

Celts fall short against South Salem

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

In a showdown featuring the top two volleyball teams in the area, McNary didn't bring their A-game on Wednesday, March 31 and South Salem took full advantage, beating the Celtics in straight sets (25-16, 25-19, 25-14).

"We just couldn't find a rhythm," McNary head coach Crystal DeMello said. "South played really well. They put up a really good block and our hitters struggled going around the block. We knew they would be tough."

Through the majority of game one, it appeared, initially, that both squads were evenly matched. Junior outside hitter Emily Lettenmaier put away a spike, then served up an ace to put McNary on top 8-7. South Salem rallied to score seven of the next eight points, but McNary responded with five straight of their own thanks to multiple kills by Taylor Ebbs and an ace by Maddison Corpe.

However, a litany of unforced errors by the Celtics allowed the Saxons to rattle off 10 straight points, giving them first control of the opening game.

"The object for our players is to not make back-to-back errors. Whether it was your error or your teammates' error, you have to cover for each other. Tonight, it just seemed to be strings of errors from different players," DeMello said.

McNary also took an early lead in game two, getting a 6-4 advantage on a kill from Corpe. But the Saxons gained all the momentum

back after scoring eight of the next nine points to take a 12-7 lead.

"South made some great saves. That was one of the ways they were able to get the momentum," DeMello said. "In those instances, we usually dig in and find a string of a good serving or a hot hitter. But tonight, we couldn't find that groove."

After trailing by as many as eight, McNary came back to cut the lead to four at 23-19 due to back-to-back kills from Emily Blagg — including one off a tremendous over-the-head pass from Corpe. But the Saxons scored the final two points of the set to take a 2-0 lead in the match.

In the third game, the Celtics fell behind by 10 and couldn't recover. It was the first time this season that McNary lost a set by double-digits. DeMello believes that the loss will serve as a learning experience for her younger players — McNary will return seven of their 10 players to the team next fall.

"Every loss is an opportunity to grow. A lot of our team is young and some of our players will use tonight as a benchmark of where they know they want to be," DeMello said.



South Salem outside hitter Brooksie Isham spikes a shot past McNary middle blocker Emily Blagg.
Photo by MATT RAWLINGS of Keizertimes

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— CRYSTAL DEMELLO
McNary head coach

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