

1997 Division I Regional Tournament

Giants in Root's hands

Senior is catalyst for Ross boys

By BRIAN SPIESS
Sports editor

Fremont Ross point guard Sam Root, who plans to study pre-med next year, has helped revive the Little Giants basketball program.

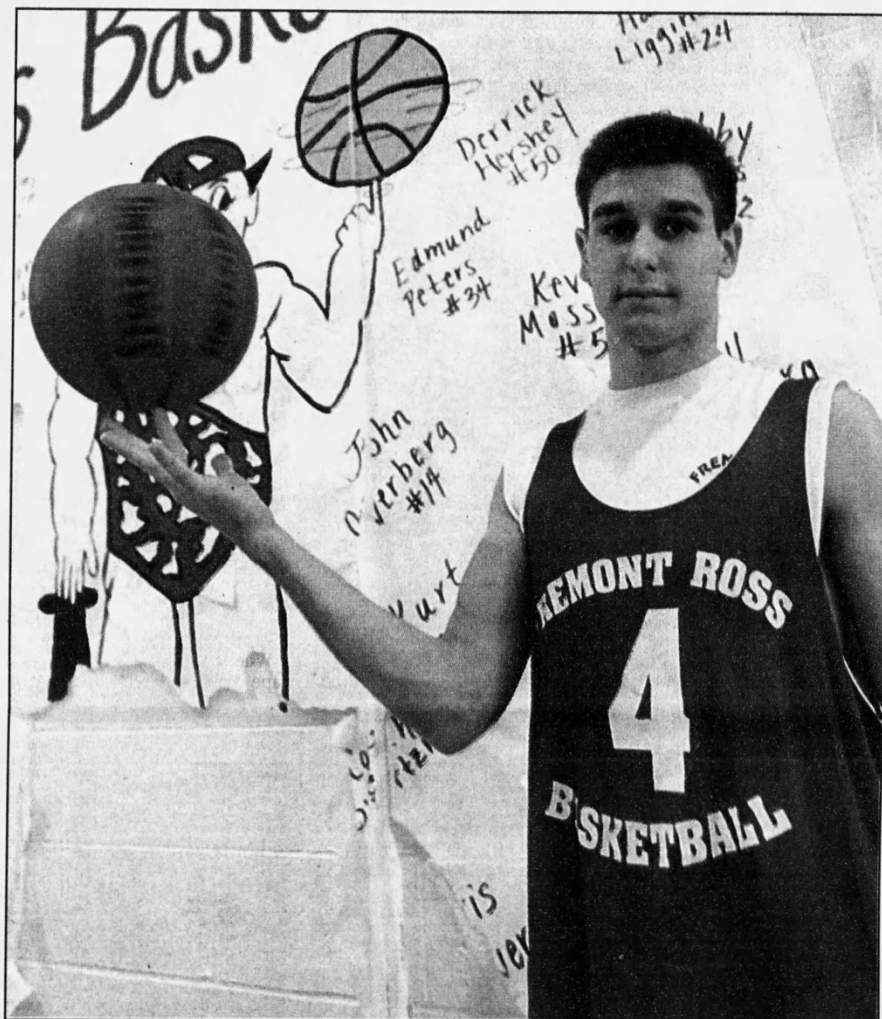
Root, a 6-foot senior, used intelligence, speed and leadership to guide a group of eight seniors, a sophomore and a freshman to wins in 10 of the team's last 11 games en route to a district championship.

"Without Sam, this team would not function right," said Ed Peters, a 6-foot-3 senior center.

Peters' sentiments were echoed by Root's teammates and coach, all of whom have seen Root emerge as the offensive and defensive leader of the Little Giants. He scored a total of 23 points at the district tournament as the Little Giants advanced to a 6:30 p.m. Wednesday game against Lakewood St. Edward.

Root is The News-Messenger's Athlete of the Week, an achievement earned by teammate Derrick Hershey earlier this season.

"A lot of people think I'm the leader. Actually, he is," said Hershey, who averages 17.35 points per game. "He's been our leader since seventh grade. And now he handles the pressure better than anyone in our league and anybody we've seen



SAM ROOT imitates the Little Giant with the spinning ball before practice Monday at the Purple Pit. News-Messenger/Steven Garner

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Sam Root profile

School: Ross

Class: Senior

Sports: Basketball (point guard), football (defensive back), baseball (2nd base).

Hobbies: Watching ESPN's SportsCenter

Family: Bothers Stan 23, Scott 21, Shaun 19, Spencer 15; parents Stan Jr., Martha

in the tournament."

Root does not view his leadership as a gift or talent, but rather an obligation. He's the point guard, he's supposed to run the show.

"It's executing, setting them up for shots," Root said. "I just think it's my job to set the offense. 'Sometimes it turns into playground ball, every team has a tendency to do that."

"Sometimes I'll demand the ball and set up the offense."

That happened more early in the season.

"We just didn't have the team chemistry ... a lot of new faces," said Peters, who, himself is just a second-year player.

"When you've got nine play-

ers averaging at least 5 ppg, there's got to be one constant," Coach Mark Gedeon said. "He's definitely the player that makes us go offensively and defensively. For us to be successful, he has to be on the floor."

Asked to recall Root's most impressive performance, Gedeon's thoughts returned to the 73-69 loss to then-No. 1 Toledo St. Francis on Jan. 18. With leading scorer Hershey out of the lineup with a dislocated kneecap, Root scored 15 points, grabbed six rebounds and had five steals.

He also single-handedly broke the St. Francis press, prompting the Knights to pull off the defensive pressure.

"He knew we needed a spe-

cial effort," Gedeon said.

Next season the Little Giants will be without Root for the first time after three seasons (he was moved to varsity after eight games as a sophomore). It will be difficult to replace a player so coachable and positive, Gedeon said.

"He's always done whatever it takes for the team," Gedeon said. "It's a joy, no, it's a privilege, to coach him."

In fact, a loyalty to Root and the class of 1997 — along with the class of 1996 — were part of the reason Gedeon pursued the Ross varsity job after coaching the same players on the junior

See ROSS, B2

Root has understudy

Continued from B1

varsity level.

And while most of the varsity players graduate after this season, Ross has an exciting duo of young players returning in Joell Heidelberg and Reggie Jones. That means Heidelberg has big shoes to fill.

"There is no doubt Joell is our point guard of the future, and what a perfect role model for Joell," Gedeon said. "And (JV guard) Rob Ritzman has learned from (Root) as well."

"He's a good point guard," Heidelberg said of Root. "He knows the team real well and how they play together and everything."

Root is a 3.723 student at Ross, and will either try to play basketball either for a small college or be a practice player at a larger school while studying pre-med.

"He's definitely got the intelligence to that," said Gedeon, a math teacher, who is constantly receiving compliments from fellow teachers on Root's demeanor. "He's a gentleman, very respectful. He's just a great kid."

And as of 1997, Root has the Little Giants basketball program going in a positive direction.

"It's an awesome feeling," Root said. "I just hope the classes after us carry on the tradition."

Ross tickets, shirts on sale

Tickets for the Ross Little Giants' regional semi-final basketball game at the University of Toledo Wednesday evening are on sale at the Ross athletic office and Dumminger's Photo.

All seats are reserved and cost \$5 each. The local school keeps 75 cents from each of the advanced sale tickets. The athletic department is also selling District Champion T-shirts and sweatshirts. T-shirts are \$10 each and sweatshirts are \$15 apiece.

The Little Giants play Lakewood St. Edward at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at the University of Toledo's Savage Hall.

Eagles squelch Giant hopes

St. Ed's uses glasswork, defense to dominate regional semifinal

By MICHAEL BOSI

Staff writer

TOLEDO — Nothing lasts forever.

Did you think that the Fremont Ross basketball team's improbable victories and history-defying charge through the Division I tournament would never end? That Mark Gedeon would continue to be able to pull rabbits out of his magical coaching cap?

