

2019-2020 Season Review

CULTURE CHANGE IS SLOW, BUT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE AS THE BOYS' HOOPS SEASON NEARS TIP-OFF

by Rich McGowan | Nov 27, 2019 | Boys Basketball



FREMONT – As the Fremont Ross boys basketball coach, John Cahill, enters his second season on the Little Giants' sideline, reshaping the program's culture remains Job 1.

But, as Ross prepares to host Toledo Waite Friday at 7:30 in its season-opener, with progress being made on the culture, Cahill hopes that progress will carry over to the team's play on the court.

"The offseason was much better," Cahill said. "Last year we had a hard time getting guys to lift, and we made a real commitment to be in the weight room – and that's from when we finished in the spring last year, though the summer and through the fall. I would say we made real strides in trying to change the culture."



Ben Gedeon

"We're really holding ourselves accountable. We don't really have rules; we have standards. And, so far, they've done a good job of being accountable to themselves and to us."

A team that finished 5-18 last season, Ross returns only one starter, senior Ben Gedeon. Ross will have to replace its shifty point guard, Jabryis Heidelberg; its prominent post presence, Bryce McKinstry; and its leading scorer, Bryce Root. Though its losses leave a void, Cahill hopes a more cohesive unit will be able to offset the loss in skill.

"Last year's seniors, they were good kids, but we just never all quite got on the same page – and I'll take some of that blame – but I don't think we ever quite got all that we could have out of that group, talent-wise," Cahill said. "This group, on paper, probably isn't as talented. We'll be an underdog in every game we play, but the games aren't played on paper, and I think this group has great chemistry and great togetherness."

"If you study Fremont basketball, Fremont might not always win, but they've always battled. I think what we're looking to for is compete hard every day in practice and games. So far, they've been good at doing that."



Kang Ou



Connor Malan

In Gedeon, Ross returns as an intense spot-up perimeter shooter and leader. He will be joined by fellow seniors, Connor Malan, who will be bringing grit and sandpaper down low, and Kang Ou, another capable shooter.

Underclassmen will play a prominent role in 2019-20. A trio of sophomores, Kahji Pickens, Kurt Harrison and Labronze Barnett will all see heavy minutes – if not start.

“Right now (Pickens is) starting at point guard for us, and that is something that, coming into the season, I don’t think we were necessarily expecting,” Cahill said. “He’s very confident with the ball, hasn’t given us a ton of turnovers, and his defensive effort has been through the roof. He’s really competed hard every day. I think he’s earned it.

“Kurt is going to give us a good presence in the post. He’s really stepped up over the summer and gotten strong. On our Indiana trip, he played extremely well and held his own in the post. Bronzie got his feet wet last year; it was a big jump for him, but he hung in there. He’s steady, he rebounds well, he defends and he’s getting his 3-point shooting touch back.”

A mix of juniors remain and will be in the mix for minutes as well, including Josh Rhea, Jonathan Szymanowski, Jared Adkins, Mikey Lather and Dion Bradley, as well as freshman Kaden Holmes.

As Year 2 of the Cahill era nears its tip-off, the Little Giant alum said his goals of the season are mixed between the intangible and quantifiable, but both take the long-view.

“If we do our core standards, I will be really happy at the end of the year, regardless of wins and losses,” he said. “If I think we’ve helped a lot of young men, if they get to the level where they have some level of belief and they’re playing hard together and they’re getting good grades and all of those things.

“At Clyde I took for granted cutting down nets. We haven’t cut one down here in quite some time. To win a sectional title would be something we haven’t done in a long time. This isn’t something you’ll hear me say a lot, but we’re young and inexperienced, so I don’t expect us to be playing our best basketball today. But with a month, two months, three months, four months of them being around our coaches, I think by March we could be a tough team to beat. The seniors have, for the most part, bought into everything we’ve said since we’ve been here, and I would love to see them have an opportunity to cut a net down. We would love to cut a sectional net down.”

EFFORT INCONSISTENT IN LITTLE GIANT LOSS TO ST. FRANCIS

by [Rich McGowan](#) | Dec 11, 2019 | [Boys Basketball](#)



FREMONT – Hosting one of the Three Rivers Athletic Conference favorites, the Fremont Ross boys basketball team knew it had a steep hill to climb Tuesday night.

