

Clinton in sectional opener

Key returners: T.J. Grof, p, 1b, sr; Joe Brinkman, 2b, sr; Kyle Damschroder, ss, sr; Ryan Smith, of, p, jr; Tom Reinhart, p, of, jr; Adam Grof, c, so.

Outlook: Schimmoeller will be learning the league as well as his own players his first year at Oak Harbor after coaching Fremont Ross last season. Port Clinton has most of a squad that advanced to regionals back. Perkins has won the league the last three or four seasons. Schimmoeller said the Rockets will be aggressive on the basepaths. Oak Harbor should be adept at small-ball — laying down bunts and stealing bases. Senior Shane Paule (of, p) will see time after coming over from Woodmore.

Old Fort

Coach: Ryan DuBois (5-19)

Last year: 5-19, 1-9 ninth in MAL
Last tournament: Lost to Gibsonburg in first round

Key returners: Adam Nye, cf, p, jr; Bruce Karle, 2b, jr; Bud Seigley, c, p, utility, jr; Chris Rodriguez, 3b, of, p, sr; Cody Perry, ss, of, p, so; Justin Lee, of, p, jr; Kent Kohlenberg, 1b, p, so; Marcus Hoke, ss, p, jr; Matt Malott, 1b, of, p, jr; Nick Malott, c, sr; R.J. Brunthaver, c, so; Randy Ardery, 3b, p, sr; Zach Schwochow, ss, 2b, of, jr; Zak Magers, p, of, utility, sr.

Outlook: All the players on this year's roster except freshman Jake Molyet (2b, of) received at least minimal experience on the varsity team last season. Old Fort will not have a junior varsity team this year. SJCC and Tiffin Calvert are the favorites in the MAL. Each has strong coaching as well as pitching. Both are also extremely sound fundamentally and commit few errors on defense. The MAL should be a relatively tough conference. Old Fort remains young with a number of juniors. Old Fort should be markedly improved from last year, buoyed by the return of Ardery, who did not pitch last season because of a knee injury. Ardery is likely to be the closer and has tremendous power at the plate. DuBois hopes to continue to build the program and believes last year was a step in the right direction after the team won zero games two years ago. The Stockaders were fourth in the MAL in hitting (.324) last year and the bats should again be a strength. Nine of the 15 kids on the roster can pitch so determining roles will be essential.

Ross

Coach: Andy Dennings (first year)

Last year: 15-10, 5-5 in GBC

Last tournament: Lost to Mansfield Senior in sectional opener

Key returners: Robbie Hall, of, jr; Kyle Cook, ss, p, jr; Aaron Opelt, of, jr; Joey Garza, 1b, p, sr; Brad Cobb, 3b, p, sr; Kory Decker, p, of, jr; Cody Ruiz, c, sr.

Outlook: Ross made a splash in the state rankings last season before slumping to close the year. Garza, Cobb and Ruiz should provide the team with solid leadership. Hall hit over .500 last season. Findlay is probably the league favorite with Napoleon close behind. Each is typically long on talent and proficient with the funda-

mentals. The Little Giants should be very competitive in the league. The Little Giants will be adept at putting runs on the board and should play solid defense behind several returning hurlers. Continued development among the pitchers would buoy the team's confidence. Dennings was a junior varsity coach at Ross last year and head coach for St. Marys Legion for the last three years. Ross's lineup is heavily-laden with juniors but each has two years of varsity experience already. Dennings said maturity and the speed at which the newcomers get acclimated will be keys.

St. Joseph Central Catholic

Coach: Rick Barbour (164-123)

Last year: 20-8, 9-1 first in MAL

Last tournament: Lost state semifinal to Newark Catholic

Key returners: Kevin Wammes, p, 3b sr; Cory Miller, p, sr; Robbie Roth, rf, c, p, sr; Andy Rabenault, lf, sr; Cory Swaisgood, ss, 2b, p, jr.

Outlook: The Crimson Streaks were tabbed by coaches to finish first in the MAL this season. That certainly is no surprise with Wammes and Miller back at the front of the rotation. The pair has pitched each of SJCC's important league games the last three years. Miller handed Wammes a one-run lead in the regional semifinals last year before Wammes blew the save and subsequently sent the team to state with a home run. Calvert, St. Wendelin and Seneca East have a lot of returning talent and should also battle for the conference. Junior Ryan Schmidt is the frontrunner to replace Nate Kerr at catcher. Roth and Swaisgood also saw time on the mound last season so the top four hurlers return. Five position players, including shortstop and center field must be replaced. Sophomore Anthony Rusher will likely start in the middle-infield after primarily pinch running last year and Grant Barbour should slide into the spot in center field.

Woodmore

Coach: Scott Smith (71-93)

Last year: 13-15, 5-9 sixth in SLI

Last tournament: Lost to Lake in sectional's second round

Key returners: Billy Dyer, p, c, sr; Brett Golightley, 3b, sr; Matt Gerwin, 1b, sr; Jordan Shaw, ss, p, jr; Matt Deal, of, p, jr; Carl Smith, of, jr; Charles Wooten, p, 2b, so.

Outlook: Dyer will catch when he doesn't pitch to get his and Gerwin's bats and gloves on the field at the same time. Dyer played first, Gerwin's spot this season, when he didn't pitch last year. Dyer was first-team all-league and Golightley was honorable mention last year. Sophomore Josh Zollinger will vie for time at second base. The league's projected finish according to coaches is Eastwood, Elmwood, Lake, Otsego, Woodmore, Genoa, Gibsonburg then Lakota. With Dyer as the ace, a solid infield and a young but talented pitching staff the Wildcats could very well surprise some people this year. The team's top four pitchers (11 of 13 victories) return and the seniors should provide plenty of leadership. Dyer also led the team in hitting last season (.377).

"I'm pretty pleased the way we started off. I couldn't ask for a whole lot more out of us."

— First-year
Fremont Ross
coach Andy
Dennings

No doubt about Ross opener

By RYAN AUTULLO
News-Messenger correspondent

The only parallel was the circumstance surrounding the endings.

Last year, the Fremont Ross baseball team's season opener at Sandusky Perkins was shortened with the score tied because of darkness.

A season later, the two teams once again failed to play a regulation seven inning game because of poor visibility.

But there likely wasn't any speculation of what the outcome would have been this time around.

The Little Giants used a five-run

fifth inning and allowed only three Perkins hits as they cruised to an 11-2 victory Thursday over a perennial area power.

The game was called in the bottom of the sixth when Ross had one out.

"I'm pretty pleased the way we started off," first-year Ross coach Andy Dennings said. "I couldn't ask for a whole lot more out of us."

Dennings, a Little Giant junior varsity coach last year, led the way in his first varsity level game after taking over for Rob Schimmoeller in the off-season. Schimmoeller is now

the head coach at Oak Harbor.

"He's really happy with us," third baseman Brad Cobb said of Dennings. "We like him. Everybody respects him."

The sentiments were certainly reciprocated Tuesday — especially in Cobb's case.

The senior was 2-for-3 — including a triple and double — with three RBIs from the No. 7 spot in the batting order.

"I felt pretty good," he said. "I kind of struggled in scrimmages earlier this year."

Perkins, which lost its first game

after beginning the season with two wins, went 20-7 last year before falling in the district semifinal. One of those setbacks came from Ross in a rescheduled game late in the season.

The Pirates have claimed the Sandusky Bay Conference championship seven of the last eight years — including the last four titles.

"It just goes to show our program is right up there with all these other well-known programs," Cobb said.

See ROSS, B2

Ross picks up win to open season

Continued From B1

Kyle Cook picked up the win on the mound for the Little Giants, allowing just two hits in four innings before he was replaced by Joey Garza.

Kirk Salinski was dealt the loss for the Pirates.

Cook helped out his own cause with a 3-for-4 performance at the plate, including two RBIs.

"I wanted to get off to a good start and didn't want to walk too many," Cook said. "It took me a little while to get my curve over, but that's about it."

Cook was one of many Little Giants who warranted complimentary words from Perkins coach Ray Neill after the game.

"I thought one-through-nine (in the batting order) they had good at-bats," Neill said. "They did a good job of putting the ball in play."

"Obviously, (Cook) had a nice opening night for them," he continued. "He's a nice player."

Cook is one of at least five Ross pitchers who will be called upon to take the hill for Dennings this season.

Cobb, Garza, Kory Decker and Mike Abbott give Dennings the luxury of

choosing between several serviceable arms.

"The depth is definitely there," Cobb said. "We have players who can fill in anywhere."

Robbie Hall singled home Aaron Opelt to begin the Little Giants' scoring barrage in the fifth inning as Ross batted through the order.

Cook followed with an RBI double to make the score 6-2 before Cobb brought home a pair of runners with a double of his own.

"I knew we had the capabilities," Dennings said of the scoring outburst. "I didn't know if we would show up today being the first game with jitters and what not."

Ross faded down the stretch last season and finished 15-10.

The Little Giants had a cameo in the state rankings early in the year, but ultimately fell in the sectional opener to Mansfield Senior.

"We were supposed to be good last year, but I think we'll have a little better team this year," Cook said. "I think we can make a run at something. We should be very tough in the league and go far in the tournament. Anything less, I won't be happy."

BASEBALL

Ross wins in last at-bat

Ross scored two runs in the bottom of the eighth inning to defeat Springfield 4-3.

Springfield (0-1) scored one run in the top of the eighth for a 3-2 lead before the Little Giants rallied.

Continued From B1

Brad Cobb registered the win in relief for Ross with two innings of work. He allowed two hits and one run.

Cory Chestnutt was 2-for-3 with two RBI and Cobb singled in a run for the Little Giants (2-0).

Ross takes third victory

News-Messenger reports

Aaron Opelt drove in three runs and the Fremont Ross baseball team scored four runs in the final two innings to claim a 10-6 victory over Lexington Monday.

It was the third straight victory for the Little Giants (3-0).

Opelt went 2-for-4 with a pair of doubles, Mike Abbott was 2-for-2 with three runs scored and Kory Decker was 2-for-4 with an RBI for Ross.

The Little Giants' Billy Boukissen and Brad Cobb also went 2-for-4.

Ricky Clark picked up the win and recorded two strikeouts.

Little Giants earn GBC victory

News-Messenger reports

Fremont Ross knocked out 11 hits and Kyle Cook threw a complete game as the Little Giants topped Marion Harding 6-4 in Greater Buckeye Conference baseball action Tuesday.

Cook allowed four runs on five hits while striking out three.

"Kyle threw strikes and I thought we played very good defense behind him," Ross coach Andy Dennings said.

Cook also swung the bat well for the Little Giants, rapping out a pair of hits and driving in three runs.

Cory Chestnutt added a pair of hits and two RBIs for Ross (4-3) while teammate Robbie Hall contributed two hits and one RBI. Brad Cobb also doubled and went 2-for-4 in the Little Giant victory.

Mike Abbott, Aaron Opelt and Billy Boukissen also added hits.

"We did a better job of sitting back and driving the ball for most of the innings," Dennings said. "It's nice to see us back to swinging the bats like we're capable."

Grof strikes out 11

Even with the aid of the wind, the

Huron baseball team couldn't catch up to T.J. Grof's fastball.

The Oak Harbor hurler fanned 11 while walking one to help the Rockets to a 5-2 victory over the Tigers Tuesday. It was the Sandusky Bay Conference opener for both squads.

Grof scattered five hits over seven innings and allowed one earned run.

"He did well in the cold," Oak Harbor coach Rob Schimmoeller said of Grof's performance on the mound. "He threw a lot of strikes and challenged the batters."

Stephen Sprouse was 2-for-2 with

a double and two RBIs for the Rockets (4-5, 1-0) while teammate Tom Reinhart went 2-for-3 and knocked in a pair of runs.

Shane Paule added two hits and two runs scored for Oak Harbor.

Tuesday's victory was the first of three consecutive league games for the Rockets.

"It helps a lot," Schimmoeller said of starting off the SBC schedule with a victory. "It's great to get that first one and start off on a high note."

See DYER, B2

BASEBALL

Game 1 slips away from Ross

Ross allowed three runs in the bottom of the seventh and fell to Huron 4-3 in the first game of a doubleheader before losing Game 2 11-0.

Aaron Opelt doubled and drove in a run in Game 1 for the Little Giants (3-3).

Brad Cobb (0-1) took the loss in the first game and Kory Decker lost the second.

Mike Abbott was 2-for-2 and Joey Garza singled for the Little Giants' hits in Game 2.

BASEBALL

Ross hits three homers

Ross amassed 23 hits and Aaron Opelt and Kyle Cook each drove in five runs as the Little Giants stopped Bellevue 19-5 in five innings.

Mike Abbott notched the win for Ross. He walked none, struck out five and allowed eight hits in five innings.

"Mike threw the ball pretty well," Ross coach Andy Dennings said. "The nice thing to see with our big lead was zero walks. That's what you like to see. You just want to see him throwing strikes at that point."

The Little Giants scored 16 runs in the first three innings.

"It was nice to see us come out and be aggressive for pretty much the entire game," Dennings said. "We got some breaks with some balls falling in and we also hit some balls hard. It was kind of a combination — that's how we turned out 23 hits."

Jarrid Breyman took the loss for the Redmen.



CLYDE TENNIS player Cory Dickman serves against Oak Harbor Wednesday.

Opelt was 4-for-4 with a double and home run, and Cook went 4-for-5 with a double and home run. Corey Chestnutt had three hits, including a double, in four at-bats and drove in two runs, and Cody Ruiz singled three times for Ross (5-3).

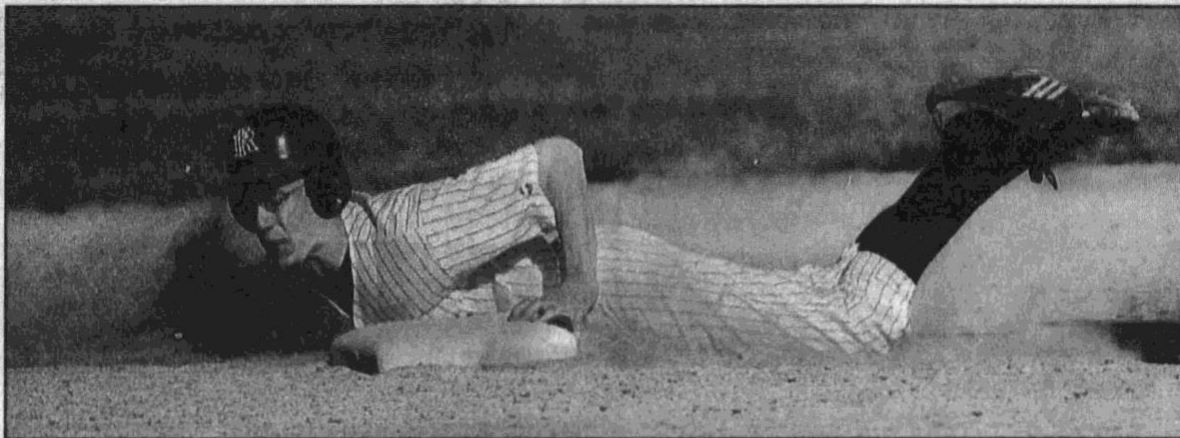
Brad Cobb added a single, home run and three RBIs, and Robbie Hall and Billy Boukissen each singled twice for the Little Giants. Abbott,

Tim Jackson and Kory Decker each singled.

David Foos and Jon Journey each singled and hit a home run for Bellevue.

Hoffman baffles 10

Zach Hoffman struck out 10 to notch his first win and added two hits, including a double, and one RBI at the plate as Margaretta beat Huron 11-2 in the Sandusky Bay Conference to remain un-



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

BRYANT RUIZ of Fremont Ross slides safely into second during the Little Giants' 10-2 victory over visiting New Riegel Thursday. Ruiz also earned the win on the mound for Ross.

Ross staying aggressive

News-Messenger reports

The Fremont Ross baseball team continued to present a strong presence at the plate as the Little Giants earned a 10-2 victory over New Riegel Thursday.

Aaron Opelt went 3-for-3 for Ross with a double and three runs scored. Teammate Robbie Hall was 3-for-4 with three RBIs, a double and a triple.

Mike Abbott, Brad Cobb, Billy Boukissen and Bryant Ruiz also added hits for the Little Giants.

"We're staying pretty aggressive," Ross coach Andy Dennings said after the Little Giants' third game in as many days. "It was a good week for us to get back on track."

Ruiz also earned the win on the mound for Ross, striking out six.

Seventh inning lifts SJCC

Fremont St. Joseph Central Catholic scored three runs in the bottom of the seventh to earn a 5-4

victory over Woodmore.

The Wildcats had scored three times in the top of the inning to take a 4-2 lead.

Cory Miller earned the win for the Crimson Streaks (8-2), pitching seven innings and striking out three.

Ryan Schmidt, Kevin Rousch and Anthony Rusher all had two hits for SJCC. Teammate Grant Barbour contributed two RBIs.

Jordan Shaw had a double for Woodmore (5-4).

Rockets edge SMCC

A two-run seventh helped Oak Harbor defeat St. Mary Central Catholic 4-3 in a Sandusky Bay Conference matchup.

T.J. Grof had the game-winning single as the Rockets upped their SBC record to 3-0 (5-4 overall). Grof finished with three hits and three RBIs.

Adam Grof went 2-for-3 with a double and Shane Paule was 2-for-

3 for Oak Harbor.

Tom Laderach picked up the win after throwing 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ scoreless innings. Greg McNutt also struck out four for the Rockets.

SOFTBALL

Streaks down Wildcats

St. Joseph Central Catholic snapped a tie with a four-run third inning on the way to an 8-1 victory over Woodmore.

Alyssa Dickman picked up the victory, recording nine strikeouts through seven innings.

Jenna Beam struck out six for the Wildcats.

Jackie Fahle went 2-for-3 with one run scored for Woodmore and teammates Anna Giles, Ashley Artessia and Brandi Dobrosky all added hits.

Artessia also had an RBI.

Dickman had three RBIs for SJCC and scored a pair of runs.

See KERN, B2

Continued from B1

SJCC (4-9) also lost to Norwalk St. Paul 6-5 in the Northwest Ohio Catholic School Association tournament at SJCC. Bork walked three and struck out three while allowing only three hits against Cardinal Stritch.

Alyssa Dickman singled, scored twice and drove in a run, and Hasselbach tripled, drove in a run and scored once against Cardinal Stritch. Alison Chudzinski singled and drove in two runs.

Dickman (1-2) won in relief versus Mansfield Christian as SJCC scored two runs in the sixth to tie the game and won it in the bottom of the eighth. Dickman struck out four in two innings and added three hits, including a double, two runs and one RBI in three at-bats.

Bork singled twice, scored twice and drove in a run.

St. Paul scored three runs in the top of the sixth and seventh innings to top SJCC. The Crimson Streaks outhit St. Paul 12-7.

Dickman allowed no earned runs in seven innings as SJCC committed five errors.

Giants sweep Columbian

Erin Hiestand and Beth Shaffer each notched victories as Ross took a doubleheader from Tiffin Columbian 7-5 and 9-4, respectively.

The Little Giants (6-5) scored twice in the top of the seventh to win Game 1. Hiestand (2-1) allowed three earned runs and struck out six.

Shaffer (4-4) allowed two earned runs in Game 2.

Paige Kingsborough was 5-for-8 with two doubles, two runs and three RBIs in the two games.

Megan Wasserman doubled, Shaffer singled twice and scored once, and Jessica White and Rachael Daugherty each singled and scored one run for the Little Giants in Game 1. Ashley Long singled and scored on run, and Daugherty and Brittney Miller each scored one run.

Stephanie Nagle doubled, scored once and drove in a run, Shaffer singled and drove in two runs, and Cassie Steinberger and Miller each singled and scored one run in Game 2.

Gibsonburg handles Northwood

Gibsonburg's Ali Warren and Miranda Milleson each allowed only one hit in respective 7-1 and 20-0 victories over Northwood. Warren struck out nine and Milleson fanned two in five innings.

Alisha Kaemming went 3-for-3 with a triple and four RBIs in Game 2.

Alexis Donnell hit a home run and Kaemming singled twice and drove in a run in Game 1. Kris Dix singled, doubled and drove in three runs and Warren added a double.

The Golden Bears scored 10 runs in the second inning and collected 17 hits in Game 2.

Rockets come back strong

Oak Harbor rebounded from a loss to Eastwood in the Oak Harbor softball tournament to win two games Saturday — 3-2 over Lakota and 4-3 over Clyde.

Genoa defeated Eastwood in the championship game to win the event.

Kylie Biggert was 4-for-4 in the two contests with a double in each and a triple in Game 2. Char Baker scored the game-winning run against Clyde.

Brooke Sprouse won Game 1 and Erica Winke took Game 2.

Oak Harbor (6-4) scored one run in the second and three in the fourth against Clyde. Angie Powell took the loss for the Fliers.

"The girls came in confident," Rocket co-head coach Tiffany Turnow said. "We threw a different pitcher at them."

Erin Graber took the loss and Gabby Gladieux tripled for Lakota.

Wildcat pitchers sharp

Jenna Beam and Erica Warren each earned five-inning victories as Woodmore allowed only four combined hits and swept a doubleheader from Danbury 7-2 and 3-1.

The Wildcats (4-7) scored five runs in the third in Game 1.

Beam allowed only two hits, walked none and struck out eight.

Stephanie Constantini was 3-for-3 with a double, triple and RBI in Game 1 for Woodmore.

Warren allowed two hits, walked two and struck out nine in Game 2. She added two doubles, one run and an RBI in two plate appearances.

BASEBALL

Giants split pair

Ricky Clark pitched wonderfully in relief as Fremont Ross defeated Tiffin Columbian 15-5 before falling to Defiance 10-0 in six innings at Defiance.

Clark (2-0) allowed no runs and three hits in five innings while striking out two in Game 1.

"Ricky came in in a tough situation," Ross coach Andy Dennings said. "He threw the ball extremely well. He threw strikes and kept his pitch count down."

Clark entered the game with the bases loaded and no outs.

The Little Giants (7-4) scored five runs in the second and third innings, and amassed 15 hits while committing zero errors against Columbian.

"We stayed aggressive throughout and played good defense," Dennings said. "If you get that combo with good pitching you'll be all right."

Kyle Cook went 3-for-5 with a double, home run and four RBIs and Bryant Ruiz was 3-for-5 with a double and two RBIs against Columbian. Corey Chestnutt went 3-for-4 with a double and RBI, Billy Boukissen homered, singled and drove in two runs, and Kory Decker hit a two-run home run.

"Kyle has been consistent all year," Dennings said. "He's hit the ball extremely well. He's thrown extremely well, too."

Streaks rebound nicely

St. Joseph Central Catholic defeated Norwalk St. Paul 10-8 after losing to it 15-9 in Game 1.

The Crimson Streaks (9-3) pounded out 15 hits and scored five runs in the first inning in the victory. Robbie Roth (2-1) notched the win, walking one and striking out seven in seven innings.

Cory Swaisgood was 3-for-4 with an RBI, and Aaron Pumphrey and Ryan Schmidt each singled twice in three at bats in the win. Kevin Wammes and Cory Miller each collected two hits while Wammes drove in three runs and Miller added one RBI.

SJCC allowed 11 runs in the first three innings in the setback. The Crimson Streaks had 14 hits but gave up 16.

Swaisgood (1-1) took the loss. Roth was 3-for-3 with a triple and RBI, Wammes singled and tripled, and Grant Barbour added a double and triple in five at-bats.

Wildcats take two

Jordan Hepler and Matt McGee each notched wins as Woodmore defeated Northwood 14-7 and 20-8 in five innings, respectively.

The Wildcats (8-4) scored eight runs in the second inning and collected 17 hits in Game 1.

Carl Smith was 3-for-4 with a home run and three RBIs, and Matt Deal, Mickey Schnabel and Brett Golightley each singled three times in five at-bats in Game 1. Curtis Schlea went 3-for-3.

Woodmore scored 13 runs in the third and again amassed 17 hits in Game 2. Smith was 3-for-4 with two doubles and five RBIs and Corey Wilker went 4-for-4 with three RBIs.

TRACK AND FIELD

Old Fort girls finish third

Lisa Ortiz won two events and the Old Fort girls finished the First Federal Invitational in third place as Carey won the event with 129 points. SJCC wound up seventh and Gibsonburg was 10th.

Hopewell-Loudon won the boys portion with 92.5 points. SJCC was sixth, Old Fort ninth and Gibsonburg 11th.

Lisa Ortiz won the 1,600- and 3,200-meter runs and Cassandra Swanigan won the pole vault for the Stockaders. Lucy Stults was second in the 3,200 and Becky Miller was second in the 800 for Old Fort.

Rebekah Paul won the 400 and finished second in the 100 for Gibsonburg.

Emily Overmyer finished second in the discus for the Crimson Streaks.

"Emily PRed Wednesday and PRed again Saturday by 12 feet," SJCC coach Paul Grahl said. "She's exactly three feet from the school record and she's only a sophomore."

Andrew Adams won the 300 hurdles and was second in the 110s for the Crimson Streak boys.

"He's probably the best hurdler in the conference," Grahl said. "He won the 300 hurdles from the slow heat. I'm glad he's only a junior."

Aaron Lewis was second in the pole vault.

The Stockaders Jimmy Sisi won the high jump and was second in the 200.

Opelt a defensive gem

By RYAN AUTULLO
News-Messenger correspondent

At approximately the same time the chance at victory for Fremont Ross was slipping away, Aaron Opelt made sure to pull it back in.

With visiting Findlay looking to add to a two-run lead in the fifth inning, the Little Giant standout center fielder reached out in full extension to make a remarkable catch, thus preventing an extra base hit by Trojan Andrew Badertscher.

In turn, Ross added five runs in the bottom of the frame on its way to an 8-6 victory over the defending champion of the Greater Buckeye Conference.

The spectacular defensive effort by Opelt — one of his several in the game — served as a fitting metaphor for the Little Giants, who have let several games slip away in the early stages of contests this season.

"I can get to them pretty quick — that helps me a lot," Opelt said, "but I get pretty good jumps on it."

Opelt also had a two-run single in the third inning.

Kyle Cook pitched six innings and allowed 10 hits to earn the win on the mound. Ricky Clark threw a scoreless seventh to pick up the save for Ross (8-4, 2-1 in the GBC).

The win served as a prime opportunity for the Little Giants to erase the memory of Saturday's 10-0 run-rule loss to Defiance.

"The last couple games that we lost we've gotten down early and we just kind of put our heads down," Ross junior Kory Decker said. "Both games we could have won, but this game we just kept fighting."

"It's great to beat Findlay," he continued. "They and Sandusky are our No. 1 rivals. We just love to beat them anytime in any sport."

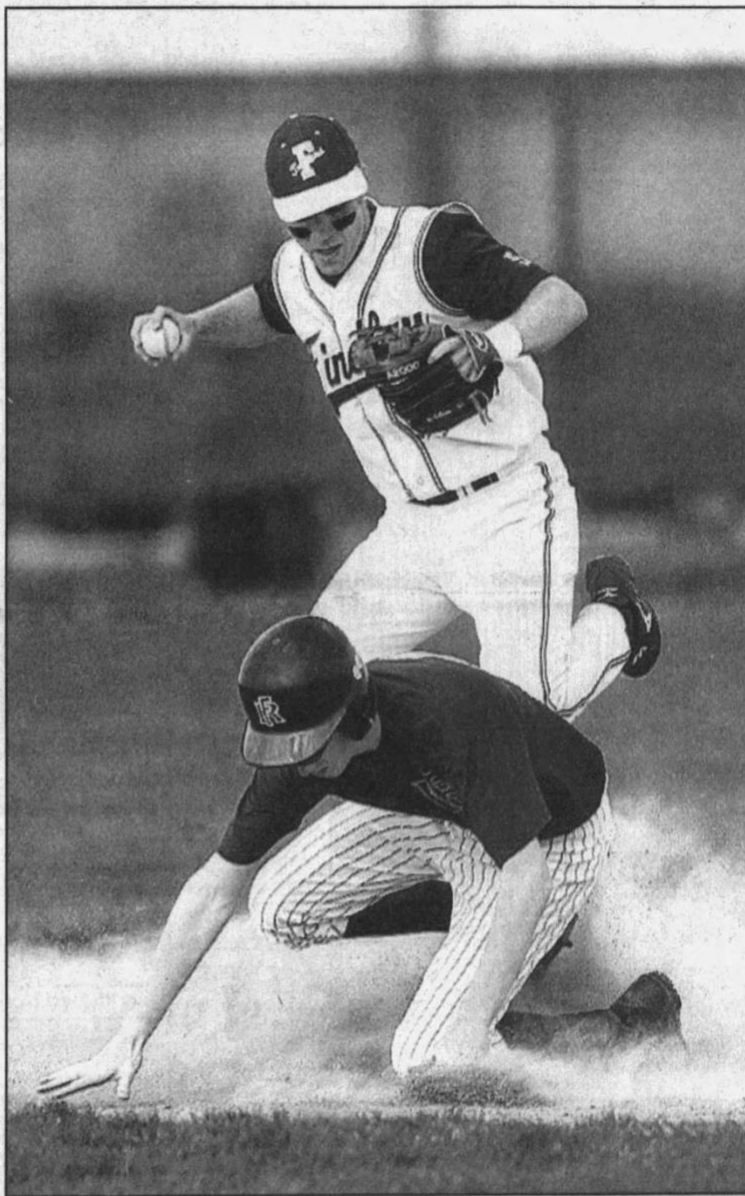
Decker capitalized on the fifth-inning outburst with a two-run single to left-center to make the score 8-5.

Opelt walked against losing pitcher Grant Deppen to load the bases earlier in the inning. A Findlay throwing error on Cook's groundball then resulted in two runs for the Little Giants, who got hits from seven of the nine batters in the order.

"The one inning we had six or seven outs," Findlay coach Jack Foltz said, referring to his team's defensive breakdown. "If you do that against a good team like Fremont, you're not going to win."

Thought not particularly pleased with his squad's defensive outing, Foltz certainly made mention of Opelt's spectacular play in the field.

"Opelt made some great catches out there. That was huge," he said.



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

MIKE ABBOTT breaks up a double play attempt for Fremont Ross as Findlay's Zach Burke looks on Tuesday. The Little Giants defeated their GBC foe 8-6.

The greatest vantage point of Opelt's fielding presentation, however, belonged to right fielder Billy Boukissen. Following Opelt's aforementioned potential game-saving grab, he fell to the ground and tossed the ball to an awaiting Boukissen.

In the third inning, Opelt dove face first as he sprinted to shallow center to rob a potential Trojan hit. In the sixth, he raced to his right to make a difficult catch without stopping. Instead

of scoring two runs on the play, the Trojans were held to just one on a sacrifice fly.

"Man, he's gotten fast over the last couple years," Decker said of his junior classmate. "He just keeps getting faster it seems. He made some great catches. He tracks the ball down better than anyone I've seen this year."

After an auspicious start to the game, Cook ran into trouble on the mound. Leadoff hitter

Zach Burke crushed a two-run homer in the third and Cook surrendered two more runs in the fourth. Despite a chat on the mound from first-year Ross coach Andy Dennings, Cook remained in the game.

"He just made a couple mistakes in certain situations," Dennings said. "He started to get a little bit tired so we went with Ricky and Ricky did a nice job of closing out for (Cook). Kyle pitched a really nice game."

spectators' standpoint it was fun to watch."

BASEBALL

Hershey helps power Ross

Paul Hershey hit his first home run and Mike Abbott notched the victory with six strikeouts in five innings and added an RBI at the plate as Fremont Ross avenged an earlier Greater Buckeye Conference setback to Lima Senior with a 9-1 win.

Abbott (2-0) allowed four hits and one earned run while walking only one. Joey Garza finished and struck out three and walked none while allowing one hit in two innings.

"The pitchers threw extremely well," Little Giant coach Andy Dennings said. "We had some problems on the basepaths early but corrected that and played solid baseball the rest of the way."

Aaron Opelt went 3-for-4 with an RBI, and Brad Cobb and Kyle Cook each drove in two runs for Ross (9-4, 3-1).

"We took advantage of our opportunities. We squandered some baserunners in the first game and made some things happen today," Dennings said in comparing the two games against Lima this year.

Hershey homered in his only at-bat.

"Paul made a nice adjustment," Dennings said. "He's worked hard on his swing. He hit the ball really well to dead center."

Cody Ruiz and Abbott each added one RBI as Ross issued Lima (8-7, 3-1) its first GBC loss.

Smith drives in six

Woodmore scored 10 runs in the first inning to help catapult Jordan Shaw to his first victory — a 17-0 five-inning Suburban Lakes League win over Gibsonburg.

Shaw (1-2) allowed only two hits and one walk while striking out five.

Wyatt Kiser took the loss for the Golden Bears.

Carl Smith accounted for six total bases with a homer and double and drove in six runs for the Wildcats (11-6, 5-2). Jordan Hepler had two singles and Billy Dyer added a double and three RBIs.

Lakota drops SLL contest

Brent Hoerig scored two runs and Lakota outhit Lake but lost 7-4 in the Suburban Lakes League.

See ROSS, B2

Ross splits with 'Skins

By MATTHEW HORN
Sports Writer

The Port Clinton baseball team opened Saturday's doubleheader with Fremont Ross with four consecutive singles.

And it seemed as though the scenario was exactly what starting pitcher Brad Cobb needed.

Cobb responded by striking out the next three batters after allowing leadoff hitter Logan Meisler to score and the Redskins managed only four hits after the first inning in a 6-2 Little Giant victory in Game 1.

Port Clinton won the second game 4-0.

"(Cobb) is just a calm individual," Ross coach Andy Dennings said. "He takes everything in stride. He's always ready to go."

After allowing four straight singles — two of which didn't leave the infield — Cobb allowed one additional run while striking out five and walking only one.

"He separates his emotions," Dennings said.

"That's what you want out of a pitcher. He's a kid that keeps his composure at all times."

Bryant Ruiz pitched well for Ross in Game 2 but the Little Giants squandered several opportunities on the basepaths. Meisler again reached base and ultimately scored in the first inning.

But Ruiz too recovered as he allowed only three hits in seven innings. He walked four and struck out four.

"We threw the ball well enough to win but didn't get it done in the other aspects of the game," Dennings said.

Ruiz was pleased with his outing.

"Everything felt good," Ruiz said of his arsenal. "They got a couple hits and turned the game around."

"If we had the sticks in the second game like we did in the first we would have come through."

Kyle Cook drove in two runs with a first-inning double in Game 1 and scored in the third. Joey Garza, Robbie Hall and Billy Boukissen



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

KYLE COOK of Fremont Ross is safe at first after beating the throw from Port Clinton's Joe Higgins (2) to first baseman Joey Malfara during a doubleheader in Fremont Saturday. The Little Giants won the first game 6-2 before falling in the second 4-0.

each drove in one run and Aaron Opelt stole home in Game 1 for the Little Giants.

"(Cook's) very important to our lineup and very reliable," Ruiz said. "He makes clutch plays."

Ross (10-5) scored two

runs in the first, third and sixth innings.

Cook came to the plate with Mike Abbott and Opelt on base before his double. Cook said he has grown quite accustomed to Opelt being on base for his at-bats.

"He always hits it hard — even when he's not getting on," Cook said of Opelt. "I don't remember him not hitting. At the beginning of the year he was hitting it right at people. Now they're finding the holes."

Hall doubled in Game 2 for Ross.

Cody Salyers took the loss in Game 1 and sophomore Nate White won his second varsity start in two outings for Port Clinton (14-3) in Game 2.

Ross eyes league title

By RYAN AUTULLO
News-Messenger correspondent

Napoleon baseball coach Mike Hummer gave a slight indication of who he expects to emerge from the logjam atop the Greater Buckeye Conference.

In Hummer's mind, the league title just might ultimately belong to the team that aggressively pursues it.

Fremont Ross dominated visiting Napoleon 9-1 Thursday to retain its position in a three-way tie atop the league standings.

Thursday marked the first of two chances this year that Hummer's Wildcats will oppose the Little Giants.

"I think as far as aggressiveness at the plate, they're probably by far the most aggressive team (in the GBC)," Hummer said.

Kyle Cook went 4-for-4 for Ross and drove in two runs while Brad Cobb pitched a complete game as the Little Giants improved to 12-5 (4-1).

The Little Giant victory sets up today's showdown at home against fellow league leader and archrival Sandusky. Lima Senior, which Ross has already split a pair of games with, also has one loss in the conference.

"If they get the pitching and play defense the way they did today, they're going to be a tough team to beat," Hummer said of the Little Giants.

With the score tied at one, Ross exploded for a six-run third inning.

Cook doubled down the left-field line to score the first run in the sequence. Robbie Hall singled home Aaron Opelt two batters later and Joey Garza followed with a two-run single to make the score 5-1. Corey Chestnutt and Billy Boukissen contributed with RBI groundouts in the inning.

Hummer's assessment of aggressive plate appearances by the opposition was certainly evident in the third.

"That's something we preach all year," said first-year Ross coach Andy Dennings. "I think we've gotten better the past couple games at driving pitches we're supposed to drive and swinging at pitches (we) should swing at."

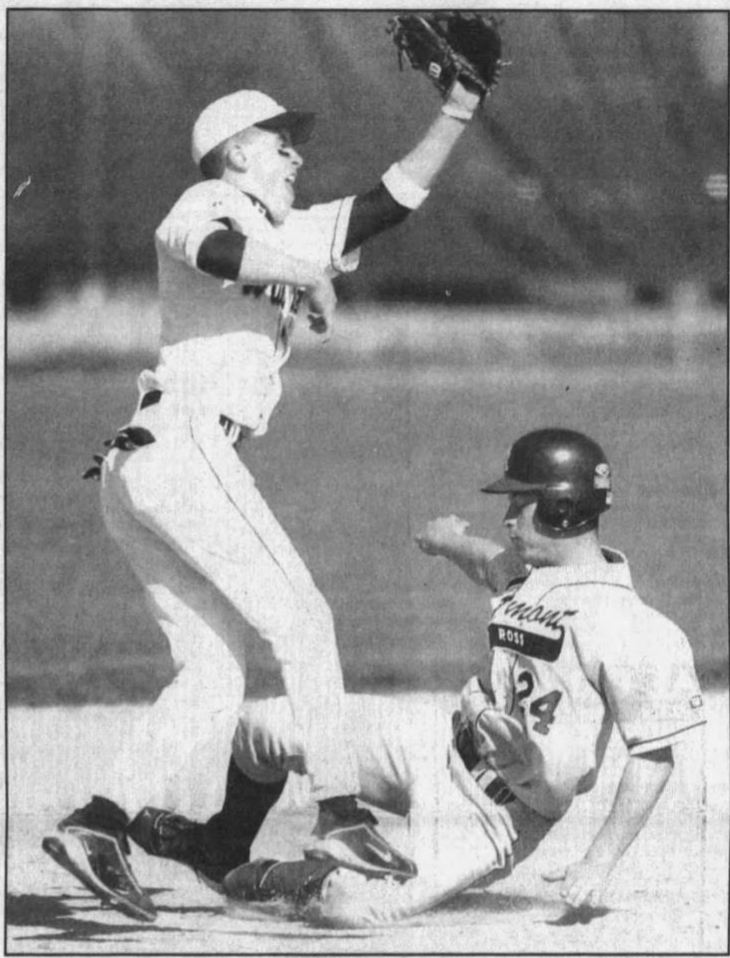
The loss dropped Napoleon to 2-17 (0-7).

Although far from overpowering, Cobb used finesse on the hill in getting 14 groundball outs. He struck out three, walked three and did not give up an extra-base hit.

"I mainly threw my fastball," Cobb said. "I located it pretty well, I guess, and I think that's why I was so successful in getting people out."

Cobb got himself into a momentarily sticky situation in the top of the seventh.

With one runner on, Cobb proceeded to walk a pair of Wildcats to load the bases. He subsequently got Adam Miller, the team's No. 4 hitter, to fly out to



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

KYLE COOK of Fremont Ross slides safely into second base as Napoleon's Biran Hummer fields the throw Thursday in Fremont. The Little Giants won the GBC contest 9-1.

center to end the game.

"He's had good outings all year," Dennings said of Cobb. "He keeps his composure well, throws strikes, doesn't walk people — that's all you can ask for. He's very good with location. He has a purpose for every pitch."

Cook, the ace of the Ross pitching staff, proved he is solid in the field as well, with several stops — in-

cluding a terrific double play — at shortstop. Cook fielded Dustin Smith's grounder, stepped on second and tossed the ball to first base to get the first two outs in the sixth inning.

"I thought we hustled all over the field and didn't have any mental lapses," Dennings said. "We got dirty on plays and that's what you like to see."

Cook, from the cleanup spot, also slapped three singles. His two RBIs in the game upped his team lead to 25.

Cook will likely start on the mound in today's contest against the Blue Streaks.

"Everybody really wants (the GBC title)," Cook said. "We haven't really been close the last couple years. We just have to be focused."

Hall helps Ross top Sandusky

By RYAN AUTULLO
News-Messenger correspondent

Robbie Hall was relieved to finally break out of his rut.

Hall, who batted above .500 last year as a sophomore, ended a season-long slump at the plate by going 2-for-3 with a pair of RBI singles as Fremont Ross defeated visiting Greater Buckeye Conference foe Sandusky 6-2.

Hall estimated his season average at .300 prior to Friday's game.

"I've just been struggling all

year trying to hit the ball solid," said Hall, a left fielder. "I hadn't been hitting it real well all year, and I finally came through."

Mike Abbott pitched five innings while striking out five to earn the victory on the mound for Ross, which improved to 13-5 (5-1 GBC). Joey Garza, in relief of Abbott, picked up the save with two innings of work.

Ross remains in a tie with Lima Senior atop the GBC standings. The teams have split in league play this season.

Minutes after the game's conclusion, Ross assistant coach Mark King smashed a pie filled with whipped-cream in the face of Little Giant head coach Andy Dennings.

King attributed the act to a ritual that all first-year coaches must go through. It was also reason for exaltation as it was the first win for Dennings over archrival Sandusky (10-10, 4-4).

"Solid defense, that's what we've been about all year," Hall said. "Giving up two runs in high school baseball, pretty much, you're going

to win the game. Our pitching has been awesome all year."

Hall singled in the third inning to make the score 2-2 and did the same in the Little Giants' four-run fourth.

Shortstop Kyle Cook began the scoring barrage with an RBI base hit and an additional runner scored on a Sandusky throwing error. Billy Boukissen was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded to conclude the Little Giant rally.

See ABBOTT, B2

Abbott picks up victory for Ross

Continued from B1

All runs were unearned in the inning.

"We had errors that cost us in the fourth inning that made the difference in the ballgame," Sandusky coach Schuyler Smith said.

Smith opted to pull starter Kevin Larnoski with the score tied after the third to save his ace for a sectional contest on Monday.

"We figured we'd start off with him, set a good base and go from there," Smith said.

Abbott got off to a shaky start, allowing seven baserunners in the first three innings, before pitching back-to-back 1-2-3 frames in the fourth and fifth.

The junior allowed two baserunners to begin the sixth before giving way in favor of Garza.

"Mikey didn't have the best stuff today," Dennings said, seconds before being blindsided by King. "It's nice to see him stay solid on the mound and do what he had to do to get a W. He's a big-time competitor on the mound. I thought he got a

little bit better the more tired he got."

Relatively uncharacteristic of the team, Ross reached base via a walk nine times.

Garza walked three times while the always picky-at-the-plate Aaron Opelt received two free passes.

"We're usually a real aggressive team at the plate and I guess patience does help with (getting runners on base)," Hall said. "You get them on and get a couple singles here and there — you're up 6-2."

After inheriting the situation with two runners on base, Garza allowed a bunt single to load the bases. He stayed composed, however, and retired the next three batters — two of whom were strikeout victims.

Ross travels to Margaretta today for an impromptu non-conference matchup, which was scheduled at the end of the week.

Hall will use the non-scheduled game as a chance to continue his recent success at the plate.

"It was a breakout game, I guess — I hope," he said.

Opelt explodes

Aaron Opelt scored three times and drove in six runs as Fremont Ross defeated Margaretta 13-1 in five innings in a game that wasn't organized until Thursday.

The Little Giants (14-5) scored each of their runs in the first three innings.

Bryant Ruiz (2-1) earned the victory for Ross. He allowed three hits and no earned runs while walking one and striking out four in five innings.

"Bryant threw extremely well," Ross coach Andy Dennings said. "You could tell in the first inning he had command of all his pitches and he continued throughout the course of the game."

Opelt hit a bases-loaded double to clear the bases and added a three-run home run. Kyle Cook hit a two-run home run and Robbie Hall singled and doubled for Ross.

"Aaron had a big day," Dennings said. "He and Kyle have been there for us all year."

"We had a balanced attack (Saturday). We had quite a few kids hitting. If you get that kind of productivity at the plate you'll be successful most of the time."

Brian Schenk took the loss for Margaretta (8-7). Brett McCullough drove in the Polar Bears' run and Bill Keegan scored.

BASEBALL

Ross falls to GBC rival

Ross rapped out 15 hits, but a five-run sixth inning helped Sandusky to a 13-8 win over the Little Giants in GBC action.

Brad Cobb went 3-for-3 with three doubles and three RBIs for Ross (14-7, 5-2 GBC), which remains at the top of the conference standings.

Kyle Cook, Corey Chestnutt, Cody Ruiz and Robbie Hall all had two hits each for the Little Giants. Teammates Mike Abbott, Aaron Opelt, Billy Boukissen and Kory Decker each had one hit.

Sandusky hit five home runs in the contest.

"It was just a combination of the ball getting in the air when the wind was blowing out on a short field," Ross coach Andy Dennings said. "Those things happen."

Ross scored three runs in both the first and second innings.

"We hit the ball pretty well," Dennings said. "We started with a bang and kind of slowed up in the middle."

Boukissen swats grand slam

Billy Boukissen hit a grand slam and Mike Abbott scattered three hits over five innings as Fremont Ross topped Greater Buckeye Conference foe Napoleon 11-0.

"Billy sat on a fastball over the plate and drove it," Ross coach Andy Dennings said. "It was nice to see."

Abbott struck out three and walked one to run his record to 4-0 on the season.

"Mike threw the ball extremely well," Dennings said. "He had good command of his fastball and the curve was really working. He threw a nice ballgame."

Abbott also homered in the road victory and had two RBIs.

Robbie Hall drove in two runs and had two doubles for the Little Giants (15-7, 6-2 GBC) while teammate Brad Cobb hit a two-run home run.

Aaron Opelt also had a hit for Ross.

Ross had a 4-0 lead before tacking on seven in the fifth inning.

"Offensively, we were selective," Dennings said. "We drew some walks and we sat on some pitches we should drive."

"I was very pleased with our approach at the plate."

Ross takes GBC

News-Messenger reports

Fremont Ross coach Andy Dennings said it's always a nice accomplishment when the Little Giants beat Greater Buckeye Conference rival Findlay twice in the same year.

Securing the GBC crown while doing it is an added bonus, to be sure.

Ross wrapped up the GBC championship Tuesday with a 12-5 road victory over Findlay.

"The kids were pretty ecstatic afterward," Dennings said. "It was nice to see them stay focused through the course of the game with all they had on the line.

"I thought they handled their emotions well. They're a great group of kids."

They're also very handy with the bats. The Little Giants pounded out 15 hits in the win, including a 4-for-4 effort from Brad Cobb.

Cobb had a double and four RBIs while teammate Kyle Cook went 2-for-5 with three RBIs and a triple.

"Everybody hit the ball well," Little Giant Aaron Opelt said. "Brad Cobb had a great day at the plate. He had some clutch hits."

Robbie Hall went 2-for-2 with a pair of RBIs for Ross and teammate Opelt went 2-for-4 with a double.

Corey Chestnutt, Mike Abbott, Billy Boukissen, Kory Decker and Cody Ruiz added hits for the Little Giants (16-7, 7-2 GBC).

This was Dennings' first year at the helm.

"They came ready to work every day," Dennings said of his squad. "They were ready to be coached and they deserve a lot of credit for staying positive through the entire season.

"We didn't get as far as we wanted in the tournament, but it was nice to see the kids plug away and get the GBC title. It's something great for our program to build on."

Abbott (5-0) also picked up the win, striking out five over four innings while walking five.

See ROSS, B2

Ross baseball sits at top of GBC

Continued from B1

"Abbott came in and threw them off balance," Opelt said.

Opelt and Billy Boukissen doused Dennings with a celebratory water

shower after the game.

"After losing in sectionals, this was a good way to come back and finish things up right," Opelt said. "We needed a positive, and obviously winning the GBC is a positive. It gets us rolling for next year."



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

ROBBIE HALL of Fremont Ross takes a swing against Marion Harding Thursday in Fremont. The Little Giants won 4-0 to finish out their season.

Ross ends with win

News-Messenger reports

After clinching the Greater Buckeye Conference championship earlier in the week, the Fremont Ross baseball team just had one game to go to finish out the season.

Brad Cobb — and a nearly flawless Little Giant defense — made sure it was a shutout.

Cobb pitched seven scoreless innings Thursday, helping Ross to a 4-0 season-ending victory over visiting Marion Harding.

"I thought Brad pitched extremely well," Ross coach Andy Dennings said of Cobb, who finished the game with nine strikeouts and two walks while running his season record to 5-2. "He had a little more zip on his fastball but still had his normal command."

"He's thrown extremely well for us this year."

Billy Boukissen went 2-for-3 with a double and an RBI for the Little Giants (17-7, 8-2 GBC) while teammate Corey Chestnutt also added two hits.

After breaking a scoreless tie by pushing a run across in the bottom of the fifth inning, Ross added three more runs in the sixth.

Mike Abbott had a two-run pinch-hit single for the Little Giants, while teammates Aaron Opelt, Robbie Hall, Cobb and Cody Ruiz also had base hits.

"We were pretty balanced throughout the lineup. That's nice to see," Dennings said.

"Any time you can have no easy out in the lineup, it makes it tough on the other team. (They) really can't sit back any time throughout the order."

Dennings said the Little Giants graduate six from this year's GBC-winning squad.

"It's nice to see our seniors get a GBC title," he said. They worked extremely hard. It's nice to see the hard work pay off.

"A lot of these kids had really nice years for us. It will be tough to replace them."

SJCC loses finale

It wasn't the best way to end a season.

But it was a fine year for the St. Joseph Central Catholic baseball team.

The Crimson Streaks fell to Toledo Central Catholic 21-2 after the visitors scored 13 runs in the top of the fifth inning.

"We're saying goodbye to six seniors. This is a tough way to go out," SJCC coach Rick Barbour said. "We were league champs and that's the main thing."

"Hopefully the younger kids learned something from the older kids."

Kevin Rousch went 1-for-2 with an RBI for SJCC (18-7) while Robby Roth, Ryan Schmidt and Juni Arreola also added hits for the Crimson Streaks.



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

FREMONT ROSS catcher Cody Ruiz makes a catch on a foul ball against Marion Harding Thursday during the Little Giants' 4-0 victory.

See PARKER, B2

High School

GBC All-Conference

First Team

Ned Tracht	12	Sandusky
Alex Raymond	12	Findlay
Matt Feltner	11	Sandusky
Alex Frank	11	Findlay
Mike Abbott	11	Ross
Da'Vell Winters	10	Harding
Zach Burke	12	Findlay
Aaron Opelt	11	Ross
Robbie Hall	11	Ross
Jeff Fultz	12	Findlay
Brad Cobb	12	Ross

Tim Voorhees	11	Findlay
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Second Team

Brandon Cramer	11	Napoleon
Greg Smith	12	Findlay
Tommy Conley	12	Harding
A.J. Miracle	12	Lima Senior
Matt Begin	10	Lima Senior
Adam Birtcher	12	Napoleon
Kevin Appell	10	Sandusky
Richie Kimble	11	Sandusky
Greg Wellman	10	Lima Senior
Justin Knapp	12	Harding
Chad Combs	12	Findlay
Jerrold Slater	12	Harding
Billy Boukissen	11	Ross

Honorable Mention

Ross: Cody Ruiz, Cody Crestnott

League Champion: Ross

Coach of the year: Andy Dennings
(Ross)

Player of the year: Kevin Lasnoski
(Sandusky)

Pitchers of the year: Kyle Cook (Ross),
Zach Marshall (Lima Senior)