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Celtics hang on for season-opening win

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

In their first game since November 2019, the McNary defense set the tone from kickoff until the last play.

Facing fourth-and-goal from the McNary 10-yard line with four seconds left on the clock and trailing by five, West Albany quarterback Michael Cale tried a fade to his favorite target, Caden Zamora, in the corner of the end zone for the win. But McNary's Sage Allen broke up the pass as time expired, giving the Celtics the 19-14 victory on Friday, March 5.

During a typical McNary home game, there would be a celebration with the student section on the field and players would stay behind for nearly an hour after the horn sounded, greeting friends and family members and taking photos. But due to COVID-19 protocols, the Flesher Field grandstands were empty. There was no band, there was no cheering after a big play, only silence.

However, after the game was over, the players weren't dwelling on what had been taken away from them during this tumultuous year, they were instead, thankful

for the simple joy of playing football once again.

"It feels amazing to be out here again. Right before kickoff I was like 'man, I am really about to play football again,' and I am so glad it turned out the way it did," McNary linebacker Dyami Rios said.

"It feels so good to be back. It's a blessing that we are able to be out here," Celtics running back Dakota Dunagan added.

McNary head coach Jeff Auvinen, who has been coaching football at McNary for nearly three decades and has been a part of two state championship teams (1997, 2001), claimed that this might be one of the best feelings he has ever experienced after a game.

"I've been doing this a long time, and no matter what level it's at, it's always been awesome. But this might be the best I have ever felt," Auvinen said.

With it being the first time either team had played in over a year, the game was sloppy during certain points. When West Albany made a pair of crucial mistakes in the first quarter, the Celtics took full advantage.



McNary defensive back Jake Paton celebrates after a big hit in McNary's 19-14 win over West Albany on Friday, March 5. KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

Please see CELTS, Page A10



McNary midfielder Karla Rodriguez controls the ball off the bounce. The Celtics scored the opening goal of the contest, but lost to South Salem by a score of 4-1 in their home opener. KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

McNary falls to South Salem after gaining early advantage

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary girls' soccer squad was able to compete with South Salem for the first 55 minutes of the contest. The Saxons, however, ran away with the game in the second half.

After the Celtics took a 1-0 lead in the 25th minute, South Salem scored four unanswered goals to earn the 4-1 victory on Thursday, March 4, spoiling McNary's home opener.

McNary first-year head coach Lauren Brouse said that she felt that the final score wasn't indicative of how the team competed.

"I was really proud of the way my team played. I don't feel like the score is reflective of how we played," Brouse said. "We're still learning how to play together."

Coming into the season, the Celtics didn't have a set goalkeeper in place. During the first half of this game, Brouse put senior defender Caitlin Huffman in the back

of the net to play goalie for the first time in her career.

Huffman was tested early and often, but refused to budge. South Salem had a pair of great looks in the opening 10 minutes, but Huffman got back-to-back diving saves to turn the Saxons away — Huffman had five saves in the first 15 minutes of the game.

"We don't really have a set keeper right now, so when we asked who wanted to step up, Caitlin was ready and willing," Brouse said. "You never would have guessed that she had never been a keeper before. She did so well."

McNary did not score a goal in the first 20 minutes of the game. However, the Celtics broke the scoreless tie

with 15 minutes remaining in the half.

Celtics midfielder Tessa Fisher broke past the Saxons back line off the dribble and got herself enough space on the right side to cross the ball to the middle. Isabella Walker positioned herself to receive the ball and knocked it into the back of the net to give McNary the lead.

"It was a great pass from Tessa. I was really glad she was able to send it in and I was just in the place at the right time," Walker said.

South Salem, however, broke through just moments later when Mya Froy scored the first of her two

"I was really proud of the way my team played. I don't feel like the score is reflective of how we played,"

—Lauren Brouse, McNary head coach

Please see GSOC, Page A10

Zavala looks to continue hot streak with the Ducks

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

At the start of the 2020 season, no player on the University Oregon baseball team was swinging a hotter stick than sophomore Aaron Zavala.

Through 15 games, the Keizer native was leading the team with a .418 batting average. Zavala also was leading the squad in both multi-hit (8) and multi-RBI (9) games and had the most RBIs in the Pac-12 Conference.

But once the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March of last year, the collegiate baseball season was canned, and Zavala's gaudy numbers ended up being all-for-not.

Zavala was still named a third-team All-American at third base for the shortened

2020 season, but the disappointment in the cancellation still lingered.

"I just want to keep playing and finish out the season. It was the most frustrating not to be out there every day with my teammates. That was the hardest part," Zavala said.

After many months of not playing ball, the Ducks began winter workouts in January to prepare for the spring season. Even though it will look

different, Zavala couldn't contain his enthusiasm for returning to campus for his junior campaign.

"I was really excited to get going," Zavala said. "There has been a lot of anticipation. It's been a while since a lot of us have played last."

Just six games into the year, Zavala and his team have already gotten off to a great start.

After splitting a four-game series with the University of Seattle in late-February, the Ducks went on the road last weekend and swept a four-game set with UC Santa Barbara — who were ranked as high as #7 in some college baseball polls.

Proving that he was worthy of being named to the Bobby Bragan Collegiate Slugger Award watch list, Zavala has already picked up right where he left off from last year, going 13-for-29 (.448) with a pair of homers and 10 runs scored so far this year.

Zavala was a serviceable player as a freshman for the Ducks in 2019, batting .273 in 43 games, but said that he really made a leap in his ability between his freshman and sophomore seasons.

"I feel like I just grew up a lot between my freshman and sophomore year. I got my feet under me and was playing with a lot more confidence on a day-to-day basis and I wasn't caring who I was facing. I was just playing ball," Zavala said.

Zavala grew up playing Please see ZAVALA, Page 10



Keizer native Aaron Zavala is expected to be one of the best players in the Pac-12 Conference this season. Samuel Marshall/Goducks.com