So as the Little Giants tipped off against St. Francis de Sales, coach John Cahill wanted to see his team put forth four quarters of competitiveness and battle the Knights to the end.

And Cahill saw that – in parts. The final score went about as expected, a 69-42 loss for the Little Giants, but Cahill wanted to see more from his team.

"I felt like in the first half we didn't do the physical things I felt we needed to do," Cahill said. "I felt like the moment got a little too big for us. For a lot of those guys, it's their first time they've been out on the floor against a top-flight team."

"With their size and athleticism, they create problems," Cahill said of St. Francis. "I think it'll be a great learning tool for us. We've seen this now."

Early on, Ross looked up to the challenge. They remained close through most of the first quarter, trailing 11-7, until the Knights surged late for eight unanswered points in about 40 seconds enroute to a 19-7 lead entering the second quarter. The Knights continued the momentum, building on the lead with a 10-2 run over the first 2:30 of the second quarter and eventually took a 33-16 halftime lead.

By the middle of the third quarter, however, Ross found some footing and started to battle again with the Knights. Ross opened the fourth quarter on a 7-2 run and trimmed the deficit to 15.

"The beginning of the third was bad – but by the end of the third, we played harder and then, in the fourth, we got to the point where it was workable," Cahill said. "Not that I'm thinking we're going to make a huge comeback and win, but it's possible. Then we got away from what we were doing."

"There is going to be a lot of learning for this team, but I don't want our learning to come through effort, and I felt like, tonight especially, we got wide-eyed and just watched shots and didn't expect to compete."

Things won't get any easier, however, as Ross hosts another TRAC power on Friday, St. John's.

"It's going to be a tough ask, but we're going to put in two solid days of work and come back and hopefully put on a better product Friday night," Cahill said.



Ross' Ben Gedeon steals the ball. DOUG HISE

Ross basketball buy in to Cahill improves

Matthew Horn
Fremont News-Messenger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Fremont Ross boys basketball coach John Cahill wasn't sure about the ratio at first.

The more time passes, Cahill believes the mental aspects of basketball outweigh the physical 4:1.

Cahill, entering his second year at the Little Giants' helm, has a young group that lacks varsity experience. With the exception of senior Ben Gedeon, who happens to be an ideal on-court leader.

"The mental part is so big," Cahill said. "We're not crazy athletic, but we can box out and set picks. The mental is four times as important. If you don't believe you're tired, you're probably not tired. Mental capability."

The program has six standards encompassing belief, confidence, responsibility and timeliness. Players are expected to set examples for future Little Giants.

They can do this by sharing, sacrificing and supporting. They're expected to play with enthusiasm and intelligence.

They need to compete with pride representing Ross. Cahill, who is in the Little Giants' Hall of Fame, knows what all of this looks like as a player as well.

"Our big thing is culture," Cahill said. "The way we handle ourselves on and off the court. Last year, we were our own worst enemy. Be a good teammate. Show up early. You have to be a good

student-athlete and role model.

"We talk about being a smart team. There's running, jumping and dunking. Then, there's the mental. Believe in your team. Believe in yourself. Keep battling. Share the ball. Good shots."

Ross followed the map since last season.

"It's a guide to how we hopefully are living our lives," Cahill said. "Since March, they've tried to do what I've asked. They've worked hard. They listen. We'll be an underdog, but they'll compete."

"It's a group who bought into what we tried to do in Year 1. We struggled with some of my expectations. Everybody has a lot of room for growth."

Gedeon is the only returning starter. He played junior varsity as a sophomore.

"Last year, he was a spot up shooter," Cahill said. "He put in the hard work in the weight room and on the court. He starts at point guard but he can play the 4. He has to lead and defend and rebound."

"We ask a lot. With his dad a coach for so long, he has that savvy. He's an unofficial part of the coaching staff. He has to wear a lot of hats and be a Swiss Army Knife."

Senior Connor Malan, junior Mikey Lather and freshman Kaden Holmes are currently starters. Sophomores LaBronze Barnett and Kurt Harrison have alternated starts based on match ups.

Senior Kang Ou and junior Jared Adkins are key reserves. Holmes and Ad-

kins weren't even in the preseason varsity team picture, before surging into prominent roles.

Adkins is a shooter who can stretch the floor. He and sophomore point guard Kahji Pickens started a few games this season.

