

Celts look to reload with experienced roster



Senior forward Tyler Copeland is expected to be one of the top players for the McNary basketball squad this season.. FILE PHOTO, Keizertimes

McNARY HOOPS

By **MATT RAWLINGS**
Of the *Keizertimes*

Although the McNary boys' basketball team returns nearly their entire roster, the Celtics will be looking to replace one of the top players in the state this season.

Nate Meithof was the Mountain Valley Conference (MVC) Player of the Year in 2020 as a junior, averaging more than 23 points per game, and in the shortened spring season, the McNary shooting guard poured in more than 25 points per contest, leading the Celtics to a 13-4 record.

While losing Meithof is a big hit to this Celtics squad, McNary head coach Ryan Kirch says it will give different players a chance to shine.

"As much as he scored and rebounded, when you have someone who is that dominant at times, it is very easy to stand and watch, not necessarily intentionally, you're just playing off

of that. We are looking for our guys to be a little more aggressive and be play-makers with the ball in their hands," Kirch said. "Regardless of how many kids you have back, everyone's role has changed, whether you were a guy that came off the bench last year to now being a starter this year, or a starter that has to do a little bit more. It's going to be about making the most of your role."

One player that is expected to step into the spotlight this year is senior forward Tyler Copeland, who is entering his fourth season on the varsity squad. Copeland, who is coming off a successful football season as the McNary quarterback, is a versatile athlete who can score both on the inside and outside.

"We feel like he can score with his back to the basket and take people off the dribble. He has gotten a lot more physically strong. He can bully some people inside and has great vision," Kirch said. "He is a do-it-all type of guy."

Another player who has shown versatility from the guard position is senior Gunner Smedema. The third-year varsity player is one the Celtics best on-ball defenders and will be expected to be more involved on the offensive end.

"Gunner is a guy that can play the one, two or three spot. He is a guy that will probably play as many minutes as anyone. He is one of our best defenders. He is a lockdown guy. He is also a guy who finishes games," Kirch said.

Along with their two most experienced players in Copeland and Smedema, the Celtics return a number of other seniors who are expected to see increased roles.

Tyler Cleveland received significant playing time at wing last season in his first year on the varsity team, and Evan Cornell will likely be one of the top spot-up shooters in the MVC. In the frontcourt, with the loss of Zane Aicher, who elected not to come out for the team this season, senior post Carson Long will be expected to take the bulk of the minutes down

low.

"The leadership of the seniors will be huge. They bring a lot of maturity and experience to the table, which is why we will be relying on them. But they also understand what we want out of an X's and O's standpoint as well," Kirch said.

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— **RYAN KIRCH**

McNary head coach