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McNary claims second straight league title

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 scampered 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



The McNary football team celebrates with the Mountain Valley Conference Championship trophy.

File

touchdown by Walling.

Walling scored his second touchdown of the game from four yards out with 1:01 left in the opening period. The Celtics held 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.

But a defensive stop from McNary forced 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 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 offensive lineman Nathan Young said.

Walling also added: "I just trusted my line. They were getting a push all game, so I

got to give them all the credit."

Despite having a lot of success with their vertical passing game in their first two drives, the South Salem defense struggled to get anything going against the Celtics defense for the remainder of the contest.

After the Saxons could barely get past the line of scrimmage on their next two drives, the Celtics increased their lead to three scores midway through the third quarter when Barker found the goal line from four yards out.

"Our defense kept getting tougher and tougher throughout the game. We got a few three-and-outs and I think that was huge for us," Walling said.

Even though the South Salem offense drove into Celtic territory in each of their next two possessions, the McNary defense forced turnovers both times, including a interception from Celtics linebacker Quinn Bach that was returned to the Saxons 24-yard line — which eventually set up Walling's fourth touchdown of the game.

"It's unbelievable. It's the same exact story as last season. This team has fought so hard through the season. It's an honor to play with these guys," Young said.

Volcanoes clinch first half division crown

For the first time since 2015, the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes were in the Northwest League playoffs.

Yorlis Rodriguez hit an RBI-double in the top of the 12th, then came into score on a base hit by Simon Whiteman, helping give the Volcanoes the 4-3 victory over the Boise Hawks on Sunday, July 21. The win allowed Salem-Keizer to clinch the first half crown in the NWL South division and earn a spot in the postseason.

"It feels good to give this back to the community, because they have waited a long time for this," said Mitche Graf, the Volcanoes president of business operations. "Now we have to finish the job."

The Volcanoes finish the first half with a 26-12 record, two games better than the second place Hillsboro Hops.

"It's a great feeling. I'm really proud of everyone on this staff and the hard work that we have put in so far," Volcanoes manager Mark Hallberg said. "We have a talented group of guys that we're developing."

Salem-Keizer grabbed the early advantage in the top of the first to go up 1-0. Whiteman led off the contest with a double. But after a free pass was issued to Hunter Bishop, Franklin Labour lined into a double play. Logan Wyatt, however, was able to drive in Whiteman with an RBI-single to left field.

The Volcanoes struck again in the top of the second thanks to a solo bomb from Armani Smith to put his team up 2-0. It was Smith's second home run of the season.

On the mound, Volcanoes starter Kervin

Castro was phenomenal in his first four innings of work as the young right-hander from Venezuela gave up just one hit to the Hawks. But in the bottom of the fifth, Boise got on the board with an RBI-double by Daniel Cope to cut the lead to one.

Castro left the game after five innings, giving up just three hits and one run.

He gave up no walks and struck out four.

Boise came back to tie the game in the bottom of the eighth thanks to another RBI-double, this time courtesy of Aaron Schunk, which forced the game to go into extra innings.

A new rule implemented in the minor leagues last season is that when a game goes into extra innings, the player that was the last out of the previous inning starts the frame at second base — this rule was enacted to speed up the pace of play when a game goes past the ninth inning.

Neither team was able to take advantage of the runner in scoring position in the 10th or 11th innings, but the Volcanoes finally capitalized in the top of the 12th.

Rodriguez's double to left field scored Alexander Canario to give the Volcanoes the 3-2 lead. Two batters later, Whiteman came through with a key RBI-single that allowed Salem-Keizer to get a much-needed insurance run.

In the bottom of the frame, Hallberg brought in reliever Deiyerbert Bolivar to try and get his first win of the season.

A pair of wild pitches allowed a run to score from second, but Bolivar struck out the side to seal the deal.



TM



On Wednesday, Dec. 13, Junior Walling signed his letter of intent with the Oregon State Beavers. Walling was the Mountain Valley Conference Defensive Player of the Year for McNary in 2019.

File

Walling signs with OSU

McNary linebacker Junior Walling, had received nearly a dozen offers from Division I schools. And on Thursday, June 13, Walling made the decision on where he wants to continue his career as a student-athlete.

In a two-minute video posted on his Twitter account, Walling revealed that he has committed to Oregon State University to play college football.

Walling has been an Oregon State fan for his entire life — in large-part due to the fact that his father, Jason, was a tight end and defensive end for the Beavers from 1990-92. So being able to play in Corvallis is a dream come true.

"It feels amazing to know that I will be a Beaver. I grew up dreaming that one day I

would be able to play at Reser Stadium," Walling said.

Walling is the number two in-state recruit and the 14th-ranked inside linebacker in the country according to 247Sports.com.

He had offers from Army, Air Force, Princeton, Yale, Georgetown, Brown, Cornell, Columbia, Eastern Washington and Utah in addition to his offer from Oregon State.

In his approach to the recruiting process, Walling broke down his decision into three categories. He wanted to have a solid connection with the coaching staff, he wanted to attend a place that met his academic needs — Walling is a 4.0 student — and he wanted to be at a place that was a good fit socially.

"I wanted to make sure I felt like I connected with the coaches and had the ability to be successful in the program. I also wanted to make sure that the school had an engineering program, as that is what I will be focusing my education around. Then, of course, it was important to me to be comfortable with where I would be living for the next four to five years of my life," Walling said. "After my family and I visited more than 15 campuses, it was very clear to me that OSU was where I belonged."

Walling made it official with the Beavers on Wednesday, Dec. 13 by signing his letter of intent in front of friends, family and local media.

FOR MORE, see Pages A7-A9