Freshmen Anthony Vann, Bryson Hammer and De'Mar Moore are in the mix to contribute.

"We've played different lineups and different groups," Cahill said. "We've played hard, which should be a given. We've been unselfish. Compete and play hard. Share the ball. We need to do that every night."

"I've been happy with those two aspects."

The Little Giants won two of five games to start the season, including a victory over Oregon Clay in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference. The players' adjustment period to Cahill should be mostly complete.

Habits have improved.

"With me being new last year, there were different expectations, different coaches, different systems," Cahill said. "Different terminology. There are similarities, but they understand where I'm coming from."

"In Year 2 it got better and people showed up to work. We're trying to create a family. The three seniors have done a nice job setting a tone of hard work and the things we're preaching."

Cahill replaced longtime coach Mark

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Gedeon at the helm. Gedeon, who wanted to take a step back, returns as an assistant.

DeMar Moore and Issian Redding are also assistants. Moore played at Bowling Green State University and Redding at Murray State.

"With those guys coaching them every day, we'll get better," Cahill said. "We're young and inexperienced. I'd expect us to get better. We're doing a lot of

teaching every day. You have to show patience, but it's fun."

When Cahill was new to coaching, the 4:1 ratio didn't resonate. Many of his teams, including daughter and Clyde all-time leading scorer Amanda Cahill, needed few reminders.

Ross won five games last season.

"We haven't cut down a net at Ross in a long time," Cahill said. "We'll have some ups and downs, but we can be tough to beat in February. We have to stay the course."

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COLD STREAKS DOOM LITTLE GIANTS IN LOSS TO FIGHTING IRISH

by Rich McGowan | Feb 1, 2020 | Boys Basketball



FREMONT – A prolonged scoring drought against a quality opponent can make winning any game a massive challenge.

A game with two such droughts, however, rarely ends happily.

Though the Fremont Ross boys basketball team remained competitive Friday night against Toledo Central Catholic despite an early cold streak, a second rough stretch to end the third quarter proved too great an obstacle for the Little Giants in a 68-47 loss to the Fighting Irish.

“Tonight stings a little bit because I really felt like we were primed to give a performance that would really make (Central Catholic) battle,” Ross coach John Cahill said. “I thought we competed hard, but by the end of the game none of the starters were in anymore and one of our goals was to make them play all four quarters tonight.”

After trading baskets to a 10-9 start to the game, Central Catholic went on an 11-0 run over four minutes late in the first quarter to 24-12 lead into the second quarter.

Central built on its lead early in the second, pushing its advantage into the high teens and threatening to blow the game open. But Ross battled back and narrowed the deficit back down to 10 at halftime, 36-26.

Ross came within eight points 90 seconds into the third quarter, but then hit a wall. The Little Giants went scoreless for the rest of the quarter while Central compiled another 11-0 run en route to a 19-point lead entering the fourth quarter, putting the game away.

“We did something we haven’t done in a while, we got careless with the ball there in the third quarter,” Cahill said. “We had a lot of possessions where we didn’t get a shot and turned it over a lot. We’ve been more consistent lately, but we’re still fighting consistency as a whole.”

Sophomore LaBronze Barnett continued his stellar play of late, leading the Little Giants with 15 points. Freshman Anthony Vann added 10.

“He played very, very well again tonight,” Cahill said of Barnett. “He was our one guy that actually got to the foul line tonight. We shot 10 (free throws) and he shot five. He was pressuring them to make calls. He’s done a nice job. I think we’re trending in the right direction most nights. The kids are doing better things.”

Having completed a busy nine-game stretch, the Little Giants (5-13 overall, 2-9 TRAC) get a chance to catch their breath, with just one game in their next 13 days, that being at Findlay next Friday.

“It’s been an incredibly busy January,” Cahill said. “I think it’ll give us some time to teach and work and maybe fix some of the things we didn’t do very well tonight.”

Toledo Central Catholic 68, Fremont Ross 47

CC| 24—12—16—16 68

FR| 12—14—7—14 47

FREMONT ROSS (47)

LaBronze Barnett 15, Ben Gedeon 3, Jared Adkins 6, Mikey Lather 1, Kurt Harrison 5, Anthony Vann 10, Kaden Holmes 7.



