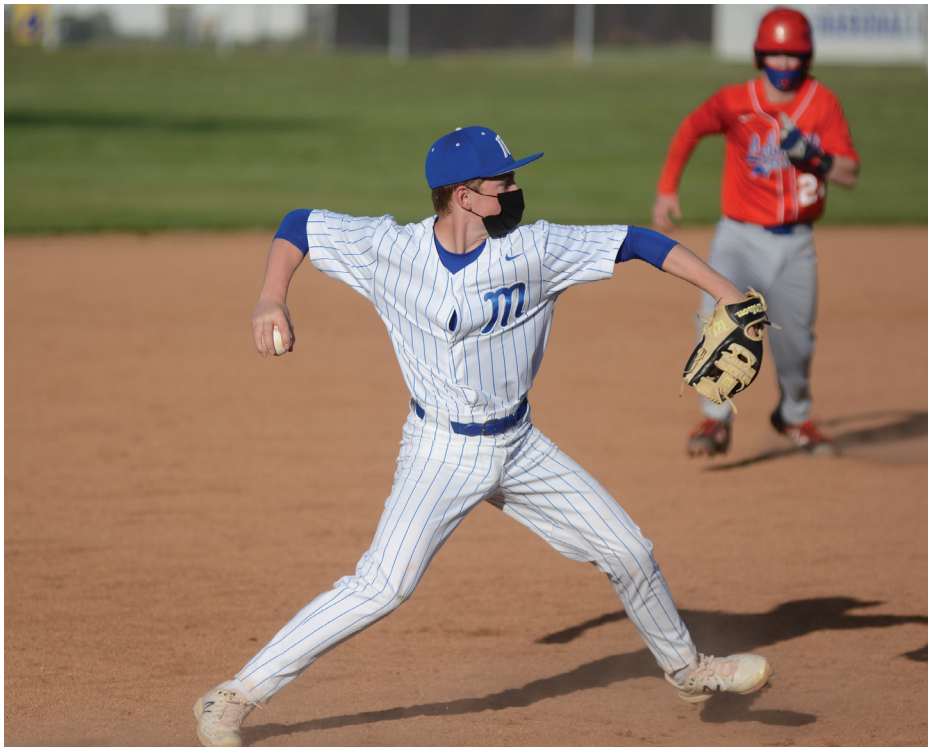


# McNary takes down Lebanon in home opener



McNary third baseman Trevor Ratliff fires to first base after scooping up a ground ball that was hit down the line. Photo by MATT RAWLINGS of Keizertimes

**BY MATT RAWLINGS**  
*Of the Keizertimes*

It had been nearly two years since the McNary baseball squad had hosted a game, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But on Thursday, April 15, the Celtics made their long awaited return to Vic Backlund Field.

Hayden Kaiser and Dante Olivo each threw three scoreless frames for the Celtics while Aaron Nease went 3-for-4 with three RBIs as McNary defeated Lebanon by a score of 9-2.

“It’s awesome. I love playing out here. It just feels good to be playing baseball at our field,” McNary infielder Eben Mayer said.

McNary head coach Larry Keeker also shared his excitement of baseball being back and credited his kids with putting in a lot of work during the offseason, even when there was uncertainty of whether or not they would be able to play or not.

“We had kids showing up for workouts in October, then showing up for workouts in January. The football guys that were pitchers and catchers came on weekends to try to get ready. You really couldn’t

ask for anything more as a coach. It was a sunny afternoon, we got to play a home game. We were all just really excited,” Keeker said.

After retiring the side in order in the top of the first, Kaiser got into a jam in the following inning after a pair of infield errors. But with the bases loaded, the big lefty ended the frame with a strikeout.

Kaiser would allow some traffic in the following inning as well, but got out unscathed.

“That is his role. He is going to start about once a week with the goal of getting to the middle innings,” Keeker said. “He did exactly what he needed to do.”

The Celtics got their second unearned run of the contest in the bottom of the second after the Lebanon catcher attempted to pick off Trevor Ratliff at third base, but the ball sailed into left field and Ratliff scored easily on the play to put McNary on top 2-0.

McNary took advantage of another defensive miscue by the Warriors as Trevor Thompson reached after the Lebanon second baseman dropped a pop-up. Nease followed with a double to the left-center

gap and Thompson would later score on a sacrifice fly by Kaiser.

Senior outfielder Griffen Hubbard then brought in Nease after scorching a double to deep center field, extending the Celtics lead to 4-0.

Keeker brought in right-hander Jacob Allen to the bump in the top of the fourth, but the freshman struggled with his command in his first varsity appearance and walked the bases loaded, which caused the McNary skipper to bring in Mayer from shortstop to try and clean up the damage.

After giving up a two-run bloop single, Mayer forced the next hitter into an infield pop-up. Lebanon then tried a squeeze play with runners on third and first, but Celtics third baseman Carter Hawley scooped the ball with his bare hand and gave a perfect underhand toss to catcher Ben Allen to nail the runner at the plate.

Mayer got the following batter to groundout to end the frame, allowing the Celtics to still hold a 4-2 advantage.

“That is a tough spot to come in, but that is just something I do. That’s my job. So I came in there, pounded the zone and got my outs,” Mayer said.

In the bottom of the fourth, the Celtics got four straight singles by Noah Fischer, Mayer, Thompson and Nease put McNary on top 6-2. Hawley would get beamed with a pitch later in the inning to extend the lead to 7-2.

“We knew these guys weren’t throwing hard so we had to make adjustments, get up in the box a little bit and sit on the ball,” Fischer said.

The Celtics got great production from the bottom part of their lineup in this one, which helped set the table for the guys at the top of the order. Fischer, who was batting in the 9-hole finished 2-for-3 with a double and a run scored. Ratliff, who was the 8-hole hitter, scored two runs to go along with a base hit.

“Both Trevor and Noah had great nights at the plate. We have a lot of confidence in them at the 8-9 spot,” Keeker said. “We like the offensive lineup right now.”

The Celtics bumped the lead to 9-2 in the bottom of the fifth after a two-run single from Nease — McNary scored in every inning except the sixth.

In the top of the fifth, Olivo came to the mound to replace Mayer. While the hard-throwing right-hander had troubles with control at times, Olivo worked himself out of a pair of bases-loaded jams in the fifth and sixth innings.

Olivo then closed out the top of the seventh by retiring the side in order — he finished the with no earned runs and one hit with four punch-outs.

“(Olivo) can be a little inconsistent with his strike throwing, but to his credit, he got down 3-0 in the count to a few guys and came all the way back to get them out,” Keeker said. “He did a really good job.”

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## brainfood ANSWERS

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4	9	1	8	7	3	5	6	2
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*sudoku*

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*crossword*