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COVID-19 shakes up Cepeda's softball plans

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

It was a highlight year for McNary softball player Alexa Cepeda in 2019.

In her junior season, Cepeda was named first-team all-state thanks to batting .495, with 48 runs scored, 10 doubles and having an on-base percentage of .560.

In November, Cepeda also signed on to continue her softball career at Portland State University.

But as she was gearing up for the 2020 season, the spread of the COVID-19 virus turned Cepeda's plans upside down.

On March 12, Cepeda was traveling to Florida to try out for the Puerto Rico Junior Olympic Team, but when her flight landed, she was informed that the tryout had been canceled due to the coronavirus.

The following day, the OSAA announced that they were suspending interscholastic practices and contests

for sports and activities for all member schools until March 31 — which has since been moved to April 28.

"My world just exploded. Nobody could have ever prepared for this," Cepeda said. "I had big goals for my senior year and plans of playing for the Puerto Rican Junior National Team, and they all came crashing down."

Cepeda and the McNary softball team came into the 2020 season with a lot to look forward to.

"My world just exploded. Nobody could have prepared for this."

— Alexa Cepeda, McNary outfielder

In 2019, the Celtics won 13 of their last 15 games of the season and won the 2019 Mountain Valley Conference title. McNary returned eight of the nine starters from last year's team, as well as a slew of freshman that would compete for playing time.

But as it stands now, it's safe to assume that there likely won't be a spring sports season this year.

"My heart is breaking for Alexa. She is an exceptional young lady who is super



Alexa Cepeda smiles as she walks off the field after McNary defeated North Medford 5-4 in the first round of the 2019 OSAA Playoffs. Cepeda will be playing at Portland State in 2021, but it's likely that she will miss her senior season due to the coronavirus.

talented and smart and she sets an example for this team both on and off the field," said McNary head coach Kevin Wise.

Through the hard times and uncertainty that the COVID-19 virus has brought, Cepeda appreciates that her high school coach is always there for her.

"Coach Wise and his wife, Deb, have shown the biggest support for me personally, as well as the team as a whole. It's great to be reminded that I'm not in this alone," Cepeda said.

For the last two years, Cepeda has gotten the chance to play with Nadia Witt and Faith Danner, a pair of senior leaders for McNary that have since gone on to play college softball.

While Cepeda has played with a quiet confidence for the first three years of her career, she was looking forward to being a more vocal presence this year and stepping

into a leadership role as the only senior on the McNary team.

"I wanted to be the best leader I could be for the underclassmen. I was really looking forward to doing that and helping some of our younger girls learn," Cepeda said.

Wise added: "She has

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McNary's Dyami Rios runs the anchor leg of the boys 4X100 relay at a meet from last season.

OSAA preparing for different scenarios

By MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

After meeting virtually on Wednesday, April 1, the executive board for the OSAA decided to maintain the current suspension for OSAA spring sports and activities until April 28.

"We're hoping to get a little more information before we make our final decision," said OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber.

On March 18, instead of cancelling the season due to the spread of COVID-19, the OSAA decided to suspend the season until April 28. The decision came a day after Gov. Kate Brown closed all state schools until April 28.

Last week, the Oregon Department of Education shared that students might

not be returning to classrooms this school year due to COVID-19, and that districts will need to be preparing virtual learning tools for school-work outside of the classroom.

If schools do indeed remain closed for the remainder of the school year, it's more than likely that the OSAA will follow suit.

"Right now the philosophy of the board is that as long as classrooms are closed, we shouldn't be holding practices or competition," Weber said.

However, the OSAA is still preparing for a scenario where an abbreviated spring sports season would take place.

Members of the OSAA staff have been working with Dr. Mick Koester, the chief medical advisor and chair of the OSAA's Sports Medicine

Advisory Committee, to promote and develop guidelines that would emphasize athlete safety if teams are able to reconvene in May.

There would be an initial seven-day period with no contests, only practices, and those practices would be limited to no more than three hours in length. There would also be an emphasis on late start times and weekend competitions to limit loss of class time.

"We want to make sure that our athletes are safe if they come back. We're not going to try and jam stuff in to make up for lost time," Weber said.

One of the points of discussion was the possibility of moving spring sports and

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Steelheaders can be dead serious



On the Wild Side
by G.I. Wilson

It is a cold December day on the Nestucca River. Twenty to 25 drift fishermen, in cold weather gear and insulated hip boots, line the gravel bar below the mouth of Three Rivers.

Skilled drifters cast and retrieve with a synchronized ebb and flow that would make a Broadway dance choreographer glow. Cast and retrieve in unison and few tangles occur. Cast out of sequence a few times and it would be a good idea to quietly slink away to a safer place to fish. Could be a little intimidating hearing your ancestors described in colorful language not to be heard by women or children.

Winter steelhead are returning in record numbers. This is the peak of the hatchery run. Millions of smolts are being released yearly. The Nestucca has been the top river for steelhead production for several years in a row. State hatcheries are adequately funded and running at capacity.

This is long before anti-hatchery groups began a program to convince state leaders fish hatcheries are far worse than coal burning plants and pipelines.

A river guide arrives in a wooden driftboat after a half day float. He has to come ashore on this gravel bar.

He has to bring the craft in and interrupt the casting cycle. Two reluctant anglers grudgingly wave him in, grab the heavy boat and slide it partially onto the gravel and promptly return to casting.

A passenger, feeling somewhat uncomfortable for the interruption, smiles weakly and offers greetings. She notices a beautiful 7-8 pound steelhead on the bank.

"What a beauty. Who got that one?" she gushes.

"Guy landed that fish, dropped dead in his tracks," a big, bearded guy mutters. "Hauled 'em away in the ambulance."

"Who gets the fish?" the stunned boater asks timidly.

"Guess the guy he came with," a second angler offers, jumping into the conversation.

"Tall skinny guy down there with a fur hat. He ain't leaving till he gets his limit."

"We are dead serious about these winter steelhead," giggles a heavy guy as he finished his second Blitz. "Had my limit before 8:00. Got to wait for my buddy to get his limit now."

Guide Jim Johnson has one client on another December trip down the Nestucca River. Today he decides to float from Bridge One to Cloverdale.

They float past the usual crowd at Three Rivers. About a quarter mile downriver, the client suddenly has an urgent "call from Mother Nature."

Johnson rows to shore and the guy makes a dash to the bushes. He comes back to the boat, steps one foot into the boat and drops dead.

Obviously, Johnson is not only badly shaken, but has a major problem on his hands. It is over an hour float to Cloverdale and a quarter-mile hike back to the Three Rivers parking lot.

Since Al Gore hasn't invented the cell phone yet, Johnson has to leave the body and make the hike, flag down a vehicle and drive to the nearest telephone. "My client just stepped one foot in the boat and just checked out," a shaken Johnson blurted. "I mean, he was stone dead."

Firemen and paramedics return to carry the corpse back to the parking lot.

This is the big news of the day at the local watering hole. All the locals are eager to hear the details and have some fun at Johnson's expense.

"Old boy just checked out right there in mid-step," Johnson stammers. "Dropped stone dead."

"Was it a full day, or half day trip?" a giggling barmaid asks.

"Had he paid you?" comes from another local, struggling not to laugh.

"I can just see the headlines 'Local Guide Dead on Steelhead.'"