

# McNary set to host North Medford in first round

BY MATT RAWLINGS

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After posting a 6-3 record (3-3 in Mountain Valley Conference play) during the regular season, the McNary football squad will host their first home playoff game since 2017 as they prepare to take on North Medford at 7 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 5.

“The kids will be excited,” McNary head coach Jeff Auvinen said.

The Celtics began the year with four straight wins, with three of their victories coming by 20 points or more. But in the back half of the season, McNary suffered injuries to several key players and lost three of their final five games to finish tied for third place in the Mountain Valley Conference (MVC).

Before their last regular season contest against Summit, McNary had a positive COVID-19 case in their program, forcing five starting linemen to miss the game due to contact-tracing protocols. The Celtics were missing eight starters before kickoff, many of which play on both sides of the ball, and fell 27-7 to the sixth-ranked Storm.

“The kids battled their butts off. Our cupboards were just a little bare,” Auvinen said.

The Celtics are expected to go into the first round without one of their top playmakers in Gunner Smedema, who suffered a leg injury in a loss against West Salem on Oct. 15. McNary’s top receiver, Braiden Copeland, who missed last game with an Achilles injury, is expected to be a game-time decision.

However, McNary is planning on having their entire offensive line ready to go on Friday, which will be key in handling the physicality of North Medford.

“They are a very physical team. We are going to have to bring our lunch pails,” Auvinen said.

At the beginning of the season, multiple media outlets predicted that North Medford would win the Southwest



McNary quarterback Tyler Copeland will try and lead the Celtics to their first playoff win in four years as the Celtics take on North Medford on Friday, Nov. 5. FILE PHOTO, Keizertimes

Conference and possibly compete for a state championship. Although the Tornados fell short of expectations, finishing 4-4 on the regular season, they have proved to still be a dangerous football team under first-year coach Nathan Chin.

Behind an experienced offensive line, North Medford’s scored 25 points or more in six of their eight games this season. Although they run a spread offense, the Tornados rely heavily on their ground game, led by junior running back Ty Pugliano. Pugliano’s brother, AJ, is also a focal point of the North Medford offense at tight end — as a sophomore, AJ has already received a scholarship offer from the University of Oregon.

On defense, the Tornados have been susceptible at times this season, giving up more than 35 points in half of their games.

Despite playing in different leagues, North Medford and McNary had three common opponents this season (Bend, South Medford and Grants Pass). McNary picked up wins against all three teams, defeating South Medford 35-13, beating Grants Pass 41-0 and defeating Bend 41-21.

North Medford defeated Bend 25-21 and beat Grants Pass 51-7 but lost to South Medford 40-34 in their final

regular season contest.

“We don’t want to come into the game feeling overconfident. At the same time, the kids know that they can be successful against North Medford. It’s important we come in with the right level of confidence,” Auvinen said.

If McNary’s front-five can set the tone throughout the game, Auvinen likes his team’s chances on Friday night.

“It’s going to be about who can win the battle up front and who can make plays on the outside. It is going to be a good ballgame,” Auvinen said.