

OSAA places Salem-Keizer schools in five-team, local league for next four years

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

After competing against the Bend schools since 2018, McNary, as well as the rest of the Salem-Keizer schools (minus McKay) will get some relief from going over the mountain for the next four years.

On Tuesday, Dec. 14, the Oregon Schools and Activities Association (OSAA) announced their conference realignment starting in the 2022-23 school year for non-football sports. Among the notable changes, the Salem-Keizer schools are slated to play in their own five-team league called the Central Valley Conference.

McKay will drop down to the 5A classification and compete in the Mid-Willamette Conference.

McNary athletic director Scott Gragg said that some of the guiding

factors for the decision was less travel, more instruction time and maintaining historical local rivalries.

“People didn’t want big changes due to the fact that we are still operating in a COVID environment. But some of the people that gave testimony emphasized the importance of less travel and what that might look like,” Gragg said. “With every team in the conference located in town, it makes it pretty easy for standard operating procedures.”

While Gragg is pleased that McNary won’t share a league with the schools in Bend, it wasn’t the ideal outcome for him.

In October, Gragg told the *Keizertimes* that he was clamoring for a five-classification system that featured the Salem-Keizer schools in a conference with the Albany schools, plus Silverton. However, he also said that

he recognizes that the OSAA is trying to do what is best for the entire state.

“I appreciate the process. I’m not super happy with the outcome, but the OSAA has to act in the best interest of the state. But in large, they were able to mitigate some of the concerns of the past,” Gragg said.

With only a five-team league, a barrier that



the Central Valley Conference (CVC) will have to overcome is dealing with non-league scheduling. For instance, in sports such as basketball, volleyball and softball compete against their conference opponents twice during the season. In order to fill a 26-game schedule, CVC athletic directors will need to schedule 18 non-league contests for each of those sports.

During the COVID-shortened seasons over the spring, Salem-Keizer schools partnered with schools from the 5A Mid-Willamette Conference, which featured teams from Albany, Corvallis, Independence, Dallas and Silverton. Due to the competitive nature of the majority of contests played between the two groups, Gragg says that a continued partnership could be in the works in the future.

Gragg also said that he likes the idea of holding conference tournaments at the end of the season.

“I am confident that we will be able to fill our schedule,” Gragg said. “We will get things figured out.”

The Ad-Hoc football committee, which Gragg is a part of, will meet multiple times over the next month to discuss special districting as it relates to football. A decision should come by the end of January according to Gragg.

While there may be some differences between football special districts and regular leagues, Gragg believes that contrasts will be minimal.

“The hard work has been done. We are going to look at what has already been established before making a final decision on what we are going to do,” Gragg said.

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— SCOTT GRAGG

McNary athletic director

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