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Cepeda and Ebbs are Division I bound



Alexa Cepeda (left) signed to play softball at Portland State University for the 2021 season while Taylor Ebbs (right) gave a verbal commitment to the University of Kentucky back in November.

KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings



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By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the Keizertimes

Both Alexa Cepeda and Taylor Ebbs have been standouts for the McNary softball team over the course of their careers. And in the years to come, both players will get a chance to showcase their talents at a pair of Division I softball programs.

Cepeda, who is entering her senior season with the Celtics, will continue her career at Portland State University after officially signing with the Vikings last month.

Ebbs, a junior at McNary, gave her verbal commitment to the University of Kentucky last month as well.

Looking at their statistics

and accolades, it's obvious to see why Cepeda and Ebbs have been recruited so heavily.

Last season, Ebbs had an unbelievable batting average of .628 with seven homers and 60 RBIs. She also had 22 extra-base hits on the year and was recognized as the player of the year in the Mountain Valley Conference.

Cepeda also had an excellent year for the Celtics as she led the team in runs scored (48), and was second on the team in batting average (.495), on-base percentage (.560) and doubles (10). She also proved to be one of the top defensive center fielders in the MVC.

Both players were also selected to the all-state first-team and helped the Celtics win the conference title in 2019.

"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," McNary head coach Kevin Wise said. "What stands out with both of them is their work ethic. They are not satisfied with being okay and if there is an area of weakness, they will work

hard to improve it. They are also excellent teammates, very unselfish and great leaders."

Ebbs went on an unofficial visit to Kentucky in September. Even though it's more than 2,000 miles away from Keizer, she said that it felt like home.

"I went to other places, but I just didn't get that same feeling as the one I had when I was at Kentucky. I just knew that I could spend four of five years of my life living there, even if I wasn't playing softball. It just felt like home for me," Ebbs said.

While Ebbs went on visits to several different schools, Cepeda knew pretty quickly that Portland State was the place that she wanted to be after high school.

"I didn't know much about the school at first, but I have always loved Portland and after I went on my visit, Portland State was the only school that I was really interested in," Cepeda said. "When I went and met my coaches and the team, I just felt like I was a part of the team already. I just can't wait

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Celtics come away with a pair of wins at Jerry Lane

By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the Keizertimes

In their season-opening tournament, the McNary wrestling team finished with a 2-2 record in their four dual meets at the third annual Jerry Lane Invitational on Friday, Dec. 6 — which took place at McNary High.

The Celtics picked up their two victories against Glencoe and Cleveland.

"The product that we put on the mat for our first time out was as good or better than the product we put out at the end of last season. It was good to see our off-season growth. I think our kids are growing stronger mentally and they are just maturing overall," McNary head coach Jason Ebbs said. "We're going to be a pretty good little dual team."

McNary senior Matt Mehlhoff (160 lbs.) had one of the best tournament showings of his career, going 3-1 on the night with all three of his victories coming via first-round fall.

"(Mehlhoff) has never

been a superstar on the team, but he has always been the guy behind the scenes that always is putting his hours in the practice room and getting better week by week," Ebbs said. "He should start raising his expectations."

"Going 3-1 definitely gave me a boost of confidence," Mehlhoff added.

Mehlhoff's lone defeat came in the dual against Dallas. Although he ended up getting pinned by Dallas 160-pounder Colson Spencer in the second round, Mehlhoff believes that was possibly his best match of the day.

"Honestly, I felt like it was a pretty even matchup. He kind of took over late, but I thought we both wrestled well," Mehlhoff said.

Freshman Brandon Blanco also had a solid night for the Celtics in the 106-pound division, picking up a pair of pins and a forfeit win.

Grady Burrows (120) and Gilbert Parra (145) — the Celtics two representatives at the state meet last season

— each picked up three victories as well. Parra earned a major decision victory to go along with his two other victories, which came via pin. Burrows also pinned two of his opponents and won his other match thanks to a forfeit.

Joshua Friesen (138) and Rigoberto Hernandez (126) contributed to the cause by adding a pin apiece.

The Celtics jump into their Mountain Valley Conference slate on Wednesday, Dec. 18 when they take on Sprague at 7 p.m.

McNary had a hard time competing with Sprague last season as the Olympians have one of the best programs in the state. But Ebbs welcomes the challenge that Sprague presents for his team.

"Last year was last year. You don't want to dwell on it, but at the same time, we want to use it as motivation. We should always be chasing the best teams in the state. Our kids should be learning to wrestle at that level," Ebbs said.



McNary point guard Jando Gonzalez prepares to crossover in the Celtics 53-38 win on Tuesday, Dec. 18.

KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

Defense key in McNary's victory over McMinnville

By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the Keizertimes

It's still early in the season, but it appears that the identity of the McNary boys basketball team can be found in their defense.

The Celtics tenacious full-court press gave McMinnville fits for the majority of the night as the Celtics moved to 2-0 on the season with a 53-38 victory over the Grizzlies on Tuesday, Dec. 10.

McNary has held both of their opponents this season to under 45 points.

"We always pride ourselves on our defense. We have a lot of quickness and we have a lot of tough

guys who can guard one-on-one. We want to make everything difficult when we're defending. Our guys take a lot of pride in that," McNary head coach Ryan Kirch said.

"Every time we got a deflection or steal, it gave us more momentum and helped us on offense."

— Nate Meithof,
McNary guard

The Celtics got back-to-back triples from Nate Meithof and Riley Flores to jump out to an early 6-2 lead. Flores got an easy lay-up in transition moments later to increase the lead to six, which was followed by another triple by Meithof after McNary forced McMinnville into a 10-second violation.

McMinnville trimmed the deficit to 16-11 by the end of the first quarter, but

the Celtics continued to create offensive opportunities with their ball-pressure.

McNary forced three turnovers in a four-minute stretch in the second quarter, which allowed them to go on an 11-3 run to take a 27-14 lead late in the period.

"Every time we got a deflection or steal, it gave us more momentum and helped us on offense," said Meithof, who led McNary with 21 points.

"You can see when defense turns into offense, it can be backbreaking for a team," Kirch added.

After taking a 29-18 lead into halftime, freshman point guard Jando Gonzalez opened up the third quarter by nailing consecutive triples to increase McNary's lead to 35-16.

The Celtics lead by as much as 25 points in the

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McNary's Brandon Blanco (blue singlet) tries to get position on Cleveland's Sean Lee in a 106-pound bout.

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