

Saxons, however, concluded the period by scoring five straight points and took a 23-21 lead into the half.

Despite receiving multiple good looks, the Celtics were plagued by poor shooting to start the third quarter. But Evan Cornell finally got his team off the snide with a corner trey to cut the lead to one.

At the midway point of the third quarter, Gonzalez had missed all six of his shot attempts. But the junior point guard's belief in himself never wavered, as he knocked down a deep, straightaway triple to put the Celtics on top 31-29.

Moments later, Gonzalez struck again from beyond the arc, forcing South Salem head coach Travis Brown to burn a timeout.

"My team just kept telling me to shoot the ball. I was finally glad I was able to knock a couple down," Gonzalez said.

With less than 40 seconds remaining in the third quarter, and the Celtics holding for the final shot of the period, it was Long that stepped up for his team once again.

As the clock was winding down, Long corralled the kick-out pass from the paint and nailed a step-back trey at the buzzer, completing McNary's 12-0 run, putting them up 38-29.

"We would like Carson to shoot more. I think sometimes he loses his confidence a little bit. I have told him at practice before that if he doesn't shoot, I will take him out, so it was a bit ironic that he had some shots that he was forced to take at the horn," Kirch said. "The guys were really excited for him, and certainly that one at the end of the third quarter was a huge momentum swing for us, and probably broke their back a little bit too."

What also broke the Saxons back was McNary's swarming man-to-man defense that forced South Salem to attempt most of their shots from the perimeter.

"We knew coming in that they had a lot of playmakers, so we were really focused on containing the ball. We knew they were going to go on runs, and we knew they were going to hit



Celtics guard Gunner Smedema, who scored 11 points in the victory, looks to take his defender off the dribble.

Photo by MATT RAWLINGS of Keizertimes

some big shots, we just needed to keep them to a minimum." Long said.

The 42 points that the Saxons scored was their lowest point total in MVC play and their second lowest offensive output of the season.

"We knew their personnel and we knew how they liked to play. When they are frustrated they like going one-on-one. They have some kids that can score, but we tell our guys to make them earn in and make them score over us," Kirch said. "They made some good baskets, but throughout the course of 32 minutes, if you make someone have to work, they will get tired late, and that is exactly what we saw. It's rewarding for our guys to see that work pay off on the defensive end."

After going more than eight minutes without a field goal, South Salem finally broke their drought thanks to a 3-pointer from Eli Gabriel, cutting the McNary lead to eight at 43-35 with less than five minutes left in the contest.

South Salem got the lead down to as little as four with 3:30 left, but the Saxons got too aggressive on the other end, leading to an easy layup from Smedema after Copeland broke the double-team.

To make matters worse for South Salem, after barking at officials for most of the game, Brown got a technical foul with two minutes left on the clock, sealing the Saxons fate.

After going just 2-of-6 from the foul line in the first three quarters, the Celtics sank 10 free throws in the final quarter to earn the double-digit win.

"Once we got that lead, we just continued to defend and we were finally able to make some free throws down the stretch," Kirch said.

Since league play has started and we've been at full strength, we have gotten better every single game. We have really guarded well over the last couple weeks.

— RYAN KIRCH  
McNary head coach



Jando Gonzalez brings the ball up the court. The McNary point guard had a game-high of 14 points.

Photo by MATT RAWLINGS of Keizertimes