For the last four months, the Little Giants have been the talk of the town, and it was fun while it lasted. But before a crowd of 2,200 Wednesday night at the University of Toledo's Savage Hall, Lakewood St. Edward flexed the dominance it has shown throughout its rise to the No. 10 spot in the country, pummeling Ross into its worse loss of the season, 78-46, with its 18th straight victory in the Division I, Region I semifinals.

After opening the game with an 11-0 run, the Eagles punished Ross with their pressure, demoralized Ross with their defense and obliterated Ross with their many, many offensive weapons. Gino Bartolone led St. Ed with 18 points, Steve Lepore had 15 points and Larry Holmes earned 13.

Meanwhile, 6-foot-7 iceberg Sam Clancy, the son of the former Cleveland Brown, led the Eagles' 34-25 rebounds advantage with a dozen.

"It was definitely the worst-case scenario," said Gedeon, whose team finishes its best season since 1954 at 16-8.

This one was a David vs. Goliath mismatch from opening tap. It was Northwest Ohio's greatest overachievers vs. the second-ranked team in the state. It was the yellow school bus vs. the cushy motor coach. It was fans whose rowdiness cannot be overstated vs. fans who simply never have been in a position to taunt.

And it was obvious in the first half, as St. Edward crashed and banged its way to a 40-16 lead, the biggest halftime hole the Little Giants have faced this season.

While the Eagles were busy accumulating the game's first 11 points, Ross's first four posses-

TOURNAMENT

And then there was one

The Bellevue boys basketball team, which plays Olmsted Falls tonight in a Division II regional semifinal, is the last area team still competing in the state tournament after Fremont Ross's 78-46 loss Wednesday. The Redmen play at 8:15 p.m. at Savage Hall in Toledo. The winner will need to beat the Cleveland Benedictine-Elida winner Saturday to reach the state final four.

High School pairings, B2

sions resulted in turnovers, and the Little Giants didn't dent the scoreboard until Sam Root hit a 3-pointer with 3:51 left in the first quarter.

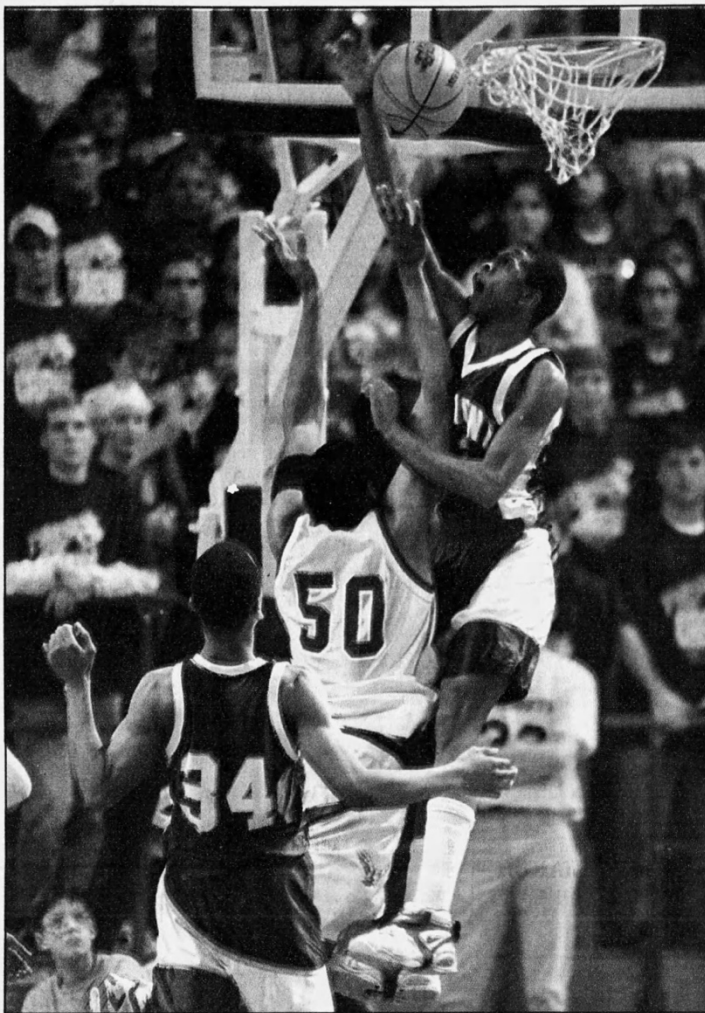
"I think the most important thing was for us to just get on the board and get some momentum going our way," Ross's Derrick Hershey said. "Everyone just came out playing scared and as soon as we scored once I figured maybe it would help us a little bit. But it didn't turn out that way."

