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MYB squad victorious in summer opener

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

The summer of 2020 has been unusual to say the least due to COVID-19.

But on a perfect July evening at Keizer Little League Park, a small sense of normalcy was restored.

Baseball was back.

In their first game of the year, the McNary Youth Baseball (MYB) senior national team defeated Oregon City 12-6 on Thursday, July 16. However, the end result wasn't the highlight of the night for this Celtics squad, it was the ability to, once again, play the sport they love.

"We got to be out playing baseball again. That was the biggest thing. It didn't matter to our kids who we were facing, they were just excited to play again," said Rob Tavares, the head coach for the MYB senior national team. "I feel like this whole process has really changed all of our perspectives on being appreciative of what we have."

McNary starting pitcher Andrew Hammond looked to be in midseason form in his first outing, retiring the side with two strikeouts in the top of the first.

In the bottom half of the frame, Drew Zeller reached base with a bloop single to right field. After Zeller stole second, Logan Hendrickson knocked him in with an RBI-double left center field. Jack Tavares soon followed with an RBI-single to left field.

The Celtics wound up getting two more across the plate in the inning thanks to a hit-batsman and fielder's choice — both coming with the bases loaded — increasing the lead to 4-0.

"I think we were a little rusty in the beginning, but I felt like our kids got their groove back pretty quickly," Tavares said. "We have a great group of guys that are always willing to learn."

Hammond retired the next two hitters he faced in the top of the second before getting replaced by Riley Castillo, who forced the next hitter to groundout.

McNary continued their hot hitting in the bottom of the second. After Hammond and Daniel Cooper drew two-out walks, Castillo lined an RBI-single into left field to make the score 5-0.

Zeller then cleared the

bases by scalding a ball to the base of the fence in left center for a two-run triple, extending the Celtics advantage to 7-0.

"As a program, we put more of an emphasis on hitting, which has really worked out in our favor," Tavares said. "It was good to see a lot of our kids find some gaps."

A pair of free passes and an error allowed Oregon City to score their first run of the game in the top of the third. But even though the Pioneers were threatening to do further damage with runners on second and third, Hendrickson made an impressive backhanded stop on a hot shot down the first base line and touched the bag to end the inning.

McNary responded with a pair of runs in the bottom half to make the score 9-1.

With a comfortable lead, Tavares wanted to give some different kids chances on the mound and in new positions.

"We had guys that were brand new to playing on the big field," Tavares said. "We wanted to experiment with kids on the mound and in different positions. It was fun, though. It had more of a fall



KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

After knocking in the first run of the game, Logan Hendrickson crossed the plate moments later in the Celtics 12-6 victory over Oregon City on Thursday, July 16.



KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

Riley Castillo hits a sharp ground ball back up the middle.

ball feel to it."

Oregon City got a couple runs back in the top of the fourth, but McNary responded with three runs of their own to go up 12-3. The Pioneers then pushed three runs across in the top of the fifth to make the score more respectable.

Because of the coronavirus, coaches had players take health and safety precautions all throughout the contest.

The MYB program bought temporal scanners to test kids for a fever before they entered the dugout. Masks were required to be worn by coaches and kids when they weren't on the field and fans were asked to practice social distancing.

Handshakes and high-fives were also prohibited.

"We wanted to be safe and enjoy playing baseball and in order to do that, we had to take precautions," Tavares said.



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Celtics pitcher Andrew Hammond retired all five hitters he faced on the mound.

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