

McNary swimmers compete at Salem-Keizer Relay event



LEFT: Lanah Metz swims in the girls 200-yard breaststroke relay. RIGHT: Gavin Eisele swims the backstroke leg of the boys 400-medley relay.

By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary swim team kicked off their season on Thursday, Dec. 5 by competing in the Salem-Keizer relays at the Kroc Center.

While this meet was treated as an exhibition, McNary head coach Casey Lewin appreciated that the event helped ease his kids back into competition mode.

"I liked the relay meet. It's a low-key and relaxed way to get back into racing.

I thought the kids enjoyed it as well," Lewin said.

Both the boys and girls Celtic teams experienced their most success in the 200-yard freestyle relay, as McNary swept the event on each side.

The girls 200-free team of Paris Boyd, Alex Beard, Bella Beard and Alyssa Garvey touched the line at the 1:51.01 mark while the boys team of Kaleb Bergh-Graven, Gavin Gaperini, Bryce Junker and Kyle Hooper finished the event in 1:45.64.

The McNary girls ended up with six second place finishes, while the boys were runners-up in three races.

"It's exciting to see relays swimming fast to begin the season. We still have work to do, and need to be faster, but with where we are at in the season I feel like we are in a good place. We will continue to improve," Lewin said.

But even though Lewin felt good about his team's outing, he knows the Celtics

will face some stiff competition to face during the dual season.

"I thought that West (Salem) and South (Salem) looked strong at the meet. It will be exciting racing them in the upcoming weeks. The girls 200 medley from McKay swam well too," Lewin said.

McNary's first dual meet will be on Thursday, Dec. 19 at 4:30 p.m. against West Salem.

D1, continued from Page A16

to go be a part of it for real."

One of the driving forces for Cepeda that has constantly pushed her to get better is her dad, Jose, who played in the minor leagues for five seasons in the Kansas City Royals and Atlanta Braves organizations and owns a hitting facility in Tualatin.

"Ever since I was little, he's just always been that one person that will care for me and help me to get better. He just wants the best for me. He's very intense, and he doesn't allow me to give up on myself and not reach my full potential. He's a really good motivator for me," Cepeda said.

Part of what has made Cepeda and Ebbs great athletes is their dedication to their craft. Both girls play softball year-round for the Northwest Bullets — arguably the top club team in the Northwest.

The Bullets can have a tumultuous travel schedule at times, going to tournaments in California, Colorado and even New Jersey.

"I can't remember the last time we played in Oregon," Ebbs said.

But both girls believe that playing for the Bullets has better prepared them for college softball.

"I think it's given us a lot of exposure, because we're always around college coaches. We're around girls that are going to big schools and we're always getting challenged. It makes us better prepared," Cepeda said.

Ebbs added: "I feel like it has prepared us for college,

not only because of the high level of play, but I think it's also helped me learn how to manage my time."

Both players are excited to begin their college careers, and already have individual goals in mind for when they head to their separate institutions.

"I definitely want to be in the starting lineup as a freshman and play with consistency, but I also want to be a good teammate," Cepeda said.

Ebbs, however, has even bigger aspirations for her college career.

"I want to be an All-American. That is my biggest goal," Ebbs said.

When she was younger, Ebbs looked up to Jenna Lilley, a four-year star for the University of Oregon softball team. In her senior season, Lilley earned third-team All-American status, which inspired Ebbs to strive for that same accomplishment one day.

"I started watching (Lilley) when I was in middle school. I really looked up to her and thought if she could do it, I could also do it," Ebbs said.

Even though they're looking forward to the future, Cepeda and Ebbs still have some unfinished business at the high school level.

The McNary softball squad returns all but one starter from last year's league championship team, which gives both Cepeda and Ebbs high hopes for the upcoming season.

"We would really like to make it to the state (championship). That's our biggest goal, but we got to take it one step at a time," Ebbs said.

"I have been fortunate in my time at McNary to be able to coach some excellent players. With that being said, I would put these two at the top."

— Kevin Wise,
McNary head coach

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