St. Ed, using a 20-8 first-half rebounding advantage, ran plays at ease. They shot the 3-pointer (Lepore had a pair in the first half), they ran the fast break (Clancy had a dunk) and they crashed the boards (Clancy was an immovable object with eight first-half points and 10 rebounds).

"They killed us in the first half. They just outpowered us. Every time we tried to box them out, they just threw us in the stands pretty much," Hershey said.

Ross's only semblance of offensive flow came when Hershey followed Root's 3-pointer with a pair of free throws to narrow the gap to 11-5. But St. Ed finished the first quarter on an 8-2 run and cruised to a 34-13 lead in the second quarter on a Lepore 3-pointer before Ross called another timeout with 3:30 left.

"One thing we concentrated on was we knew this was the first game in a new place and we



REGGIE JONES of Fremont Ross fouls Lakewood St. Edward center Sam Clancy while trying to block Clancy's shot during the first half of the Eagles 78-46 win Wednesday in the Division I regional semifinal at Savage Hall in Toledo.

See ROSS LOSES, B4

Ross loses semifinal to Lakewood St. Ed

Continued from B1

wanted to get out to a quick start, play defense and put the pressure on them to force them to make the decisions and then have us take care of the ball offensively and take the open shots. I think that was a big key to the victory," said first-year St. Ed coach Eric Flannery, whose team improved to 23-1.

The Little Giants raised the tempo a notch in the first two minutes of the second half, with Ed Peters scoring on a putback, Root converting a steal down low to make it 40-20 and Clancy incurring his third foul.

"With the style that we play with and the intensity we play with it's really hard to keep up that intensity for four quarters, although we try to do it," Flannery said. "When we do slack, there's not a team we're better than if we don't play hard and play aggressive."

However, St. Edward was in a state of denial, quickly hustling the length of the floor to close off the options and passing lanes for Root, Joell Heidelberg and the rest of Ross's guards.

"Our game plan is to push it, and they did a great job getting back on defense," Root said. "They were denying the wings. It's just hard to start an offense when you can't even pass the ball, that's how good the pressure was. It wasn't on me at all, they were just pressuring the

wings."

Ross got as close as 15 points, 45-30, as a result of a 10-2 run, spurred by six points from Kurt Snyder, who led the Little Giants with 11. But the Eagles, masters of the art of frustration, got 3-point plays from Lepore and Delante McGrew sandwiched around a Bartolone pullup jumper.

