



Taking her shot

BY JOSHUA MANES
Of the Keizertimes

Leadership often comes with age and seniority. It takes time to earn the respect of coaches and teammates. Dues must be paid.

But McNary freshman Maile Salang has found herself in that role to begin her Celtic track and field career.

"The kids see her throw and they know she's good so you automatically have that respect because you can see the person is walking the walk and not just talking it," McNary track and field head coach David Holcomb said. "But when she comes alongside teammates and is supporting what we're trying to do with our throwers, just throwing with them. She could be the kind of athlete that just walks off to the side and does everything on her own but she doesn't do that."

It isn't just Salang's skill and leadership that excites Holcomb, it's her humility.

"It makes our job as coaches a lot easier when there's not a ton of ego involved," Holcomb said. "She's there for the sprinters and the long-distance kids. She's really buying into the team culture."

And that humility can be seen when talking to Salang, as she tries to name all of her coaches from middle school through now to make sure she thanks everyone.

Salang contributes her PRs, personal records, to the support of her coaches, teammates and her family.

"I don't think I would have the mindset or the ability to keep pushing forward and setting new goals without their help," Salang said.

Making varsity wasn't necessarily her goal heading into the year, Salang said she just wanted to throw and would have been happy on varsity or JV. But the chance to compete against higher level throwers was one she looked forward to and is improving from.

"I get to learn from these older people and see how they react to getting PRs or how they deal with the pressure," Salang said. "And it's cool to be surrounded by a bunch of upperclassmen."

Salang started learning about track and field at an early age. Her older sisters, Leilani, 22, and Kalea, 21, both competed as throwers during their times at Blanchet Catholic School. Her father even learned to throw.

At age 9, Salang wanted to start participating herself. "I was just fascinated, I had never seen it before," Salang said. "Obviously I saw a lot of sports like volleyball and basketball growing up. But throwing was kind of something that I just asked 'Can I try it, can I try it?'"

And she did. And she succeeded early on.

Salang competed in USA Track and Field youth events, winning a state championship in the shot put at 9, she said.

She knows what it is about the sport that she likes.

"It's like a team sport that is based on the individual, and it's not so much about winning it's more about setting your own records," Salang said.

Set her own records she has. In the two dual-meets she has participated in so far this season, against Sprague High School and South Salem High School, Salang placed first in the shot put and discus at both, and took first in the javelin against South Salem.

Salang has a couple marks she hopes to reach by the end of the season. She aims for 120 feet in the discus and 34 feet in the shot put.

Holcomb's goals for Salang don't involve specific distances, but rather to continue to compete and improve.

"This year it's be competitive at district and place," Holcomb said. "And next year start to push it to get up into the top-2 and throw at Hayward Field."

In her two invitational appearances this season, Salang has gone up against more and stiffer opposition. She placed fifth in discus at both the Titan Track Classic and the Wilsonville Invitational. At the Titan, Salang also placed eighth in the shot put and 12th in the javelin. At Wilsonville she finished 15th in the shot put.

Holcomb sees things opening up on the podium as Salang gets older.

"She's one of the only freshmen up there so that's pretty exciting because you know as these seniors graduate and these juniors graduate and she's getting into the 11th and 12th grade years she's going to find herself at the top," Holcomb said.

Her family influence can be seen not just in her sport of choice, but also in her outside interests. She participates in mock trial at McNary, and enjoys learning about law. Her father is a detective, her mother worked for the state for more than 20 years, sisters Leilanni is a Coast Guard and Kalea is at the Coast Guard Academy.

Salang says she might pursue a career in law in the future.

"If I still find an interest in it," Salang said. "I think it's really fun to learn about it, especially the classes here. I can expand my knowledge on it."

But the freshman has time to make decisions like that.



Maile Salang throws the shot put at a dual meet against Sprague on Wednesday, April 13, at McNary High School. Salang won the event with a personal record distance of 34 feet, 4.25 inches.

Photo by Joshua Manes of Keizertimes