

Barker and Walling take home top honors



Barker



Walling

By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the Keizertimes

While there were great football players scattered throughout the Mountain Valley Conference this season, there were two from that stood out above the rest.

On Friday, Nov. 15 McNary quarterback Erik Barker was recognized as the Senior Offensive Athlete of the Year by the Salem Sports and Breakfast Club, while his teammate, Junior Walling, earned Athlete of the Year honors on the defensive side of the ball for his play at linebacker.

Barker threw for 1,568 yards and six touchdowns through the air while adding 361 rushing yards and four scores on the ground. He was named first-team all-league in the Mountain Valley Conference.

Barker's top play of the season came in the Celtics Oct. 25 matchup with West Salem. Trailing 23-21 with 1:17 left in the contest, Barker connected with Junior Nunez for a 65-yard touchdown that proved to be the game-winning score, as McNary defeated the Titans 27-23.

The victory propelled McNary to their second straight conference title.

"The most memorable aspect of my career at McNary is how we battled through all

the adversity and still won two league championships. And also the fact that I did it with my best friends who I've been playing ball with since the very beginning," Barker said.

Walling, on the other hand, garnered first-team all-league honors at linebacker for the third straight season, ending the year with 92 tackles (73 solo), 12 tackles for loss, four sacks, two pass break-ups and an interception. He was also named MVC Defensive Player of the Year and will be playing linebacker at Oregon State University next season.

Walling was arguably just as dominant on the offensive side of the ball, rushing for 930 yards and 14 touchdowns this season. He also added 287 receiving yards and two scores and was named first-team all-league running back.

"It feels great to have the confidence of my coaches to nominate me and the respect of the other coaches in the league to vote for me to be first-team linebacker and running back. However, it is extra special to get the Defensive Player of the Year award, especially considering all the other players in the league who must have been nominated," Walling said. "As much as I am going to miss playing running back, defense has always been my passion and it is a great honor to be selected as player of the year."

McNary had 12 other players receive all-conference recognition, including their entire starting offensive line.

Nik Shepard was named to the first-team at offensive tackle and Gavin Anderson got an honorable mention nod at the other tackle position. Michael Ridgway was first-team at offensive guard and Nathan Young was an honorable mention center.

"It was a complete honor and privilege to coach this group of young men and I am a better person for being around them," McNary offensive line coach Dean Ables said. "They were the best line in the conference, no doubt."

Riley Flores and Noah Lack each got honorable mention recognition at receiver. Lack had 16 catches for 228 yards and two touchdowns. Flores had 19 grabs for 306 yards on the season.

Dyami Rios got first-team honors at tight end to go along with his second-team status at linebacker. Rios led the team with 97 tackles (63 solo), seven tackles for loss and four sacks.

Drew Brown was named to the first-team at defensive line while Spencer Delacruz earned second-team honors.

Alex Tavera was named first-team cornerback. Junior Nunez was honorable mention.

Zane Aicher was an honorable mention safety.

Ethan Martin was a first-team kick returner and Daniel Mood was a second-team kicker.

McNary head coach Jeff Auvinen was awarded Coach of the Year for the second straight season.

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