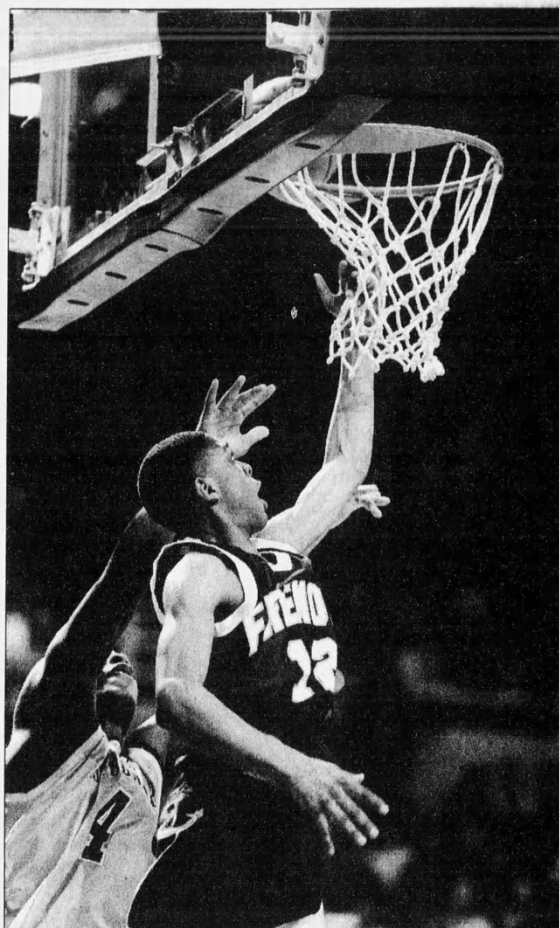
"We try to get into (opponents' heads)," Flannery said. "They know we have the national ranking and the state ranking, and our goal is to put that intimidation in them and make a team feel they can't play with us."

Another miraculous comeback attempt by Ross was just not to be. Instead, the Little Giants saw their season come to a close.

"It's a shock," Root said. "I thought it would never end."

But nothing lasts forever.

LITTLE GIANTS NOTES: The Eagles will face Valley Forge in Saturday's final at Savage Hall, which beat Toledo Central Catholic, 75-68. ... Although his team was hammered on the boards, Ross's tallest player, Kevin Mosser, played just eight minutes. ... Heidelberg and Peters each had five rebounds to lead Ross. ... Root had three steals. ... Ross finished with 25 turnovers to St. Ed's 12. ... Final proof that Murphy's Law was the law of the land Wednesday night: Ross's Reggie Jones missed a breakaway slam dunk in the final minute of the third quarter.



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

JOELL HEIDELBURG of Fremont Ross goes in for a layup against Lakewood St. Edward's Delante McGrew in the third quarter Wednesday at Savage Hall. The Eagles defeated the Little Giants 78-46 in a Division I regional semifinal. The Eagles play Valley Forge Saturday for the regional title.

Seniors wrap up Ross basketball careers

Continued from B1

the Little Giants made Wednesday night's loss doubly hard to swallow.

"It was very tough for me because these guys are my family," Gedeon said. "We've been together for three years, and I love these guys dearly and they know how much they mean to me. ..."

"But in the two years that we've been together on varsity, we've done some amazing things, and it takes a special type of player and a special type of relationship and the dedication was just unreal for the last several years. As a coach, you can't ask for anything more."

Maybe it was because this season started just like most others had — rather mediocre at 4-5 —

that the bonds on this team grew so strong. But it ended with Ross able to lay claim to being one of the top 16 teams in the state. The toughest thing about losing Wednesday night is that they can't come back and do it all over again.

"It's been great," Root said. "These are my best friends. That's who I hang out with. I don't know what I'm going to do tomorrow. Probably go home and play basketball."

Maybe right now they don't realize what kind of groundwork they have laid for

future stars like Joell Heidelberg and Reggie Jones. St. Edward, a team of just two seniors, offered a hint of what might be yet to come for the Little Giants.

"We've got a lot of juniors on the team that hopefully will contribute next year," said St. Ed coach Eric Flannery. "It makes my job a lot easier when these guys on the floor have been there before and they know what to do."

But no one in the Ross locker room was quite ready to think about letting go of the 1996-97 season (Hershey, for one, can't.

He and Gedeon have to get ready for the East-West All-Star game Sunday at Fostoria.).

"We've got a great group of kids," Gedeon said. "They'll always be special in my heart, and they'll always be my family, and that's something nothing can take away — not one ball-game."

"It is going to be very difficult for me to say good-bye to these guys. As coach-player, we'll always have the family relationship, but this is a unique bunch, and hopefully people realize how special they are."

MF® 1100 & MF 1200 SERIES TRACTORS

CUT A DEAL

Fremont