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McNary claims second straight league title

By MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Most coaches would be pretty distraught with a 0-5 start.

But even after the McNary football team dropped their fifth straight contest against South Medford on Friday, Oct. 4, head coach Jeff Auvinen wasn't dismayed in the slightest, saying that this season felt "eerily similar to last season" — when the Celtics rallied to win all four league games in route to a Mountain Valley Conference title, despite losing their first five games of the year.

When the regular season came to an end on Friday, Nov. 1, Auvinen proved himself to be prophetic.

Running back Junior Walling scamped for a season-high 216 yards and four touchdowns on 28 carries as the Celtics danced their way to a second straight MVC title, defeating South Salem 35-15.

It is the first time since 1998 that McNary has repeated as league champions.

"We have been working for this all year. It's huge for us seniors because we have been dreaming about this. It's just such an amazing feeling," Walling said.

The Celtics offense wasted no time getting to work as they went 61 yards in six plays on their opening drive, which was capped off by a 33-yard touchdown by Walling.

South Salem, however, responded by marching right



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down the field on their first possession of the game — partially due to a pair of costly penalties by the McNary defense.

On fourth-and-goal from the McNary one-yard line, Saxons quarterback Griffin Gardner connected with Gabe Johnson in the corner of the end zone, giving South Salem the 7-6 lead.

Late into the first quarter, it appeared that the fans were in for a shootout as both offenses were racking up multiple big plays.

Walling scored his second touchdown of the game from

four yards out with 1:01 left in the opening period. The Celtics took a 14-7 lead after Layton Thurlow caught a pass in the end zone from Erik Barker on the two-point conversion.

South Salem got the ball back and wasted no time getting into the red zone early in the second quarter. And similar to their first drive, the Saxons faced fourth-and-goal from the one-yard line.

Gardner was one again looking for Johnson on a shallow out rout. But this time, Walling, who was coming on

a pass-rush from the left side, leapt up and knocked the ball to the ground, forcing the Saxons to turn the ball over on downs.

The defensive stop ended up providing a huge momentum boost for McNary.

Using a key first down run from Barker, a pair of receptions from Noah Lelack and a steady dose of hard-fought carries from Walling, the Celtics slowly broke the will of the South Salem defense.

A 23-yard run from Riley Flores took the ball down to the two, where Walling punched it in on the following play to complete the 99-yard drive.

"I think that whole series was awfully big. After getting the goal-line stand, the ability to run it out of there was big. We could run the football whenever we wanted to tonight," Auvinen said.

McNary center Nathan Young, McNary center

McNary ground game was

KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings
The McNary football team celebrates with the Mountain Valley Conference Championship trophy after beating South Salem 35-15.

as good as it's been all year in this one as the Celtics rushed for a season-high 393 yards.

"I have never seen this offensive line play so well. All five of us came out super strong. It was pound and ground all night," McNary center Nathan Young said. "We were keeping the defense on their heels."

Walling also added: "I just trusted my line. They were getting a push all game, so I got to give them all the credit."

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Claggett Creek falls short in championship game

By MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Defense had been one of the strengths of the Claggett Creek varsity football squad all season. But in the Salem-Keizer Middle School Championship game, the Panthers couldn't stop the potent wing-T offense of Parrish.

Parrish rushed for four touchdowns in the final three quarters and won their second straight championship on Wednesday, Oct. 30, defeating Claggett Creek 28-16.

"We switched up our defense to a 3-5 to try and contain Parrish's outside speed. But it's a tough offense to defend because there is so much misdirection. We got caught watching the football and not pursuing the ball as much as we should," Claggett Creek head coach Aaron Carr said.

After both teams made their share of mistakes in the first six minutes, Claggett Creek's Izeyah Contreras put his team on the board late in the opening period.

On third-and-10 from their own 27-yard line, Contreras took a toss to the outside and sprinted down the sideline for a 56-yard run to give the Panthers the ball inside the red zone.

The following play, quarterback Jacob Allen hit Contreras on a crossing route for the

17-yard touchdown. Manny De-Dios ran in the conversion to put the Panthers on top 8-0.

Early in the second quarter, Claggett Creek had an opportunity to flip the game on its head.

The Panthers defense forced Parrish into a third-and-long after a holding penalty. As Parrish quarterback T.C. Manumaleuna tried to pick up the first down through the air, he was hit as he threw and the ball was intercepted by Contreras.

After picking off the pass, Contreras weaved through several tacklers and took the ball 55 yards to the house. But on the play, Allen was called for a blindside block that negated the touchdown.

The penalty proved proved to alter the game in dramatic fashion.

"It really shifted the momentum. These guys are really young and it's tough for them to get over things like that," Carr said. "It sucked the wind out of us. I thought it was a beautiful block that sprung Izeyah for a touchdown."

Claggett Creek still retained possession of the ball, but couldn't get past the line-of-scrimmage on four straight plays as they were forced to turn the ball over on downs.

Parrish was able to score on their following drive midway through the second quarter to

cut the lead to 8-6. Moments later, Parrish forced a Panther turnover, which allowed their offense to get right back on the field.

Parrish scored once again with one second left in the half to take a 14-8 lead into the locker room.

It appeared that Parrish was on the verge of putting the game away after taking a 22-8 lead early in the fourth quarter. However, Claggett Creek proved that they still had some fight left in them.

On the first play from scrimmage after the Parrish score, Allen bought himself time outside the pocket and fired a strike on a deep post to Contreras, who rumbled 58 yards for the touchdown.

But in the end it wasn't enough as Parrish ran nearly six minutes off the clock and scored on a 32-yard run with 54 seconds remaining in the game.

Claggett Creek ends the season with a 5-2 record.

"Win or lose, I'm proud of these guys. They fought hard this season," Carr said. "Considering that we only had 19 guys, it shows the kids character and how hard they worked to get to this spot."

We had to have a lot of guys play both ways and it took a lot of stamina and hard work to get them in a position to do that."



Izeyah Contreras tries to escape the grasp of a Parrish defender after catching a pass in the flat. Contreras had two touchdown catches for the game.

KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings