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Allen and Covalt sign to play at next level

By MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Less than 8 percent of athletes that played a varsity sport in high school will go onto play in college. That statistic is why this year's National Signing Day was particularly special for two athletes at McNary.

On Wednesday, Feb. 6, Celtic seniors Tyler Covalt and David Allen each signed their letter of intent to play college baseball in a ceremony at the College and Career Center at McNary High School.

Covalt signed to further his education and baseball career at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg while Allen signed to play with Pacific University in Forest Grove.

Covalt was a first-team all-Greater Valley Conference catcher last season and was one of two team captains for the Celtics.

Allen earned a honorable mention nod as a pitcher and will be McNary's top arm this spring.

Both players have proven that they can make a big impact on the diamond, but what really makes them stand out is their personal character.

"Both David and Tyler are high character guys and good students," McNary head coach Larry Keeker said. "They represent and exude the characteristics that we really promote here and McNary High School. What I am really most proud of is who they are as people and how they represent our program."

Covalt — who has played varsity baseball since his freshman year — knew that he wanted to play college baseball since he was a youngster. His journey to UCC, however, ended up being a unique one.



KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

Ty Covalt (left) and David Allen (right) shake hands after signing to play baseball in college at a ceremony at McNary High School on Feb. 6. Covalt will play at Umpqua Community College while Allen will compete at Pacific University.

UCC dropped the sport of baseball back in 1985, but announced in January of last year that they were reinstating the program for the 2020 season. Three months after the announcement, the college hired nationally renowned NAIA coach Jeremiah Robbins.

Robbins, who is from Roseburg, was the head coach at Lewis-Clark State for six seasons and led the team to three consecutive National Championships in 2015-17.

When Covalt starting looking at colleges, playing

for Coach Robbins at Lewis-Clark State was at the top of his list. But Covalt's mindset shifted when Robbins announced that he was taking over the new program at UCC — especially because Covalt wanted to stay in-state.

"When I found out, I was doing backflips," Covalt said about Robbins taking over the UCC program.

Having passionate kids with great leadership qualities is integral when starting a program from the ground up, which is why Robbins wanted Covalt

to be a part of the building process.

"Behind the plate, (Covalt) has command of the whole field. But his leadership is his biggest asset," Robbins said. "We think he has a chance to leave a legacy at this program."

After Robbins offered him a spot on the team, it was an easy decision for Covalt to accept.

"When (Umpqua) said they wanted me, I almost cried. I couldn't explain the emotions I was feeling," Covalt said. "I've had dreams about this since

I was a little kid. I've missed school dances to go into the cages and put in work."

On the field, Covalt prides himself on having an authoritative presence as a catcher and maintaining an unselfish plate-approach when he's at bat.

"Defensively, I feel like I can control the pace of the game and help get my pitchers strikes," Covalt said. "I have really big connections with my pitchers."

"Offensively, I know what needs to get done situationally.

I'm not going to crank it out of the park every time, but I will get the job done, move guys around and be a good teammate."

It will still be another year before Covalt is in a UCC uniform, but Robbins is greatly looking forward to the day he comes on campus.

"I'm so excited to get Tyler into our program," Robbins said. "He's a bulldog when it comes to working hard and he is off the charts when it comes to desire and passion for the game. We are blessed to have him being a part of building our program."

While Covalt has been playing varsity baseball since his freshman year, Allen, on the other hand, didn't get real varsity experience until just last season. But in a short time, the right-hander was able to transform himself into one of McNary's most reliable pitchers.

"David was our most improved player last year and I think a lot of that had to do with him growing up as a high school player and physically getting bigger and stronger," Keeker said. "He's got good arm speed and is a good athlete."

In 56 innings pitched last season, Allen had an incredible 1.12 ERA and struck out 30.

Even with his great command, Allen feels that his top weapon on the bump is his demeanor.

"I feel like my calmness on the mound is my best strength," Allen said. "I don't lose my temperament when I'm pitching. If something doesn't go my way, I don't let it get to me."

