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KSPORTS

Celtics say goodbye to seniors, secure big win

By **JEREMY McDONALD**
For the *Keizertimes*

McNary flexed its Senior Night muscle Friday night against South Salem, keeping their slight 6A postseason hopes alive as they await to see if they'll sneak into the Field of 32 on Saturday.

But, as they sat at 34 entering the game against the Saxons, they fell flat to start the game. Falling behind 21-12 in the second quarter in their 58-47 win in their regular season finale.

Then, something clicked. Their defense settled in; they weren't forcing shots. Those eventually landed. And that spark grew into a slight flame to help turn the deficit into a 32-25 lead by the 6:10 mark of the third quarter.

"I thought our shot selection was a little rushed early on. We really didn't have a chance to distort the defense a little bit. It's not the type of shot, it's we want to make the defense go around and I thought we did a really good job.

I thought once Jando (Gonzalez) got into the game and was able to defend (South Salem's Greg) Comer, that was a big thing for us," Head Coach Ryan Kirch said. "I thought we rebounded well and really kept them down to minimize their second-chance shots and our defense really created some shots for us. We got some baskets in transition and really got up-and-down the floor."

Gonzalez has been battling a bruised quadricep muscle and has been slowly working his way back. The junior led McNary with 19 points over the final three quarters of play as he battled through the stiffness that had him at about a six-out of 10 on this evening Kirch points. But the McNary head coach is expecting some big things out of him entering his senior year.

"He was about a six-out-of-10 from what he told me tonight, but we asked him to go in and guard the best player the whole time. He shot the ball well tonight,



Senior Gunner Smedema hugs an assistant coach after coming off the court in the Senior Night win.
PHOTO/Jeremy McDonald

he competes. He's really, really, really tough," Kirch said of Gonzalez. "As we say goodbye to our seniors this year, his role is going to have to be bigger. We're going to have to ask more of him, but he certainly does a good job and is a heck of a competitor and is really, really tough."

South Salem drew them back in, to 33-30, but the Celtics went on another run. This time of the 12-5 variety to rebuild their lead going into the fourth up 45-35. It was the last time that the margin of the game was as close to the one possession margin as the Celtics sustained their mojo for the final eight minutes.

Making sure that they did all they could to make their case to sneak into

the postseason sitting on the outside looking in.

"We called a timeout mid-way through the third and they made a little bit of a run, got it down to five or so. They're scrappy, they do a lot of things and they're going to cause some mistakes as they did," Kirsch said. "I thought we did an ok job regrouping, weathering the storm and really defending."

Brody Roth scored 12 points and Tyler Copeland added another seven in the win for McNary. The Celtics finish the regular season 10-14 and 5-9 in Mountain Valley Conference-play.

McNary wrestling: Girls place at state, boys get close

By **JEREMY McDONALD**
For the *Keizertimes*

For the first time since 2018, the McNary Girls wrestling team has a state placer in Yared Calderon.

Calderon finished sixth at 235 pounds after battling through the consolation rounds in Thursday, Feb. 24m Girls State Wrestling Championships at Culver High School. Setting a precedent for those coming up behind her as Calderon graduates.

"Yared set the precedent that we should have a McNary girl on the podium every year going forward. She also is the start of McNary Girl's Wrestling being recognized as a legitimate girl's program. We have a great crop of younger girls that I think are ready to step up and fill her shoes," McNary Head Coach Sam Martin said.

"Overall, she wrestled pretty well. The quarter's loss was a tough one because she had the Centennial girl on her back but was unable to capitalize. She knew it was a long road back to get on the podium, but she came out and was aggressive in her next match and responded well coming off the loss."

Calderon lost to Centennial's Rose Williams in the Championship Quarterfinals before picking up a pin of Reagan Alvernaz

of South Albany and a 9-8 decision of North Valley's Breanna Meek before falling in her next two matches. Falling in the fifth/sixth-place match to Williams via pin at the 2:23 mark.

On the guys side, the Celtics saw Max Blanco, Anthony Cruz-Lopez and Josh Friesen knocking on the door of the Saturday/Sunday 6A State Wrestling Tournament at Sandy High School.

Blanco took third at 106 while Friesen (170) and Cruz Lopez (285) finished a match from placing at the tournament.

"(Blanco) looked pretty dominant this weekend. He lost a close one in the semis, just started a little slow. But bounced back really well, and in dominant fashion. Josh Friesen and Anthony Cruz Lopez finished one match short of placing," Martin said. "I'm pleased with how both of them wrestled. They both left it all out there. Overall, this was another step forward for us as we continue to build. I'm already looking forward to next year to see what this team can do."

Blanco fell to Clackamas' Jeremiah Wachsmuth, a second seed, in the semi-final round before picking up a 14-1 Major Decision over Bend's Eric Larwin and another 14-1 major decision over Mountainside's Brody Lybarger

in the third-place match.

The three, plus Layan Runyan at 285 made it to Day 2 of the two-day meet. An impressive build-up from the last two years.

"It was good. That's double from what we had make it to Day 2 last year," Martin starts. "Heck, in 2018-19, and 19-20 we didn't event have kids make it to day 2. Of course, we

would've liked all four to place, but all we can ask is that they leave it all on that mat and that is exactly what they did."

Runyan lost his first match of the tournament before advancing through three consolation finals before falling to South Salem's Camden McCool two wins from the third-fourth round bout.



Josh Friesen in a recent match./ File Photo