

Celts make long awaited return to the VBall court

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary volleyball team hasn't been together in the school gym for more than a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After the other traditional fall sports got the go-ahead to begin Season 2 activities, volleyball players had to wait patiently to see if they would be able to have a season — 'Extreme' risk counties can only have six people in the gym at a time.

On Friday, Feb. 26, Marion County moved from 'Extreme' risk to 'High' risk, meaning that school gyms can have up to 50 people in the space at a time and that the McNary volleyball squad could finally prepare to have a season.

While many girls on the team have played club ball over the last year, the Celtics have only been able to do team conditioning and workouts due to OSAA restrictions, so once they were able to get back inside and practice with an actual volleyball, it was a joyous occasion.

"We are loving every minute," said McNary head coach Crystal DeMello. "We have been doing outside workouts ever since the pandemic hit, so we are beyond excited to be able to get back on the court and actually do some technical training. I want these girls to seize this opportunity."

With the constant fluidity surrounding volleyball, and other prep sports, DeMello is thankful for McNary athletic director Scott Gragg's ability to communicate with the coaching staff about what they are allowed to do on a weekly basis.

"(Gragg) has done a great job of keeping us in the loop with what we can and can't do. Being on the same page is crucial," DeMello said. "We are going to play until they tell us we can't."

The Celtics lost five seniors from last season's team, including three all-leaguers, but they return one of the top outside hitters in the league in senior Taylor Ebbs.



File
Ellie Dean prepares to set the ball in a match from 2019. Dean is one four returning seniors on the McNary roster.

Ebbs — who will be playing softball at the University of Kentucky next year — was an honorable mention all-conference selection last season with 140 kills and 106 digs. She is also one of the unquestioned leaders of the team according to DeMello.

"Taylor is a leader. You can't match her tenacity and competitiveness," DeMello said. "It's bittersweet because I know Taylor wanted a full senior season to close out her volleyball career, but she is really excited that she does at least get the chance to play one last time."

The Celtics other senior returners are key front row players in Jasmine Zepeda and Trinity Kampstra, as well as setter Ellie Dean. Additionally, McNary returns a sophomore and a pair of juniors who received significant playing time last season.

Maddison Corpe was the team's lead setter as a freshman last season and junior Maddox Snider is expected to be one of the team's top hitters. Alexis Eldridge, a junior, will likely be the team's premier libero.

"I am really excited to see what Maddison can do this year. She has been training very hard," DeMello said. "Maddox is one of our most versatile players. She has mostly been a front row player, but has really been working on her ability to play in the back row."

Sophomores Isabella Rodriguez and Emily Blagg, as well as junior Emily Lettenmaier, were three of the top players on the JV team last season and are expected to play a role in the varsity lineup.

"Our goal is to compete with everyone we play this season and have some of our younger girls transition into more of a varsity mindset. We also want to be a team that is mentally tough and have girls that are continuing to grow in their volleyball IQ," DeMello said.

Although spectators will not be allowed in the building, fans can watch McNary volleyball matches on NFHSnetwork.com. The Celtics will travel to Dallas to open up their season on Tuesday, March 9 for a 7:15 p.m. match.

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McCarty was still finding ways to improve and get repetitions. During the offseason, McCarty played on the Island Boy Camp (IBC) Gym Club squad during 7-on-7 weekend tournaments and even formed a McNary 7-on-7 team.

In their seven competitions, McCarty ended up leading McNary to a pair of tournament championships and Gym Club to four tournament titles.

"It was really fun because I always felt like I was playing in a championship game with either team," McCarty said.

After months of voluntary workouts and 7-on-7, McCarty found out last month that he would indeed get an opportunity to be the starting quarterback for Mc-

Nary when the Salem-Keizer School District announced that they would be opting-in for a partial season due to a change in COVID-19 guidance from the Governor's office and Oregon Health Authority.

Despite there only being six games on the schedule with no playoffs and no spectators, McCarty is thankful for the gift of an opportunity.

"I just wanted whatever we could get. As long as we are getting full-contact, actual football, I will take it," McCarty said.

"I'm glad he gets the chance to show what he can do," Auvinen added.

Even though McCarty has taken only a few varsity snaps in his career, he is still generating interest from several local Division III schools, including Linfield and Pacific — he even got official offers from Lewis & Clark and Willamette.

McCarty is hoping to garner even more collegiate interest

after playing some meaningful varsity snaps.

"I really don't have any varsity film to show schools right now, that's one of the reasons getting to play this season is such a big deal," McCarty said.

Auvinen is confident that, no matter how this season turns out, his quarterback will be ready for the next level.

"I think D3 is a great level for him. I believe he will be able to battle for a ton of playing time. There will be schools that would take him in a heartbeat after seeing him play this season," Auvinen said.

As for this season, McCarty doesn't have any lofty individual goals for himself, he's just excited to be able to play varsity football.

"I would really like to go undefeated as a team, but I am not really worried about stats. I'm just glad that I get the chance to play," McCarty said.



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