Allen first gained interest in the Pacific baseball program

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McNary brings youth movement to the track

By MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

After a disappointing 2018 season where they were only able to send one athlete to the state meet, the McNary track and field program hopes to bounce back in 2019 with a fairly young crew across the board — the Celtics have over 100 athletes that are either freshmen or sophomores.

"We're a really young team," said head coach Frank Gauntz. "I hope we continue to retain those kids and just get better and better each year."

Key Losses (girls):
Paige Downer- The only McNary athlete to qualify for

state last season. Downer took second at the Greater Valley Conference District Meet in the pole vault.

Kailey Doult- Took third at the district meet in the 800 meters and is currently running track at George Fox University.

Leah Doult- Was one of the top Celtics sprinters as a freshman last season, but decided to focus on spring basketball in 2019.

Key Returners (Girls):
Ashlin Samples (sophomore): One of McNary's most versatile athletes. Samples competed in the 100 meter hurdles, pole vault, long jump

and 4x100 meter relay at the district meet last season.

Isabella Walker (sophomore): Was a top-10 finisher at districts in the 300-hurdles and high jump as a freshman. Also competed in the 4x100 and 4x400.

Caitlyn Yates (junior): Was a top-five finisher in the 100m as districts. Also competed in long jump and triple jump events at the conference meets.

With the majority of his top girls athletes being underclassmen, Gauntz is excited to see his young crew continue to improve.

"We just want to keep getting growth from our young group," Gauntz said.

Key Losses (Boys):

Casey Tovas- McNary's top hurdler last season. Took fourth in the 100-hurdles at the district meet in 2018.

Tim Kiser- Placed fourth at districts in the discus last year.

Lucas Garvey- Had top-10 finishes in the 200m and 400m at the district meet in 2018.

Key Returners (Boys):

Dyami Rios (sophomore): Should be one of McNary's top sprinters. Was on the 4 x 100 team that placed fourth at districts last season.

Bryan Hernandez (sophomore): Hernandez was Mc-

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Courtney Roberts takes a hack at a ball in a game last season. Roberts is expected to be the starting catcher for McNary.

Lady Celts aim for conference crown

By MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Last Season: 17-9, (11-5 Greater Valley Conference). Lost to Franklin in the first round of the playoffs.

The McNary softball program has been one of the most consistent teams in the valley over the last five years.

Despite losing some crucial pieces to graduation, this Celtic team still plans to regroup and reload in 2019.

"Losing the kids we did does have an impact," McNary head coach Kevin Wise said. "But we return almost our entire infield and we have good experience in the outfield and

a senior starting pitcher."

"There's really high expectations for this group. They were upset with going out in the first round last year against Franklin. These girls have worked really, really hard in the offseason."

Key Losses:

Nadia Witt — McNary's best player over the course of the last three years. Witt batted a ridiculous .602 last season with 23 extra-base hits and had 29 RBIs. She also scored 46 runs and stole 17 bases and was named the conference player of the year for the second time in as many years.

Haley Ebner — A second-team all-conference performer last season. Ebner hit .371 last season with 19 RBIs and 26 runs scored.

Emma Kinler — Posted a .369 batting average last season with 22 RBIs. Received an honorable mention nod.

Key Returners:

Taylor Ebbs (sophomore-SS): The Celtics top returning hitter. Ebbs led the team with 36 RBIs and scored 29 runs on the season while posting a .539 average. She received first-team all-league honors.

"(Ebbs) might be the best all-around athlete I've ever coached," Wise said. "I'm expecting huge things from her." "I'm going out on a limb to say that she's probably going to contend for player of the year."

Faith Danner (senior-P): McNary's ace returns to the circle for one last season, hoping to build off her 16-9 record from 2018. Danner had an ERA of 3.09 over 140 innings and was second-team all-league. She also is one of McNary's top returning bats as she hit .361 last season.

"She's not going to be one of those pitchers that is going to strike everyone out. But she pitches really well to spots and when she's on, she's going to produce a lot of ground balls," Rise said.

Haley Bingenheimer (junior-INF): As a second-team all-conference player last season, Bingenheimer was third on the team with a .414 bat-

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File

Dyami Rios runs the anchor of the 4 x 100 relay