24 wrestlers that competed, 22 of them are set to return for the Celtics next season.

"I felt like we grew a ton this weekend," Ebbs said. "Every one of our wins comes with guys wrestling with more confidence next year."

McNary exacts revenge against Sprague

By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary boys basketball team has gone through some ups and downs over the last couple weeks.

After getting an upset victory over South Salem Jan. 31, the Celtics suffered their first two home losses of the season against West Salem and Summit.

But on Friday, Feb. 15, McNary was able to get back on track.

Boston Smith led the Celtics with 20 points as McNary avenged their loss to Sprague earlier in the season and defeated the Olympians by a score of 60-46.

Nate Meithof was also in double-figures with 16 points.

Going into the game, the message that McNary head coach Ryan Kirch sent to his team wasn't about strategy and assignments. Instead, it was about playing loose and having fun playing the game.

"We have just really focused on having fun," Kirch said. "Sometimes, you get so worried about X's and O's and game-planning, you forget about why you play. When you first pick up a basketball when you're six years old, you love it because it's fun."

"We have really emphasized that in our guys and they're just having a great time playing for one another right now."

Sprague took advantage of a trio of McNary turnovers in the early going to grab the 10-5 lead midway through the first quarter. But a baseline 3-pointer from Meithof



KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings
McNary guard Nate Meithof prepares to break down a Sprague defender off the dribble. Meithof had 16 points on the night in the Celtics 60-46 victory on Friday, Feb. 15.

and a runner off the glass by Alfredo Villareal knotted the score at 10-apiece.

Smith ended the quarter with five quick points on a old-fashioned three-point play as well as a pair of free throws, but Sprague came back to tie the game at 15 going into the second period.

Both teams went stone cold from the field in following quarter, but McNary was able to get the upper hand going into halftime as

Meithof and Villareal each knocked down a pair of foul shots to put the Celtics on top 25-22.

When the two squads came out for the start of the second half, McNary was the team that found their offensive groove.

The Celtics went on a 10-2 run in the first three minutes of the third quarter thanks to buckets in the paint from Meithof, Smith and Griffin Oliveira, as well as a

3-pointer by Noah Hudkins.

"We talked at halftime about slowing things down and not being effected by (Sprague's) pressure," Meithof said.

Smith would wind up scoring three more times before the end of the period, giving McNary the 42-28 lead going into the final eight minutes of the contest.

"We came out and brought the energy," Smith said.

While McNary has a solid amount of offensive weapons, the common theme in all of their victories this season has been their outstanding defensive play.

And the Celtics might of played their best defense of the season in this one, holding Sprague to a season-low 46 points.

"They played great defense. We missed some shots we normally make, but you have to tip your hat to them,"

Sprague head coach Jordan Graneto said.

Over the course of the season, McNary has given several squads fits with their 2-1-2 zone. But against Sprague, the Celtics played hard man-to-man defense for the majority of the contest.

"It was all about our effort," Smith said. "Everyone worked hard on (defense) tonight. Nobody was slacking."

Stopping Sprague's Kobe Withers was the main focus of the McNary defense. While the junior guard had 32 points in the first meeting between these two teams, Withers was held to just 12 points in this game.

"Every basket (Withers) got tonight was earned," Kirch said. "We forced other guys to have to make shots. I was really proud of our on-ball defense."

"We made everything difficult for them and by the end of the night, they got tired."

Sprague looked like they had a chance to get back into the game in the final period when they cut the lead to seven at 45-38. But McNary scored the next seven points and took a 52-38 lead after a three-point play from Meithof and a layup by Smith.

McNary's regular season finale will be at home tonight against South Salem at 7:15 p.m. The Celtics will clinch at least a share of a second place in the MVC with the win.