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## McNary boys basketball preview

# Celtics will be led by youth movement

By MATT RAWLINGS  
*Of the Keizertimes*

In recent memory, the McNary boys basketball program has relied on depth and strong senior classes to maintain their tradition of being one of the best programs in the valley.

This season, however, the Celtics will be counting on several inexperienced players to step up at the varsity level.

"I think this year will be a little bit different in that our senior and junior classes won't be as deep as we have had in the past," McNary head coach Ryan Kirch said. "We're going to have some inexperience. But it's fun getting the different pieces and putting them together for our coaching staff."

McNary put together a 15-10 record during the 2018-19 season, which was highlighted by a 59-57 road victory against second-ranked South Salem. But after suffering some key injuries late in the year, the Celtics faltered down the stretch of their schedule and were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs by South Eugene.

Four of the Celtics five starters from last year grad-

uated — three of whom received all-league recognition. But their one returner happens to be one of the top players in the Mountain Valley Conference.

Nate Meithof, a 6-foot-2 junior shooting guard, averaged 17 points per game last season and shot 40 percent from behind the arc. Meithof also showed his ability to stuff the stat sheet by averaging 4.5 rebounds, 3.5 assists and 2.5 steals per game, and was named second-team all-league.

"Nate had such an unbelievable year last year. He's incredibly talented and everything we do on offense will go through him," Kirch said. "He shoots the ball really well and he can score in many different ways."

This will be, however, Meithof's first season as McNary's top option.

Last year, McNary's inside-out combo of Meithof and 6-foot-7 center Boston Smith proved to be one top duos in the state. Smith averaged just under 18 points and seven boards per game and earned first-team all-conference honors.

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McNary shooting guard Nate Meithof drives to the bucket in a game against Sprague last year. Meithof is expected to be one of the leading scorers in the Mountain Valley Conference for a second straight year.

## McNary wrestling preview

# McNary brings back majority of roster



McNary's Grady Burrows prepares to pin Finn Whittaker from Wilson at last season's state tournament. Burrows is one of the top returners for the Celtics this year.

By MATT RAWLINGS  
*Of the Keizertimes*

While they have traditionally been a successful program, the McNary wrestling team took some lumps during the 2018-19 season, mostly due to youth and inexperience.

But after going through some growing pains last year, head coach Jason Ebbs is confident that his crew is more prepared for the upcoming season.

"Last year was a hard year because we had a lot of young kids that didn't understand

the role of a varsity wrestler real well, so there had to be a lot of teaching," Ebbs said. "But we will be returning a group of kids that have seasoned themselves the right way and are going to develop and grow into their role. We planted some seeds the last couple of years and I think they are starting to grow."

Ebbs is entering his 16th year as the head coach, and this is as excited he has ever been to start a season.

"Our preseason practices have been the best I've

seen since I've been here. The numbers are up and the excitement is up. It has showed me that the kids that are coming back that are ready to show what a varsity wrestler looks like."

The Celtics return nearly everyone from their varsity team last season, including senior Gilbert Parra and junior Grady Burrows.

Parra (138 lbs.) and Burrows (113) were the only McNary wrestlers to advance to the state tournament last year — both took third place in their respective divisions in the Mountain Valley Conference District meet.

Now that Parra and Burrows have had a taste of what the state meet is like, Ebbs is counting on the two veterans to build on their success from last season.

"They need to keep doing what they have been doing in order to get better. That has to be automatic. They need to push themselves and they have to set those high goals and keep digging," Ebbs said. "We got to make sure they are doing the work it takes to get those goals done."

Ebbs has similar expect-

tations of some of his other key returners.

One of the strengths of this McNary squad is in the heavier weight divisions as they will be led by Aldo Villalvazo Mendoza (220), Lane Runyan (220) and Anthony Cruz Lopez (285). Villalvazo Mendoza was one win away from reaching the state tournament as a freshman last season, but he was still able to finish fifth at districts.

"I am excited to watch these kids. I know that we're going to be good in the upper end weights," Ebbs said. "Those guys will be doing work for us at the district and state tournaments. We're counting on them."

In the lighter weights, McNary returns Jordan Orr, who was arguably one of the best 106-pounders in the MVC last season.

In January of last year, it appeared that Orr, who was a freshman at the time, was on track to vie for a state tournament spot. But as he was peaking, he suffered a broken wrist with six weeks remaining in the season.

As Orr returns for his sophomore campaign, Ebbs feels that he has a lot of potential if he can stay healthy.

"(Orr) had a really good chance to go to the state tournament last year, but we never got to see that come

to fruition. I'm excited to get him back in the lineup. He will make a statement for himself," Ebbs said.

One of McNary's other top lightweight athletes will be Cameron Parks. As a sophomore, Parks placed fifth at the district meet in the 126-pound division.

But even though the Celtics have many returners, Ebbs believes that he has a group of freshman, led by Josh Friesen, Hunter Ruber-

these kids, and Brandon Blanco, than can compete for varsity positions.

"We have a pretty good young group of freshman coming in. Not only are they talented, but they are legitimate, varsity caliber wrestlers that will be trying to break into our varsity lineup," Ebbs said.

With the OSAA sanctioning a girls wrestling state tournament last season, Ebbs is hoping that more females will come out and join the team. Last year, the Celtics had two girls on the team, and Ebbs is hoping that number increases this season.

"We're trying to create a full-functioning girls program. Now we're just waiting for the girls to fill in," Ebbs said. "We have invested ourselves fully into promoting our girls program. We

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