

Celts looking for new players to step up

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Coming off of one of their most successful seasons in recent memory, the McNary girls' basketball program heads into the 2021-22 campaign with a lot of hope, despite having a fair amount of roster turnover.

"I am feeling great about this group of kids. It's fun to have a fresh group that hasn't played a lot together. They are meshing together really well. I look forward to seeing how we compete," McNary head coach Elizabeth Doran said.

The Celtics went 12-3 last year during the COVID-shortened spring season, but lost five seniors to graduation, including star point guard Leah Doult, who averaged 18.2 points, 6.8 rebounds, 3.0 assists, and 3.1 steals per game and was named the Salem Sports and Breakfast Club's Athlete of the Year for girls basketball.

While Doult was the primary ball-handler last year, Doran believes that she has multiple players that will be able to fill that role this season.

"We can be more of a committee handing the ball. I don't think it's just going to fall on one person because we have multiple people with pretty good handles," Doran said.

Two returners that are expected to get the bulk of the playing time in the McNary backcourt are junior KJ Custer and sophomore Avery Buss. Custer is the Celtics lone all-league returner from last season (honorable mention) and Buss received significant playing time in the spring as a freshman.

"Both of them are really hard workers in practice. They didn't have a lot of experience coming into last year, but when they got a chance in the game, they really showed me that they deserved to be out there," Doran said.

Sophomore Ava Rubio and junior Aubri Cabral, a transfer from Wilsonville, are also expected to get minutes in the Celtics backcourt.

The most experienced player on the McNary roster is Kylie Nepstad, a three-year varsity player who will likely be the



After earning honorable mention all-league recognition in the spring, KJ Custer is expected to be one of the top returners for the McNary girls' basketball team. FILE PHOTO, Keizertimes

Celtics top three-point shooter. Along with being a consistent scorer, Doran says the senior shooting guard has stepped up in the leadership department.

"She has really shown some vocal leadership in these first couple weeks of practice. She has always been a great shooter, but she has kind of realized that this is her team because she has played the most significant minutes for us," Doran said.

In the front court, juniors Lillian Besa and Hailey Schwinhof look to fill the shoes of Bekah Grimmer — the Celtics second-leading scorer last season — and

will be McNary's top two defenders in the post.

"They can both hold their own on the inside. We are small but we have kids that are tough and can defend and box out," Doran said.

Although they lack size, the McNary program is known for playing tenacious defense and giving their opponent multiple different looks on that end of the floor — the Celtics held their opponents to under 40 points in 11 of their 15 games last season. Doran is hoping that McNary's athleticism on the perimeter will help them play aggressive on-ball

defense to create turnovers.

"Part of playing McNary basketball is coming out and taking pride in how we play on the defensive end," Doran said. "We have the personnel to run more and play more full-court defense. We want our offense to feed off our defense."

Although they lack the depth and firepower from last season, the Celtics are looking to be in the top half of the Mountain Valley Conference standings at the end of the regular season, with the goal of qualifying for the playoffs come February.

"We can compete with the top half of the league. I definitely think we are capable of it," Doran said.

McNary hosts Central Catholic in their season opener on Thursday, Dec. 2 at 7 p.m.

brainfood ANSWERS

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1	5	3	6	9	8	2	4	7
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sudoku

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crossword

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