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Spring season approved for McNary football

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

After Salem-Keizer Public Schools (SKPS) officially submitted and met requirements for opting-in to allow outdoor contact sports, the McNary High School football team held their first official practice in more than a year on Monday, Feb. 22.

Though their first game is scheduled for Friday, March 5, there is still some uncertainty as to whether the Celtics season will start on that exact day. However, while the situation is still fluid, McNary athletic director Scott Gragg said definitively that there will be a football season in Salem-Keizer this spring.

"I am confident in saying this: We will play football this year. It might be six games, it might be five games, it might be four games and a jamboree, but we will play," Gragg said. "It's going to look different, especially without any spectators in the stands, but we are super appreciative that we are able to be able to offer our kids the ability to play."

Despite Marion County being moved down to a 'High' risk COVID-19 area, rather than 'Extreme' risk, the district has to follow a strict

set of requirements in order to play. Those requirements include; offering, at a minimum, Comprehensive Distance Learning with Limited In-Person Instruction (LIPI), compliance with the Oregon School Testing Plan, limiting field capacity to 120 people maximum, prohibiting spectators, offer on-site responsive testing for symptomatic individuals, collecting contact information for contact tracing and collecting a waiver from each participant.

Players and coaches are also required to wear masks during practices and games.

Offering on-site testing has been one of the biggest hurdles to overcome for other districts in the state, which is why Gragg is grateful that SKPS has already gotten to this point.

"I'm happy with our district because it feels like we are ahead of the average, com-

pared to the rest of the state," Gragg said.

"I am confident in saying this: We will play football this year. It may be six games, it may be five games, it may be four games and a jamboree, but we will play."

— Scott Gragg,
McNary Athletic Director

North Salem, South Salem). However, the week one contest will likely be more of a jamboree style according to Gragg.

"Even if we get our nine practices in, it's likely that those games will look more like a jamboree, or a controlled scrimmage, than they will look like an actual contest," Gragg said. "Our sub-varsity might also have

Teams are required to host nine practices before they can participate in competition. McNary is scheduled to host West Albany for the first game of the season, then play Salem-area teams in the remaining five weeks (McKay, Sprague, West Salem, Salem, South Salem).



Griffen Hubbard (right) tries to beat his defender while going out for a pass in McNary's first official practice since 2019.

KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

some modifications, just so that kids are safe and they are able to participate in football."

Salem-Keizer freshman

squads will play on Friday nights before the school's varsity contest and junior varsity teams are planning to play on Saturday afternoons.

Since fans will not be allowed in the stands, McNary is currently in the process of installing cameras

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Celts soccer squads ready for action

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

On Monday, March 1, both the McNary boys' and girls soccer teams will play their first contests since Fall of 2019 — it will mark the first since the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools in March of last year that a McNary team will play in an OSAA event.

Needless to say, both head coaches are eagerly look-

ing forward to getting their respective teams back on the pitch.

"I am very excited to have a season. The athletes really need this and I am so happy they get it," said McNary girls soccer coach Lauren Brouse.

"I'm super excited, it has been a long time. I'm excited for my players, parents, coaches

and community. Sports are a key component in our daily lives. This is a hope of normality," added Celtics boys' coach Miguel Camarena.

Brouse is entering her first year as the McNary girls coach, taking over for A.J. Nash, who was at the helm for six seasons. With this season being so unique

due to the pandemic, Brouse shared what it has been like to be a first-year coach in what has been one of the weirdest years in recent memory.

"What a year to take over a program. I try to look at it as a blessing because it is teaching me a lot about communication to my parents, athletes and coaches. I am learning a ton about who I am as a coach and what my expectations are for this program. With so little time this season, I really can only focus on a handful of elements but hey, my hardest season might be my first one so hopefully future seasons will be a breeze," Brouse said.

The McNary girls team finished 5-6-3, (3-3-1) last season, just missing the playoffs. With their four all-leaguers graduating last year, and losing two of their top returners in Audrey Williams and Ashlyn Lyda — who elected to graduate early — the Celtics will have to rely on an influx of youth this

year. Since there will be no type of postseason, Brouse wants her team to focus on growth this spring and establish an identity of being the most well-conditioned team on the field.

"I want every single game to be competitive. I also expect my girls to always be the most fit on the field. We can't always control being the best team technical wise but we can control being the most conditioned," Brouse said.

Sophomore midfielder Tessa Fisher started last season as a freshman last season and will be expected to once again control the midfield for the Celtics. Sydnee Alfano, also a sophomore, joined

the varsity team in the middle of the season last year and looks to be one of McNary's top goal-scorers. Senior defenders Elise Ali and Caitlin Huffman will be expected to patrol the back line for the Celtics.

"We have a lot of returners that can have an impact. I expect Alfano to be a force up top. Fisher is one that will be key in our possession in the midfield and seniors Ali and Huffman have the experience we need to have a strong defense," Brouse said.

McNary also will return four-year varsity players Kennedy Buss and Isabella Walker.

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McNary midfielder Tessa Fisher (left) is one of the top returners on the Celtics girls' team.

File

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