

Celts can't complete comeback against West Salem



Football

McNary receiver Braiden Copeland looks for extra yardage after a first down catch. Copeland caught nine passes for 169 yards and two touchdowns on the night. Photo by MATT RAWLINGS of Keizertimes

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Despite not being at full strength, McNary had a chance to take over the top spot in the Mountain Valley Conference (MVC) with a win over West Salem on Friday, Oct. 15. But late in the fourth quarter, the Celtics defense couldn't get a stop when they needed it most.

Trailing by 20 points in the third quarter, McNary staged a second half comeback to get within a score in the fourth quarter. But the Celtics offense didn't get a chance to touch the ball again as West Salem ran the final six minutes off the clock to defeat McNary 34-27 and maintain sole possession of first place in the Mountain Valley Conference (MVC).

"We just made too many mistakes. I can't compliment our kids enough for how they battled, we just need to clean up those mistakes," McNary head coach Jeff

Auvinen said.

McNary's first miscue came on the opening kickoff as Jesse Dyer lost the football on a return to the Celtics 38-yard line, giving the Titans great field position. After a pair of third down conversions, West Salem running back Hudson Giertych ran it in from 10 yards out, giving his team the 7-0 lead.

With McNary quarterback Tyler Copeland still nursing a high-ankle sprain he suffered two weeks prior, Gunner Smedema resumed the Celtics signal-calling duties for the second straight contest. Unlike last game against South Salem, where Copeland was in street clothes, the Celtics senior leader was dressed in full pads in case he needed to make an emergency appearance.

It became apparent after their first drive that McNary would need to turn to Copeland in a crisis.

After only 25 yards passing the week prior, Smedema surpassed his previous total on McNary's first play from scrimmage, connecting on a go route to Braiden Copeland for a 42-yard gain. Moments later, Smedema found Aron Montoya for 12 yards, giving the Celtics a first-and-goal situation from the six-yard line.

However, two plays later, the injury bug bit McNary once again.

On second-and-goal, Smedema took off on a designed quarterback sweep and was tackled by multiple defenders for no gain.

When the pile cleared, Smedema was still on the ground, clutching his right leg. After being tended to by McNary trainers, Smedema was helped off the field, but couldn't put any weight on his injured leg.

With a thick brace wrapped around his injured ankle, Tyler Copeland hobbled out to the field to take snaps at quarterback.

"It was very scary to see (Smedema) go down like that," Tyler Copeland said. "When he went down, I told myself that I had to show up for my team."

After the game, Auvinen explained the hesitancy behind starting his senior quarterback, and why he put him in the game after Smedema went down.

"I never doubted him for a bit, I was just

trying to look down the road for the rest of our season and wanted him as healthy as possible because he is a huge part of our team," he said. "He was our best option."

On the first play after the injury, McNary running back Zane Aicher scored from two yards out to tie the game at 7-7. But the Celtics offense went stagnant for the next three drives.

After West Salem quarterback Brooks Ferguson hit Zach Dodson Greene for a 30-yard touchdown late in the first quarter, McNary went three-and-out on the ensuing possession.

To make matters worse for the Celtics, McNary punter Logan Ready had the fourth down snap go over his head, which gave West Salem the ball in the red zone.

The Celtics defense came up with their first stop of the game when McNary safety Pierce Walker intercepted a Ferguson pass in the end zone. But the Celtics would wind up giving the ball right back to the Titans.

On the second play after the turnover, Tyler Copeland tried to hit Aicher on a screen pass, but the throw sailed backwards past Aicher and was recovered by West Salem at the one-yard line. Ferguson snuck in for the score on the next play to extend West Salem's lead to 21-7 early in