Ross' Kaden Holmes puts up a shot. DOUG HISE

Freshmen Holmes, Vann step up for Ross

Matthew Horn
Fremont News-Messenger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Fremont Ross has five wins in 17 games.

The Little Giants won two of their last three.

"Our young guys have played well," Ross coach John Cahill said. "We're getting a little juice. We've gone younger of late. Some of it is learning to play varsity basketball. Kaden and Anthony are up from eighth-grade."

"There's a big difference, especially in the TRAC. It's been challenging. It's fun. They keep getting better."

Freshmen Kaden Holmes and Anthony Vann combined for 49 points in an 83-70 victory over Springfield.

"We started playing more efficient," Vann said. "Me and Kaden played eighth-grade last year. Labronze had a

little taste of varsity. We didn't have that. It took a little time to mesh and get on the same page."

Holmes scored 25 points, sophomore Labronze Barnett 12 and classmate Kurt Harrison 10 in a 63-56 victory over Marion Harding. The quartet, which was on the court to finish the game, is gaining invaluable experience together.

"People say the future is bright," Cahill said. "We'd like the future to be now. We're a team that maybe could surprise some people in the tournament with our growth. We're getting better."

Holmes starts at shooting guard with senior point guard Ben Gedeon.

"He's got an 'it' factor," Cahill said of Holmes. "He had back-to-back 20-plus point games and he doesn't change. He wants to be a good teammate. He can jump. He's a good ballhandler."

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Ross' Anthony Vann looks to score.
DOUG HISE

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"He had a pretty complete skill set. I didn't think he'd be playing at this high a level. He's our leading scorer (10.8 points). If you game plan for us, you have to be aware of him."

Vann was inserted as a starting forward immediately upon joining varsity for the first game against Findlay. He occasionally plays point guard.

"He played well," Cahill said. "He earned it. He gives us a ton of energy. Anthony is 14-years old. He's guarding 18-year old men. Since he's been up, he's second in scoring (9.6 points).

"He competes and rises to the moment. He made three 3s against Springfield. That's not something we saw in the summer. He's impressed with his toughness. He's worn a lot of hats well."

Cahill ran Vann with varsity at practice one day and things took off from there.

"I wasn't trying to rush," Vann said. "I was going to play hard, no matter the level. I don't have a specific role. I can play five (center) if you want. Two (shooting guard) if you want. I'll put my heart into it to do what you ask."

Vann, who is athletic to create shots and space, improved his shot selection and ability to finish. He sees the floor better, although the varsity game is faster.

Vann also notices the increased



Ross' Labronze Barnett looks to score. DOUG HISE

physicality, but doesn't shy away.

Barnett came off the bench early in the season and is a starter at forward.

"He fills the stat sheet up," Cahill said. "Assists. Rebounds. Run things at point. He's a good defender. He's a scorer. He can do a lot at a pretty high level. He's tough. Bronze can score and do a lot of other things to enhance our chances of winning."

Harrison, who has starting experience, typically is the first post off the bench.

Gedeon shifted from shooting guard

to point guard this season. He leads the team in rebounds and assists, while averaging 8.4 points.

"Ben's taken on any role asked," Cahill said. "Seniors Connor Malan and Kang Ou have been leaders too, to sacrifice and lead the program in the direction we want to go. We're playing better, but we're not winning a ton."

"We're changing the culture. We've played ball you can be proud of. It's led by the seniors. I'm proud of the growth."

Cahill's coaching staff pushes for development and retention and recogni-

tion.

"They're good," he said. "They work hard every day. If you're around us, you have to be tough and work hard. They've bought in."

Cahill said the four underclassmen have the potential to continue their careers in college.

"They can continue to get better," he said. "They've gotten comfortable with one another. There's not a ton of ego. They like each other. Everyone is happy with their role and want the others to succeed."

Vann knows Ross is typically an underdog in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference. The Little Giants share a chip on their shoulders.

"The message we're trying to send," Vann said, "no matter who we play, we'll give it our all like it's our last game. Strength difference, size difference, weight, quickness – anything – we are going to put our all into the game."

Cahill is in his second year at the helm.

"We're looking forward to the future," Vann said. "Our goal is to cut down a net. If we continue to grow together and learn. We have something going. We're coming closer, like a family."

"We're seeing each other and learning strengths and weaknesses. We have three seniors. Most teams have upperclassmen. When we come back, we'll be even better."

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