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## Changes coming to youth football?



The future of McNary Youth Football could be affected if the Salem-Keizer School District decides to adopt the Ad-Hoc Football Committee's mission statement as a conditional use for district facilities. Submitted

By **MATT RAWLINGS**  
*Of the Keizertimes*

The future of youth football in Keizer isn't in jeopardy, but there is a chance that it could look different in the years to come.

In late-December, McNary Youth Football received word that the Salem-Keizer School District was considering the OSAA's Ad-Hoc Football Committee position statement on youth football as a conditional requirement for the use and rental of Salem-Keizer public fields — McNary Youth Football uses McNary High as their main facility for practices and games.

The 2020 season won't be affected if these changes come to pass. However, if this recommendation by the Ad-Hoc Committee comes to fruition in the near future, people can expect the following guidelines to be implemented for youth football

in Salem-Keizer.

- Kids in kindergarten through fourth grade would be required to play flag football.

- Eleven-man tackle football wouldn't be available until seventh grade. Fifth and sixth graders would be required to play Rookie Tackle Football — a seven-man game where the field is only 40 yards long and more narrow.

- Seasons would be limited to eight games (no playoffs).

The goal of the proposed changes is to make the game safer and add more participants. Football has been viewed by many as a more dangerous game in recent years as a result of new scientific findings of the impact concussions have on the brain — exposure data shows children as young as age 9 are getting hit in the head more than 500 times in one season

of youth tackle football.

"While we have a long reach, we don't reach that far," said Brad Garrett, the assistant executive director for the OSAA.

"But it's become pretty apparent that moving forward, if we're going to build a continuum of football, that we're going to have to develop and foster relationships at the youth level in order to do that. Part of that is establishing some baseline expectations."

The full position statement, which can be found on OSAA.org, is endorsed by the Oregon Athletic Coaches Association, Oregon Athletic Directors Association, Ore-

gon Athletic Officials Association and the Oregon Athletic Trainers Society.

However, it is not at all endorsed by McNary Youth

"It gives us the opportunity to provide an age appropriate, safe, environment for kids to be successful and have fun playing football and hopefully increase numbers,"

— Scott Gragg,  
McNary High Athletic Director

Football, who stated on their website that they believe the proposed rule changes are "abusive and arbitrary."

"It's a weird that the decisions being made about youth football are being driven by high school coaches and AD's. They have no involvement in the youth pro-

### What's at stake:

- Salem-Keizer school officials are considering adopting a recommendation from the OSAA that would affect youth football leagues.
- Non-compliance youth leagues could be barred from using school district facilities.
- Representatives of Keizer's youth football league are unhappy with the proposed changes and the current trajectory of the conversation.

grams," said McNary Youth Football Vice President Russ Walker.

The OSAA Ad-Hoc Committee was formed in the fall of 2018, and one of the topics they initially addressed was the steady decrease in numbers that prep football was experiencing. The committee is made up of more than a dozen former and current coaches.

According to McNary athletic director Scott Gragg, the OSAA has been losing an average of 150 football participants per year since 2006.

"The committee basically looked at those numbers and thought of what could we do from an organizational administrative standpoint that could promote numbers

and help a sport that many people love, including myself, stay vibrant and relevant moving forward," said Gragg, who joined the committee earlier this fall. "They have come up with a ton of recommendations."

Plummeting participation numbers in football have been a problem across the country. But as it turns out it isn't just a high school problem.

According to a poll from the National Alliance for Youth Sports, around 70 percent of kids in the United States stop playing organized sports by the age of 13 because it's no longer fun.

"The stats show that this isn't just a high school issue. When you ask kids what's the reason they quit sports, the first reason that comes out of their mouths is that it's not fun," Gragg said. "It's

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## McNary earns second straight MVC dual victory

By **MATT RAWLINGS**  
*Of the Keizertimes*

The McNary wrestling team won their second straight Mountain Valley Conference dual on Thursday, Jan. 23, defeating West Salem by a score of 39-32.

"We have different guys each week stepping up and doing something good for us," McNary head coach Jason Ebbs said.

McNary wrestlers have made a habit this season of fighting from behind in individual matches and finding a way to come out victorious. That theme continued throughout this dual.

The match started with the 152-pound bout as McNary's Ivan Vallejo beat Xavier Finel via 3-1 decision.

After trailing early, Vallejo

tied the score at 1-1 in the second round. Vallejo then scored a two-point take-down in the final round to secure the victory.

Matthew Mehlhoff got McNary's first pin of the evening in the 160-pound

match. After jumping out to a 4-0 advantage, Mehlhoff's opponent, Adrian Galindo, came back to tie the match at 4-4 late in the first round.

But Mehlhoff was able to earn the fall midway through the second round.

Jeremiah Ratliff won a 6-0 decision at 195 pounds. The Celtics then were awarded the 220-pound match thanks to a forfeit.

McNary also earned forfeit victories at 120 and 132 pounds. But it was the 120-pound forfeit that

caused the match to swing in the Celtics favor.

Grady Burrows, one of the best wrestlers in the conference, was originally slated to wrestle at 120 for this match. But since West Salem had already planned to forfeit the match, Ebbs moved Burrows up to the 126-pound slot and had Eoan Sharabarin claim the forfeit at 120.

The strategic move by Ebbs ended up paying dividends as Burrows easily got a pin just over a minute into the match, giving McNary the 30-29 lead on the scoreboard.

"We just wanted to make sure we were getting the right matchups. When it comes to winning duals, a lot of times you need to move things around and do something different to make sure the team is getting the best guys on the mat at the right time," Ebbs said.

The Celtics went up 36-29 thanks to West Salem's forfeit at 132, meaning that

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McNary's Grady Burrows (blue singlet) pins his opponent in the 126-pound match to help the Celtics beat West Salem 39-32 in a dual meet on Thursday, Jan. 23. KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings