

Weather limits area teams



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

EMILY DOWELL, left, and Jamie Hinkle of Fremont Ross work on their throwing technique during practice Tuesday in the Purple Pit.

Spring sports slowed by winter temperatures

By MICHAEL BOSI
Staff writer

Just when you thought there was no use for the old Wal-Mart site on East State Street, we offer a suggestion:

A baseball field.

That's what it became — thanks to Mother Nature's annual spring game of Name that Forecast — for the Fremont St. Joseph Central Catholic baseball team this week.

Employing the techniques that six years of coaching have produced, Crimson Streaks head coach Rick Barbour found

himself launching fly balls to his troops in the parking lot of the Applewood Shopping Center. It was Barbour's way of sidestepping the soupy conditions of the Sacred Heart School's athletic fields, the result of the snow, rain, ice that have fallen in the winter's waning weeks.

"The weather hasn't cooperated a whole lot, but then again it usually doesn't at this time. We got out for one full workout last week," said Barbour, whose team had to play second-fiddle in its own gymnasium last week when St. Joe hosted an auction.

Forecasters predicted the next coming of the Ice Age Tuesday, but brief snow and resulting frigid air was the reality. The drier air was a blessing for some, not for others.

"I was looking forward to a day off," quipped St. Joe boys tennis coach Brian Miller.

"It's not bad so far, except it's freezing outside. We got out about four or five days and we've had some good weather."

Getting outside doesn't always mean getting things accomplished.

"With practice as cold as it is," said Bellevue tennis coach

Lee Booze, "you don't get to sort things out very quickly. We've tried to get outside every day. We went out (Tuesday) but you can't really play much. We've been outside every day and you do some running, but you just don't get to play much tennis."

Booze has encountered dilemmas similar to those of his fellow Bellevue coaches and the programs at Fremont Ross; they started late because of the schools' basketball success.

"We got pushed back a couple of days because of boys basket-

See SPRING TEAMS, B2

Spring teams begin practices

Continued from B1

ball," Ross softball coach Cheryl Schell. "The cage couldn't be put up in the gym until (last) Wednesday."

Margaretta's girls basketball team played into the regional tournament, and softball coach Jenny Pooch allowed Sarah Lowery, Erica Moore and Kelly Haynes a three-day break, but each declined and reported immediately to softball practice.

"The winning seasons, they carry over and the enthusiasm carries over," Pooch said.

Yet, even enthusiasm has to be corralled. Barbour has plenty of reason for excitement — St. Joe is gunning for a Midland Athletic League three-peat — but he'll let Mother Nature earn the victory this early in the season.

"To get outside for one day in the cold, I'm not big on that," Barbour said. "I'm afraid of getting sore arms and everything."

FREMONT ROSS LITTLE GIANTS

The softball team's biggest problem this season may be living up to the lofty standards the rest of the school's girls teams have set: winning at least a Great Lakes League championship.

In order to make a serious run at the top spot in the loaded Great Lakes League, a team approach is the top priority for coach Cheryl Schell. "We'll do what's best for Ross this year," the coach said. "Whether it's somebody has to pinch run or we have to DH for somebody, we're going to accept our roles and do everything we can to make Ross No. 1."

Head coach: Cheryl Schell (sixth season, 90-34 career).

Last year: 16-7, 8-5 GLL (third).

Key losses: SS Dawn Zerman, 3B Casey Schepflin.

Key returners: SS Jamie Hinkle, 2B Emily Dowell, P Jodi Kusmer, C/P Nicki Pelfrey, OF Jodi Fick, Jenny Schaaf, Simone Brown and Shair Horn.

Key dates: April 11 vs. Oregon Clay, April 15 at Bedford, April 16 vs. Toledo Central Catholic, May 6 at Oregon Clay, May 9 vs. Bedford.

Strengths: Experience and team speed. So many returners give Schell room for flexibility in her lineup.

Weaknesses: How quickly will the left side of the infield jell? While Hinkle saw some playing time last year when Zerman was injured, freshman Tiffany Nitschke and sophomore Erin Tuckerman are relative newcomers at third base.

Outlook: Expect typical Fremont Ross softball this spring, as the Little Giants want to make opponents work on defense. With the added speed of St. Joe transfer Erin Lytle, Schaaf and Horn in the outfield rotation, causing chaos could come easily for Ross. "A lot of teams don't execute; we try to take advantage of that," Schell said. While Ross is an experienced team, it is also young (just two seniors), meaning that any success this year could carry well into the future.

Giants clobber Streaks

News-Messenger reports

SANDUSKY — The Ross Little Giants opened their softball schedule with a bang, crushing soon-to-be Great Lakes League rival Sandusky Thursday.

Jodi Kusmer struck out nine in the one-hit victory.

Ross scored a pair of runs in its first at-bat, then rallied for three in the third and four in the sixth to ice the contest.

"We did a nice job putting the ball into play," Ross coach

SOFTBALL

Cheryl Schell said. "We saw the ball well and had no strikeouts (against Sandusky starter Misty Baranol)."

Michele Smith collected a pair of hits and scored two runs. She and Jodi Fick each had an RBI.

Little Giant pitcher chills Findlay's bats in victory

News-Messenger reports

FINDLAY — Her teammates were freezing. Ross's Jodi Kusmer did the freezing.

Of Findlay's bats.

The Little Giants junior came within an inning of her second straight shutout, hurling a five-hitter in a 5-1 softball victory over Great Lakes League rival Findlay Tuesday.

Kusmer struck out two and walked none for her second victory. The run she surrendered in the bottom of the seventh was the first of the season.

Ross mustered nine hits and struck out just once against Findlay starter and loser Ashley Ammons, who had beaten the Little Giants twice last season.

"Knock on wood, we're hitting the ball right now, which is really good," Ross coach Cheryl Schell said. "And we made some mistakes early on, but we didn't let it get us down and that shows the personality of this team."

Jenny Schaaf doubled twice for Ross (2-0), including an RBI two-bagger that broke a scoreless tie in a three-run fourth inning.

Ross made it 3-0 when two runs scored as Tiffany Nitscke reached on an error. "After that, they got frazzled," Schell said.

The Little Giants scored two more in the fifth inning, as Jodi Fick, who had doubled, scored on Michele Smith's fielder's choice and Jamie Hinkle had an RBI single.

SOFTBALL

it was," said Oak Harbor coach Kent Whitman, whose team scored at least one run in every inning.

Erin Radsick got the win, pitching four innings and allowing two hits with no walks and eight strikeouts. Greener took the mound over the final three innings and gave up two hits, walked one and struck out four.

The Rockets host Genoa on Thursday.

Clyde 8, St. Wendelin 0

CLYDE — Kristi Mounts and Cassie Burdette combined on a no-hitter as the Fliers won their fifth game in a weather-shortened five-inning contest.

Mounts (2-0) got the victory, hurling six innings, striking out eight and walking four. Burdette struck out one in one inning of work.

Tuesday's poor weather conditions led Clyde coach Marc Marshall to lift his starter.

"She threw a lot more pitches than usual," Marshall said. "We didn't think that (the no hitter) was that important because the weather conditions were rotten. We still have three more games this week."

Theresa Gierhart had a pair of singles, including one that produced two runs in a three-run second inning that gave Clyde a 5-0 lead. The Fliers scored three

miserable out there.

"We did some nice things. They (Danbury) mixed in 15 walks, so that made it tough on both teams."

It was the first game of the season for the 'Cats, while Danbury dropped to 0-2. The Lakers are coached by Gene Peluso, in his first season. Peluso is Lee's uncle and godfather.

Lee said it was "tough" facing Peluso.

"I have a lot of respect for him," Lee said.

Becky Lee, Mike's daughter, earned the victory after pitching four innings. The junior right-hander allowed one hit — a third-inning double to left-center field by losing pitcher Maria Nelson — and walked four, with nine strikeouts.

"I was real happy to see her out there," Mike Lee said of Becky. "She's coming off her back injury of a year ago and this was her first varsity win. Even in the cold, she pitched strong."

Woodmore sophomore Sarah Bowen pitched the last inning and walked none, with one strikeout.

Janelle Dangler went 2-for-3 with five RBIs, while Kristen Robenstine hit a two-run double in the second inning and Becky Lee had two RBIs for the Wildcats.

Bettsville 18, Arcadia 16

BETTSTVILLE — The Bobcats scored four runs in the bottom of

Ross rides 6-run second to win

News-Messenger reports

CASTALIA — Nicki Pelfrey pitched four innings of scoreless relief to earn her first victory of the season in the Fremont Ross softball team's 8-2 non-league victory over Margaretta Thursday.

The Little Giants, unbeaten in three games, scored six runs in a second inning that coach Cheryl Schell termed "sloppy."

Senior Michele Smith started the onslaught when her bunt produced Ross's first two runs.

Sophomore Jodi Fick went 2-for-3 and freshman Tiffany Nitschke was 2-for-3, with two RBI and a run scored.

Jodi Kusmer pitched the first three innings, allowing three hits and two runs (both unearned) before departing with an 8-2 lead. Pelfrey gave up just two hits and struck out eight.

Tiffany Cullen took the loss for the Polar Bears (2-2).

SOFTBALL

Gretchen Creeger went 2-for-5, with four runs scored.

Mary Hale (2-1) threw the last three innings in relief of Mandy Stoudinger for the victory.

"Mandy hasn't pitched for a week," Wyant said. "She struggled, but Mary came on and did a good job in relief."

The Raiders unleashed a 15-hit attack against three Hopewell pitchers. Starter Kristen Reinhart took the loss.

Oak Harbor 2, Genoa 0

OAK HARBOR — The Rockets mustered just one hit off losing pitcher Jodi Moritz but capitalized on two hit-batsmen and a couple of errors to win their fourth game.

Oak Harbor (4-1) scored both its runs in the bottom of the fourth.

Brandy Gaines was hit by a

second, and Kovalaske earning her first save.

Jacki Swaisgood clubbed her first home run for the Fliers.

Clyde led 6-3 after three innings, but allowed Sandusky to make it a one-run game with single runs in the fourth and fifth innings. A three-run sixth inning sealed the Fliers' victory.

"The score didn't reflect the game," Clyde coach Marc Marshall said. "We didn't play well and we were sluggish."

Gibsonburg 23, Danbury 14

LAKESIDE — Amanda Jividen went 4-for-4 and drove in three runs as the Golden Bears (2-2) recorded their second victory in a game whose outcome was not a surety until Gibsonburg scored six runs in the fourth inning to widen an 11-8 lead.

Gibsonburg's Krista Reiter was 2-for-3 with two RBI in support of winning pitcher Katie Wonderly.

Ross beats reigning champ

News-Messenger reports

Fremont Ross's softball team used Oregon Clay's only error as a springboard to a five-run fifth inning Friday, beating the defending Great Lakes League champs 7-3 at Alumni Field.

The win was Ross's fourth without a loss, including two league wins. Clay dropped to 3-3, 0-2 in the GLL.

"It's a good start in the league race," Ross coach Cheryl Schell said. "We've still got a long way to go. The kids were excited about it but they kept it in perspective."

Ross led 1-0 in the fifth inning when Tiffany Nitschke reached base on a one-out error. Following a sacrifice bunt from Emily Dowell and a walk by Erin Lytle, Jodi Fick singled to score Nitschke. Nicki Pelfrey cleared the bases with a 2-RBI triple and Michele Smith and Jenny Schaaf added RBI to increase the Ross lead.

Jodi Kusmer allowed six hits in a complete game win.

SOFTBALL

Seeger to end the scoring and give Oak Harbor its fifth win in six games.

St. Wendelin, which scored three runs (two earned) off Anne Greener in the fourth inning, dropped to 2-2.

Erin Radsick pitched the final three innings and allowed one hit, with no walks and nine strikeouts. Radsick faced just 10 batters.

Woodmore 18, Gibsonburg 6

WOODVILLE — Marissa Mitchell went 2-for-2 with a triple and two RBI while Janelle Dangler doubled and drove in three runs as Woodmore improved to 2-0 and 1-0 in the Suburban Lakes League.

The Wildcats scored eight runs in the first inning with the help of four hits and three walks by loser Katie Wonderly. Gibsonburg (2-3, 0-1 SLL) committed seven errors while holding the Wildcats to just six hits.

Kusmer no hits Southview

News-Messenger reports

Jodi Kusmer threw the third no-hitter of her career Monday afternoon, helping Fremont Ross hand Sylvania Southview a 15-0 non-league softball loss.

Kusmer, a junior right-hander, struck out six and walked two as the Little Giants remained unbeaten in five games. Southview, which committed six errors, dropped to 1-3.

"She had good location and great movement," Ross coach Cheryl Schell said of Kusmer, who had two no-hitters a year ago. "She was not overpowering, but the kids played good defense behind her. There were a couple plays that could have gone for base hits."

Jodi Fick and Emily Dowell had stellar defensive plays to help Kusmer record the no-hitter, Schell said.

Nicki Pelfrey went 4-for-5 with a double and two RBIs, while Erin Lytle had two hits and four RBIs to pace Ross's 16-hit attack.

Dowell, Fick, Tiffany Nitschke, Michele Smith and Jamie Hinkle added two hits apiece for Ross, which returns to league action today at Bedford.

In other games Monday:

Seneca East 17, St. Joe 2

ATTICA — Seneca East belted 13 hits in five innings, forcing its Midland Athletic League game with Fremont St. Joe to be stopped in the fifth inning because of the 15-run rule.

The Tigers had a home run, triple and two doubles among the offensive arsenal and were also helped by eight St. Joe errors in the 17-2 win.

"The errors will kill you every time," St. Joe coach Sandy Adelsperger said. The Crimson Streaks (0-6, 0-3 MAL) host Genoa today at Anderson Field.

Clyde 31, Huron 0

CLYDE — The undefeated Fliers were unchallenged against Huron, scoring 11 runs in the first

SOFTBALL

and fourth innings in a blowout Sandusky Bay Conference win.

"It was nice that all the girls got to play," Clyde coach Marc Marshall said of his team, which drew 23 walks against Huron. Theresa Gierhart led the way with two triples and a pair of singles.

Clyde 8-0 (1-0 SBC) hosts Margaretta Wednesday.

Old Fort 4, North Baltimore 0

NORTH BALTIMORE — Old Fort pushed its unbeaten mark to 8-0 with a Midland Athletic League win against North Baltimore.

Monica Whitman struck out four and did not allow a walk as she won for the seventh time.

"We get three or four runs and I feel really good about winning the ball game," Old Fort coach Ron Rau said. "We have players who can catch and know what to do with it when they get it."

Randi Whitman was 2-for-4 and Andrea Perry doubled for the Stockaders.

Elmwood 11, Woodmore 5

BLOOMDALE — Elmwood pitcher Pam Brossia tied the game with a two-run home run in the second inning, then pitched the Royals to an 11-5 Suburban Lakes League win.

Woodmore scored two runs in the first inning, but Brossia's "shot" was part of a five-run second inning.

"And it was a shot," Woodmore coach Mike Lee said. "In that second inning they had a couple nice hits mixed in with some walks."

The Wildcats (3-1, 1-1 SLL) committed six errors.

"Elmwood's a great team ... you can't do that against them," Lee said of the miscues.

Woodmore's Becky Lee, Amy Perkins and Janelle Dangler each went 2-for-4.

The Wildcats host Port Clinton today, when Lee will be attempting to win his 200th softball game

in a career which spans Woodmore and Fostoria St. Wendelin high schools.

Oak Harbor 4, Margaretta 0

OAK HARBOR — Oak Harbor scored three runs in the first inning, then relied on pitching and defense to secure a 4-0 win against Sandusky Bay Conference rival Margaretta.

Stacy Honaker connected on a two-run single in the first inning, scoring Brandy Gaines and Nancy Appelhans. Honaker scored the Rockets' third run when Shanna Matzinger hit an RBI ground out.

It was more than enough support for winning pitcher Erin Radsick, who struck out eight batters without allowing one walk. She got help from catcher Tracy Demangos and center fielder Marge Gutilla in the field, coach Kent Whitman said.

Sarah Lowery had a double for Margaretta and Appelhans was 2-for-3 with an RBI for Oak Harbor.

Lakota 13, Eastwood 11

KANSAS — Lakota collected two more hits than Eastwood and committed two fewer errors, translating into a 13-11 win for the Raiders.

Cira King had a triple, double and single for Lakota, which scored at least one run in each inning. Jenny Bomer had three hits.

Lake 18, Gibsonburg 4

GIBSONBURG — Lake scored 18 runs on 10 hits to win a Suburban Lakes League matchup at Gibsonburg.

The Golden Bears, who fell to 2-4 (0-2 SLL), got a triple from Angie Davis and a double from Nikki Reno among four hits.

Tiffin Calvert 17, Bettsville 2

TIFFIN — Tiffin Calvert's Erin Cook hit a triple as the Senecas beat Bettsville 17-2.

It was the fifth loss in six games for Bettsville, which got a two-hit performance from Angela Blausey.

Fremont Ross 14, Bedford 4

TEMPERANCE, Mich. — Jodi Kusmer improved to 5-0 as the Little Giants took down Bedford for their sixth straight win, third in the Great Lakes League.

Nicki Pelfrey went 3-for-3 with three RBI and Jamie Hinkle was 2-for-3 with two RBI, including a double. Emily Dowell had two hits, two RBI and three runs.

WOODMORE 9, LAKE 2

WOODVILLE — If at first you don't succeed ...

Woodmore's Wildcats made good on their second attempt to give coach Mike Lee his 200th career softball coaching victory Wednesday night with a 9-2 decision over Lake.

The Wildcats, 4-2 and 2-1 in the Suburban Lakes League, rebounded from Tuesday's 6-4 upset loss to Port Clinton.

"I was real happy with the girls bouncing back tonight," said Lee, who downplayed his career coaching mark, which includes a stint at Fostoria St. Wendelin and four years at Woodmore.

"It was a very frustrating loss (Tuesday) night, so it was really important that we bounce back," he said. "I was pleased with the way we came to play today. We got some timely hits and we were focused. That was a good thing because Lake came in at 4-2."

Sophomore pitcher Sarah Bowen held the Flyers (1-2 SLL) to just five hits and struck out three. Bowen (2-0) also walked seven batters.

"She pitched around those seven walks," Lee said, "so that was important."

The Wildcats scored single runs in both the first and second innings before breaking loose for three in the third and three more in the fourth.

Marisa Mitchell went 2-for-2 and drove in a pair of runs in Woodmore's seven-hit attack.

The 'Cats host Oak Harbor today.

Toledo Central Catholic 5, Ross 3

Toledo Central Catholic won a battle of two undefeated teams at Alumni Field, handing Fremont

Ross a 5-3 loss.

The Fighting Irish scored all five runs in the first and third innings, and Ross never caught up as neither team managed an extra-base hit.

The Little Giants (6-1) committed three errors as Nicki Pelfrey (1-1) lost her first start despite seven strikeouts.

"(Pitching ace Jodi) Kusmer's shoulder was stiff, and I wanted to rest her," Ross coach Cheryl Schell said. "Nicki did her job, but the defense didn't."

Errors at shortstop and on passed balls contributed to four unearned Central Catholic runs.

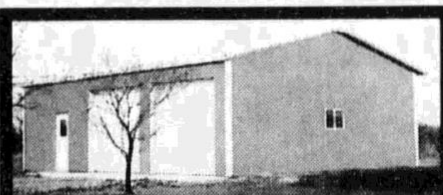
"I don't mind losing. I hope it's a wake-up call for our defense," Schell said.

Jodi Fick and Pelfrey had two hits apiece for Ross, which hosts Fostoria Friday.

Oak Harbor 10, Port Clinton 0

PORT CLINTON — The host Redskins anticipated back-to-back upset victories, but Oak Harbor pitchers Anne Greener and Erin Radsick held PC to just one hit.

Greener (2-0) had a no-hitter through five innings and struck out six, with two walks. Radsick pitched the last two innings and gave up a single to Tabby Mowel



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Ross rebounds from loss with win against Fostoria

News-Messenger reports

Fremont Ross bounced back from its first defeat of the season, beating Great Lakes League foe Fostoria 10-0 at Alumni Field.

Jenny Schaaf went 2-for-4 with 2 RBI to lead Ross's 9-hit attack, and Michele Smith added two hits.

Jodi Kusmer struck out 10 batters for her sixth win, and the Little Giants improved to 7-1 (4-0 GLL).

SOFTBALL

Fostoria dropped to 0-6.

Ross lost 5-3 Wednesday to Toledo Central Catholic.

In other action:

Oak Harbor 6, Edison 1

OAK HARBOR — Erin Radsick proved to be a two-way threat for Oak Harbor Friday night in the Rockets' 6-1 Sandusky Bay Conference softball victory over Edison.

Radsick went 3-for-3 with two doubles and two RBI and was also the winning pitcher, helping the Rockets jump to 8-1 and 3-0 in the SBC. Radsick (6-1) went the distance and gave up four hits and one walk while striking out 10.

Edison (5-4, 2-1 SBC) made a game of it until the sixth inning, when Oak Harbor scored three runs to open up a 6-0 lead.

"In this league — in any sport

— anything can happen," Oak Harbor coach Kent Whitman said. "We played well; I was pleased. The one run they got was kind of a dinker and Erin shut them down. We're hitting the ball hard."

The Rockets, who have won six straight, finished with 11 hits, including two by Jamie Seeger and a double by Nancy Appelhaus. Stacy Honaker,

See **WOODMORE LOSES, B3**

Ross pitcher proves accuracy in win

News-Messenger reports

NAPOLEON — Jodi Kusmer adjusted to what her coach called a "tight strike zone," allowing just one hit in Fremont Ross's 5-0 win against Napoleon.

Kusmer won for the seventh time without a loss and the Little Giants improved to 8-1 (5-0 Great Lakes League).

"She really pitched well," said Ross coach Cheryl, noting that the strike zone was small for both teams. "That's a big credit to give up one hit with a tight strike zone."

The hit was a fourth-inning single between first and second base by Cary Bachman, who was also the losing pitcher.

The Little Giants got all the necessary offense in the first inning. Erin Lytle (2-for-3) singled and stole second, then scored on a Nicki Pelfrey single. Pelfrey then scored on a Napoleon error on a ball hit by Jamie Hinkle.

Ross added two runs in the fourth inning and another in the fifth to remain unbeaten in league play.

Friday's home game against Whitmer will end the first half of GLL play for the Little Giants. They play each league opponent twice.

SOFTBALL

ry over North Baltimore in which the Wildcats came back twice, Runion tied the game in the bottom of the seventh inning with a triple and Dangler won it with her three-bagger in the eighth.

It was the second time in two days Woodmore (8-3) has had to come from behind for a victory. The Wildcats have a four-game winning streak.

North Baltimore gave starting pitcher Megan Dukes a 3-0 lead in the first inning, but Woodmore responded with three runs of its own in the bottom of the inning.

Several North Baltimore errors aided that rally.

"They made five errors, and it seemed like every time we hit it right at them it went between their legs," said Woodmore coach Mike Lee. "But then we'd hit shots over their head and to their right and to their left and they made about eight unbelievable plays."

The Tigers (6-7) took a 4-3 lead in the top of the second before a Dangler RBI single keyed another three-run rally for Woodmore in its half of the second.

North Baltimore added single runs in the third and fifth before Dukes launched a solo homer to

sixth to put the Tigers up, 7-6.

In Woodmore's last at-bat, Marissa Mitchell led off with a walk and was erased on Kristen Robenstine's fielder's choice. With Katie Busdiecker pinch-running for Robenstine, Laura Runion laced a triple down the leftfield line to knot the game at 7.

In the eighth, Dangler made a winner out of Sarah Bowen (5-0) when she tripled home Becky Lee on a one-out hit-and-run.

Bowen, who relieved Lee during North Baltimore's first-inning rally, went 7¹/₃ innings, striking out seven and walking just one.

Dukes (5-6) fanned 11 in a losing effort.

Woodmore continues its Midland Athletic League tour when it hosts Hopewell-Loudon today.

Clyde 6, Margaretta 5

CLYDE — Clyde scored four runs in the sixth inning to surmount a 3-2 deficit and claim a Sandusky Bay Conference victory.

"The girls showed a lot of character in the sixth inning to come back," Clyde coach March Marshall said.

Theresa Gierhart and Sara Oakleaf each went 2-for-3, and Oakleaf drove in two runs as Clyde improved to 10-2, 2-1 SBC.

Kristi Mounts (4-1) earned the

Giants silence Panthers

Freshman drives in 3 Ross runs

By MICHAEL BOSI
Staff writer

Fremont Ross's Tiffany Nitschke is living proof that actions speak louder than words.

Following her 2-for-3, three-RBI performance that, along with Jodi Kusmer's five-hit pitching, led the Little Giants to 12-0 Great Lakes League softball victory over Toledo Whitmer Friday, Nitschke had little to say.

Not because she didn't want to. She simply couldn't.

Nitschke was battling a lost voice — from cheering too much, Ross coach Cheryl Schell said — and after the game, she could muster little more than "I'm having fun."

Yes, Little Giants Nation is having fun these days in large part because the freshman has entrenched herself into the third base position and makes a mighty fine No. 9 hitter.

"She's earned it," Ross coach Cheryl Schell said. "She's doing a nice job."

Nitschke scored Ross's second run, ignited a three-run third inning with a two-run single and made

Giants' baseball

Whitmer remained unbeaten in GLL play Friday with a 7-4 win against Fremont Ross. **Baseball, B3**

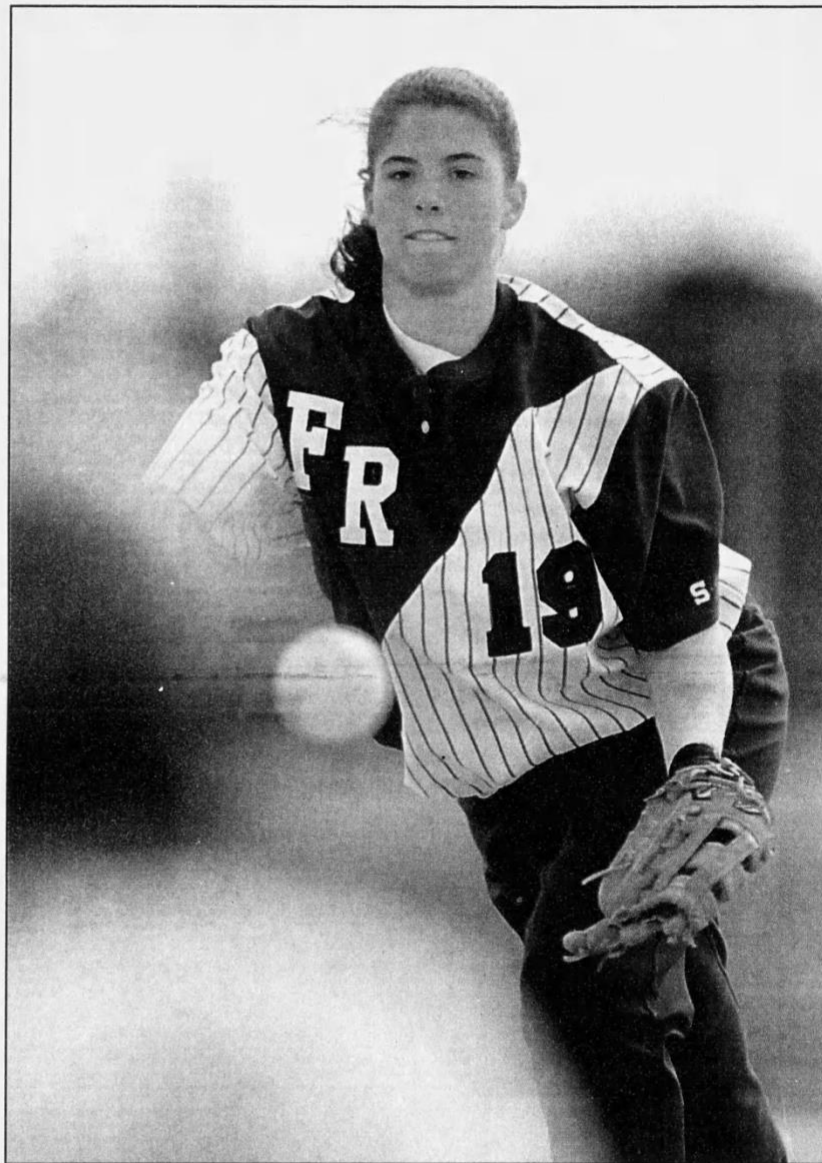
it 8-0 in the fourth with a sacrifice fly to right field that easily could have gone for an extra base hit.

"Our Nos. 1 and 2 hitters didn't hit very well (Friday) so

it's nice to have your No. 9 hitter step up. That's pretty nice," Schell said.

The Little Giants (9-1, 6-0 GLL) made losing pitcher Robin Zalewski (0-3) swallow 11 walks and nine hits as they finished the first half of their GLL schedule as the only perfect team in the league.

Ross can thank Kusmer, author of three straight shutouts and 24 consecutive scoreless innings. With just three strikeouts, Kusmer let her defense do the work — in particular second baseman Emily Dowell, who was flawless in collecting seven assists



JODI KUSMER of Fremont Ross fires a pitch against a Toledo Whitmer batter Friday. *News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison*

and a putout.

Kusmer aided her own shutout cause with a heads-up backup play at third base, preventing Crystal Wilson from scoring on an overthrow after Melissa Buehler's single in the seventh.

"I think my defense helped me out a lot and I couldn't have gotten my shutouts without them," the junior said after raising her record to 8-0.

Kusmer also squelched a Whitmer threat in the first, getting a pair of strikeouts with runners on second and third,

and she stranded a runner at third base with two outs in the fifth by inducing a groundout to Dowell.

"I think that, unlike a lot of pitchers in this league, (Kusmer) keeps her cool," Whitmer coach Mark Figliomeni said. "She never gets flustered and when you have the defense she does behind her I can understand why she keeps it in the strike zone. She isn't overpowering but she's a very solid pitcher."

Jenny Schaaf had RBI singles in each of the fourth and

fifth innings, and Michele Smith and Jodi Fick each had two hits.

In the fifth inning, Fick's second single nearly carved off third baseman Kelly Klawonn's ankles. On Smith's second bunt single, Erin Lytle and Fick scored before Smith reached third as a result of a throwing error, one of Whitmer's four.

But walks proved to be Zalewski's worst enemy. Six of the 11 free passes she issued turned into runs, three created

See KUSMER, B3

Kusmer blanks Panthers

Continued from B1

bases-loaded situations and another forced in a run (to Nicki Pelfrey in the second).

"We got into the jams and we couldn't dig ourselves out, and that was the difference," Figliomenti said.

LITTLE GIANTS NOTES: Ross dropped out of the Division I state coaches poll this week after drawing the 10th spot in the initial balloting. "I don't think rankings really

matter. I don't want a target on my back," Schell said. ... Ross stole five bases to add to Whitmer's three wild pitches. ... Dowell scored the first Ross run on the front end of a double steal. ... In an attempt to bolster her team's schedule in the second half, Schell picked up home games next week against Notre Dame Academy (Monday), Bellevue (Tuesday) and Clyde (Thursday) in addition to Friday's regularly-scheduled Findlay tilt.

Schell hits century mark in victories

News-Messenger reports

Nicki Pelfrey struck out a school-record 15 batters and coach Cheryl Schell won her 100th career game as Fremont Ross beat Norwalk, 9-1.

"I guess I'm going to have to stay for 200," said Schell, in her sixth year.

It was the fourth straight win for the Little Giants, who improved to 10-1.

Pelfrey, a junior, struck out the side three times and came within one out of hurling the team's fourth straight shutout before the Truckers scored in the bottom of the seventh.

"She was throwing pretty good, and she's going to have to because we have four games coming up in each of the next two weeks and the following week we'll have sectionals," Schell said.

"Nicki could be a No. 1 pitcher for a lot of schools."

Pelfrey surrendered just two hits, both to Nathalie Ickes.

Her 15 strikeouts surpassed the previous Ross record of 13 that Jessica Rollins set in 1995 against Springfield.

Ross scored two runs in each of the first, third, fifth and seventh innings on just five hits. Losing pitcher Kristen Obermeyer issued 12 walks and hit three batters.

Ross's Jodi Fick had three of her team's hits and three RBI.

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inning to break open a 5-0 lead and defeat Bettsville in the Golden Bears' Invitational Tournament.

Port Clinton capitalized on the 19 walks issued by three Bettsville pitchers.

Gibsonburg 10, Bettsville 7

GIBSONBURG — Amanda Shull pitched a four-hitter and Nikki Reno scored three runs as the Golden Bears (6-10) won.

Gibsonburg mustered just three hits — a single by Corinna Hemminger and triples by Krista Reiter and Megan Wassil — off losing pitcher Rachel Riley, but they took advantage of eight walks.

Port Clinton 5, Gibsonburg 3

GIBSONBURG — In the championship game of the Gibsonburg Invitational, Sarah Harman survived nine Gibsonburg hits as the Redskins prevailed.

Port Clinton, which finished second in the tournament last year, scored in its first at-bat and added two runs in the second. After Gibsonburg cut the lead to 3-2, the Redskins added single runs in the sixth and seventh innings.

"We played good defense all tournament," said PC coach Vicki Gresh. "We had good pitching and timely hitting. It was a confidence-builder for the kids."

Defeat teaches Giants a lesson

News-Messenger reports

Fremont Ross softball coach Cheryl Schell was eager to see what her team could do against top-notch competition.

After the Little Giants made seven errors and absorbed a 9-8 loss to Notre Dame Academy Monday, Schell knows where her team stands with the sectional draw looming Wednesday night.

"We needed this game," she said. "I'd like to have won it, but it was good for our defense to

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realize we've got to execute and every one of my kids left the field learning something (Monday) — unfortunately by an error. You hate to see us hit that hard, but we created a lot of the grief with the errors."

The loss snapped Ross's four-game winning streak and dropped the Little Giants to 10-2. Notre Dame, which committed six errors before winning when Emily Waller scored on an error in the top of the seventh, has lost just once in 12 games.

Trailing 6-3, Ross tied the game in the bottom of the fifth when Jenny Schaaf cleared the bases with a triple.

"I was happy to see that and happy to see that we didn't roll over and die as bad as we were playing defensively," Schell said.

Michele Smith had three hits and scored twice, while Jodi Fick and Erin Lytle each went 2-for-4. Fick drove in two runs.

Jodi Kusmer (8-1) took the loss, giving up 15 hits but allowing just three earned runs.

The Little Giants continue their plight against ranked teams today when they host Bellevue.

Slark strong-arms Giants

Bellevue pitcher allows just one hit

By MICHAEL BOSI
Staff writer

If you're going to learn, you might as well learn from the best.

That's just about all the Fremont Ross softball team can thank Michelle Slark for.

The 6-foot-1 Bellevue senior came within a bunt single of a no-hitter as the Lady Red pinned a 4-0 shutout on Ross Tuesday at Alumni Field. It was the second loss in as many games for the Little Giants (10-3).

And this is Ross coach Cheryl Schell's idea of "fun?"

"I'm having more fun this week and we're 0-2 than I did last week when we were winning 9-0. It's more real softball — the way it's supposed to be played," Schell said, alluding to Monday's 9-8 loss to 11-1 Notre Dame Academy.

Well, party on, coach, but you may not want to invite Slark to too many more *soirées*. She tends to spoil the fun.

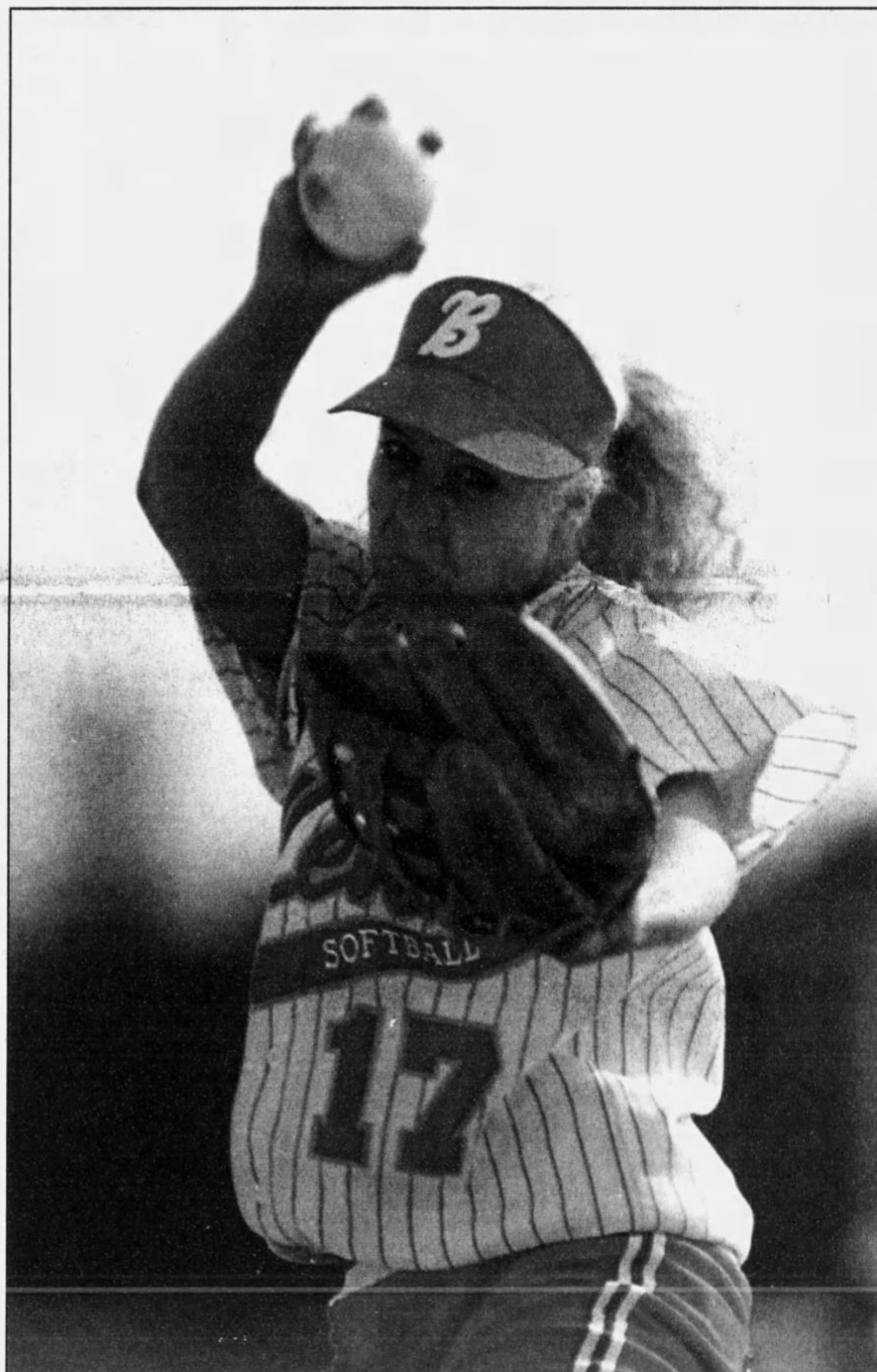
Unless, of course, striking out 11 times, having only one runner reach second base and barely making contact on numerous other occasions is classified as a good time.

After issuing her second walk against the sixth batter she faced, Slark retired 17 of Ross's last 18 hitters. Leadoff hitter Jenny Schaaf squelched Slark's no-hit bid with one out in the sixth by bunting her way on with two strikes.

With two speeds — fast and faster — and an occasional drop-your-drawers changeup, Slark struck out five Ross hitters more than once.

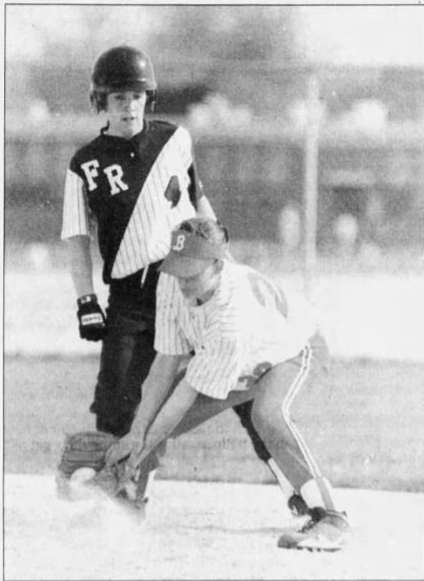
"I depend a lot on my defense, and I think they did a great job," Slark said. "It was a team effort. I don't like to take a lot of credit for myself."

Bellevue (13-2), which jeopardized its No. 8 Division II ranking last week when it sand-



MICHELLE SLARK of Bellevue fires a pitch against Fremont Ross Tuesday. She allowed just one hit as the Red-men won 4-0, sending Ross to its second straight loss. News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

See BELLEVUE, B3



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

JENNY SCHAAF is safe at second base Tuesday as Bellevue's Erica Caranfa fields the ball. SchAAF had bunted her way on base, the only hit Ross managed against Bellevue pitcher Michelle Slark.

Bellevue hands Ross its second consecutive loss

Continued from B1

wiched losses around coach Walt Snyder's 200th career victory, scored the only run it needed against Jodi Kusmer on a fluky error in the first inning.

On Bridget Krupp's two-out single to right field, Ross right fielder Jodi Fick's throw hit Erika Englund in the back as she slid into third. The ball caromed out of play, allowing Englund to score.

In the second, two runs scored as Slark laid down a safety squeeze bunt before Ross threw the ball around. Leadoff hitter Janisha Chumley then reached on a two-base error before Englund stroked an RBI double to right center field to cap the scoring.

Kusmer (8-2) settled into a groove and allowed just two hits the rest of the game. She stranded Holly McGue on third base after McGue's leadoff double in the fifth.

"I told Jodi, 'Learn.' These are the games you learn from. It's good for her and it's good for my hitters," Schell said.

As if she doesn't have enough arsenal, Slark unleashed a nasty palm ball several times. If you didn't know otherwise, you'd swear it was a mistake.

At this point of her career, Slark doesn't make many mistakes.

"She's been pretty good," said Bellevue coach Walt Snyder.

Pretty good? Snyder should

be arrested for such an understatement.

"Last year she had a lot of control problems and she worked awful hard over the summer and she and her mother probably pitched every day," Snyder said. "If someone works at something as hard as she does, something good's going to come out of it, and it did for her."

"Cocky," "intimidating" and "rude" were some of the descriptions Ross players had on the bench as Slark continued her onslaught.

Schell said she wishes her team showed some of those same traits.

"We need to play these games and we need to see these pitchers," she said. "We're young. If we ever want to go anywhere and get any farther in districts, we've got to see this pitching. We've got to get in and learn to get confidence and get an attitude to hit that kind of pitcher."

"I'll take a loss to learn."

At least she's having fun.

LADY RED NOTES: Englund, who departed the game after re-aggravating an injury on her double, will attend Ohio Dominican College on a basketball and softball scholarship. ... Normally a team laden with seniors, Bellevue had two freshmen, Becky Moore and Erica Caranfa, in the lineup, with catcher Julie Buck (foot) temporarily shelved and shortstop Jennifer Swartz (dislocated shoulder) done for the season.

Bizarre play helps Ross beat Findlay

By **MICHAEL BOSI**
Staff writer

The most timely hit of the Fremont Ross girls softball team's 7-6 victory over Findlay Friday may have come off one of the Little Giants' junior varsity baseball bats.

The bizarre timing of a foul ball from the Alumni Park baseball field to the softball diamond turned a routine ground ball into chaos for the Trojans and opened the flood gates for a spirited Little Giants comeback victory.

The most timely hit off a *softball* bat: Jenny Schaaf's game-winning triple in the sixth inning.

It's prom weekend for Ross, and right now, the most beautiful lady is named Luck.

"There was a lot of luck all through the game for both teams. Both teams booted the ball around," said Ross coach Cheryl Schell, whose team holds a No. 1 sectional seed.

By virtue of winning for the first time in three years on pre-prom night, Ross has a two-game lead over Oregon Clay

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with time winding down in the Great Lakes League season.

"It's actually a major accomplishment for us," Schell joked.

What's even more impressive than a bunch of shiny, happy people in prom dresses is the performance Schaaf has turned in since moving to the leadoff spot earlier this week.

Schaaf had a bases-loaded triple that nearly brought Ross back in a loss against Notre Dame Monday. The sophomore center fielder broke up Bellevue's Michelle Slark's no-hitter Tuesday. And Wednesday's triple drove the dagger into the Trojans.

With Ross trailing 6-3 after watching Findlay score three runs in the top of the sixth, Tiffany Nitschke fused a two-out rally when she drove in Jamie Hinkle with an infield single. Hinkle (2-for-4) had led off the inning with a fence-denting triple.

See ROSS, B3

Ross rallies for victory

Continued from B1

"I thought we were done when I looked in the dugout, then Hinkle rips one over the left fielder's head and boom, we're back to life," Schell said.

JV-callup Ainsley Watkins, in a relatively calm at-bat compared to the fourth inning (read on, folks), drew a walk before Schaaf's liner to center squirted past Courtney Ritchie. Nitschke and Watkins both scored, and a wild relay allowed Schaaf to come tumbling across the plate.

Batting leadoff has served to relax Schaaf at the plate.

"A lot more," she said after going 2-for-4.

None of Schaaf's heroics would have been possible if not for The Foul Ball.

In the fourth inning, with rain drops falling on their heads, the Little Giants got on the board as Michele Smith scored when second baseman Essence Smith dropped Nitschke's bases-loaded line drive. The next batter, Watkins, dribbled a grounder back to the mound.

But at the same time as pitcher Ashley Ammons bobbled the ball — give or take a split-second, depending on your perspective — a foul ball from the baseball field went flying in front of Ammons in the direction of first base. With two runs in, all hands were safe and the game was tied at 3.

Plate umpire Greg Van Ness — whose perspective counts most — offered an explanation.

"The play was already in action," Van Ness said. "If we felt the ball had interfered with the play, then we would have called it. The team that hits the ball, why penalize them?"

Findlay coach Kevin Haught was less convinced.

"As an official, first of all, you've got to worry about kids getting hurt and then worry about whether she can field the ball cleanly because that ball came right across her line of vision," Haught said.

"That's not the call that cost us the game particularly, but they scored a good number of runs off that."

The inning erased a 3-0 Find-

lay lead that the Trojans (11-5, 6-3 GLL) had gained in the first inning via Lisa Dunfee's two-run double and a throwing error. Not the way the Little Giants wanted to go about breaking a two-game losing streak.


"We don't step on the field ready to play ball at home," Schell said. "It's like we want to see what everybody has, and all of a sudden we're ready to play again. We cannot afford that."

But Jodi Kusmer (9-2) settled into a groove, retiring nine in a row before Samantha Williams' leadoff single in the fourth.

With rain falling heavily, two errors and a two-run double from Ritchie led to Findlay's three-run sixth.

It wasn't until after Kusmer stranded runners on second and third in the seventh inning — thanks to Hinkle's third heads-up play at shortstop — that the Little Giants (11-3, 7-0 GLL) celebrated their second win over Findlay this season.

LITTLE GIANTS NOTES: It was Hinkle's first game back after missing the last two after having wisdom teeth removed. ... Ross and Findlay could meet one more time. It would be in the district final.



**In Memory
of
MICHAEL L.
HOLMAN**

Dec. 14, 1950 ~ May 3, 1995

Two years have come and gone but it seems like yesterday you were here with me. How I miss you. Not a day goes by that I don't think of you! The times we shared together the laughs we had with family and friends were the best!

Life was good to you but so short. In that time we did share many things together, I will never forget them.

Tears still flow for you today




Photo courtesy
of Fred Felhaber

Schaaf keys Ross win; Wildcats walk past Bears

News-Messenger reports

OREGON — Jenny Schaaf accounted for three-quarters of Fremont Ross's offense against Oregon Clay, driving in two runs and scoring another in a 4-0 Great Lakes League win.

Schaaf (3-for-4) led off the game with a base hit, then scored on a double by Nicki Pelfrey (2-for-3) to give the Little Giants a 1-0 lead. Ross (12-3, 8-0 GLL) added a run in the second, fourth and sixth innings for the win.

"Since she's been there she has really been hitting the ball," Ross coach Cheryl Schell said of Schaaf. "She scored a run and knocked in two in a game with only four runs. That's saying something."

Jodi Kusmer (10-2) shut down the Eagles attack, striking out seven while allowing just two walks and three hits.

Ross plays Sandusky today in the Division I sectional tournament.

In other games Tuesday:

Woodmore 23, Gibsonburg 11

GIBSONBURG — The Wild-

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cats cruised past the hosts by virtue of 21 walks, five hit-batters and 10 hits for a Suburban Lakes League victory.

Becky Lee (6-3) went the first four innings to get the victory. At the plate, she had two hits and a pair of RBI.

Marissa Mitchell and Dawn Karchner each had two hits. Mitchell drove in three runs and Karchner scored four as Woodmore upped its record to 13-5, 7-3 SLL.

"To be 13-5 at this point, I'm real happy with the way we're playing," said Woodmore coach Mike Lee.

Amanda Cottrell had four of the Golden Bears' 11 hits, and Krista Reiter added another two.

Gibsonburg fell to 7-13, 1-9 SLL.

Old Fort 3, St. Wendelin 0

OLD FORT — The Stockaders backed winning pitcher Monica Whitman (13-0) with errorless

defense as they won their 21st consecutive game and ninth in the Midland Athletic League.

Each team had five hits.

Randi Whitman had two hits and an RBI.

"The game was well-played," Old Fort coach Ron Rau said. "We had great defense."

Mandy Corcoran (5-6) took the loss for the Mohawks (6-8, 3-4 MAL).

Old Fort gained some breathing room when it widened a 1-0 lead with a two-run sixth inning, courtesy of a two-run base hit from Heather Cleveland.

Northwood 13, Bettsville 6

NORTHWOOD — The Rangers scored six runs in the second inning to take control in their non-league victory over Bettsville.

Amy Gladieux had two hits, including a home run, for Northwood.

Kristi Blausey and Char Soto each had two of Bettsville's five hits.

Ross clinches GLL tie

News-Messenger reports

Fremont Ross clinched at least a share of the Great Lakes League softball championship with a 3-0 win against Bedford at Alumni Field.

The Little Giants (14-3, 9-0 GLL) scored one run each in the first, third and fifth innings and Jodi Kusmer struck out 11 batters on a cold, windy afternoon.

Nicki Pelfrey (2-for-2, RBI) and Jenny Schaaf each tripled for Ross, which can win the league outright by beating Fostoria

Tuesday.

In other games Friday:

Gibsonburg 6, Genoa 2

GENOA — The Golden Bears scored four runs in their last at-bat to stop a three-game losing streak with a Suburban Lakes League upset victory over Genoa.

Playing for one run to break a 2-2 tie, Gibsonburg (8-15, 2-10 SLL) instead got four in the seventh to give winning pitcher Jenny Taulker plenty of breathing room.

Woodmore 7, Northwood 1

Giants win league title

News-Messenger reports

FOSTORIA — Fremont Ross won the Great Lakes League softball title outright Tuesday when it whipped last-place Fostoria, 9-1.

The Little Giants (15-3, 10-0 GLL) need wins against Toledo Whitmer Thursday and Napoleon Friday to secure the school's first undefeated GLL season since 1994, the year the team advanced to the Division I Regional final.

Emily Dowell (2-for-2, 2 RBI) provided the most punch for the Little Giants, but it was the bottom of the lineup which started the team's two best rallies.

Leading 1-0 in the third inning, No. 8 hitter Char Horn walked and Tiffany Nitschke, batting ninth, was hit by a pitch. Dowell, Ross's No. 2 hitter, hit a two-run triple in the three-run inning.

Ross did not score again until the seventh, when Horn led off a five-run inning.

Winning pitcher Jodi Kusmer (11-2) allowed four hits.

With the title won, the Little Giants can set their sights on Ashland, their opponent in Tuesday's Division I district game at Tiffin Columbian. The Arrows knocked Ross out in last year's district finals.

In other action Tuesday:

Genoa 5, Margaretta 4

Div. II Sectional Championship

GENOA — Genoa claimed the

first sectional championship in school history Tuesday night with a 5-4 Division II win over Margaretta.

Genoa collected 10 singles off Margaretta senior right-hander Sarah Lowery to advance to Monday's district tournament at Lions Park in Castalia. Andrea Apel and Kris Cordell had two hits apiece and each drove in a run, while Lynn Clere added a pair of hits to pace Genoa, 13-7. Margaretta fell to 8-9.

St. Joe 4, Lorain Catholic 2

LORAIN — The Crimson Streaks took a four-run lead and were able to strand the bases loaded in the bottom of the seventh as they downed Lorain Catholic.

"Defensively, the game was well played," St. Joe coach Sandy Adelsperger said after her team committed just one error.

St. Joe, which scored three times in the top of the fourth, improved to 6-14, while Lorain Catholic dropped to 5-7.

Angie Weichman and Ann Foos each had two singles, as St. Joe had seven hits off losing pitcher Liz Cox.

Clyde 5, Edison 1

CLYDE — Kristi Mounts pitched a three-hitter and Clyde capitalized on seven Edison errors for a Sandusky Bay Con-

Kusmer near perfect for Ross

News-Messenger reports

Jodi Kusmer came within one hit of a perfect game Friday at Alumni Field, blanking Napoleon, 4-0, for the Fremont Ross softball team's 11th Great Lakes League win.

Kusmer (14-2) struck out seven and did not issue a walk. Napoleon was hitless until the sixth inning, when Katherine Updergraff singled up the middle with two outs.

Nicki Pelfrey provided the most offense, going 3-for-3 and driving in two Ross runs.

The Little Giants (16-3), who clinched the GLL title with Tuesday's win against Fostoria, need one more league win to complete an unbeaten GLL season. The Giants are scheduled to play Toledo Whitmer Thursday, but Ross may have to reschedule or cancel if it advances to the district final, which is slated to be played the same day.

In other softball action:

Clyde 17, Perkins 2

SANDUSKY — Jacki Swaisgood hit a home run, double and single in Clyde's win against Sandusky Bay Conference opponent Perkins.

Clyde (17-4, 10-2 SBC) had 11 hits and capitalized on 14 walks.

Kristy Nieset tripled and

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drove in three runs for the Fliers, who also got two hits from Erin Dirlam, Theresa Gierhart and Sara Oakleaf.

Woodmore 5, Eastwood 3

PEMBERVILLE — Woodmore broke out of its offensive slump just in time to beat Eastwood in a Suburban Lakes League matchup.

The Wildcats (19-6, 11-4 SLL) were shut out for the first four innings, stretching their scoreless streak to 12 innings.

"I was getting a little nervous," Woodmore coach Mike Lee said. "But the girls hung in there, stayed positive. And good things are going to happen when you stay positive."

Trailing 3-0, the Wildcats scored one run in the fifth and sixth innings to narrow the deficit to one run.

Kristen Robenstine led off the seventh with a base hit and pinch runner Susan Robey moved to second on a Katie Busdiecker sacrifice bunt. Winning pitcher Becky Lee singled Robey to third and, following Lee's steal of second base, Laura Runion drove home both with a single. Amy Perkins completed the scoring

with an RBI single.

Lee (9-3) allowed three hits in the first two innings, then limited the Eagles to one hit and no runs the rest of the game.

Oak Harbor 12, Edison 4

MILAN — Erin Radsick and Anne Greener combined on a three-hitter as the Rockets continued their unblemished cruise through the Sandusky Bay Conference Friday.

Oak Harbor pounded out 14 hits, and it scored seven runs in the first inning against losing pitcher Heather Seibert.

Stacy Honaker (3-for-4) had an RBI double in the first and Jamie Seeger had a two-run double in her first at-bat. Shana Matzinger and Marge Gutilla added RBI hits.

"(Edison) was one of the teams that could have beaten us. We played very aggressive (Friday) night and we had solid defense," Seeger said.

Tracey Demangos also had three hits, as Oak Harbor tuned up for Monday night's district semifinal against Bucyrus, which beat Bellevue, 3-2, at Willard Friday.

Radsick worked six innings and did not allow a hit. Greener surrendered Edison's four runs and three hits in the fourth.