

Defiance pitcher Ks 15 Giants in tourney

News-Messenger reports

FINDLAY — When Fremont Ross analyzed its field of opponents in the Division I district baseball tournament, it thought it had a legitimate chance for its first trip to the regionals since 1988.

But Defiance's Tom Ward threw a curve — many, in fact — into the Little Giants' road to the Sweet 16.

The junior, who returned as the only Bulldogs pitcher to have won a game last season, struck out 15 and threw a four-hitter to lead his team to a 10-3 victory over Ross in Tuesday's semifinals.

"The kid kept us off balance the whole night," said Ross coach Dan Fought, who worked his final tournament game as a Little Giant before he'll depart to be head football coach at Benjamin Logan High School.

"(Ward) was throwing the curveball at any count. He doubled up on it, started batters out

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with it and we wouldn't lay off that pitch. We took the fastball for strikes and swung at the bad curveball."

And by the time the Little Giants (11-8) finally got on the board, via Michael Hickey's three-run homer in the bottom of the sixth, Defiance had already built a 9-0 lead.

Much of the damage came in the first inning, when starter and loser Billy Sheets (4-3) was the victim of a four-run Bulldogs rally.

Christian Shavely, Chris Zirkle and Chris Maccubbin had RBI singles in the first inning.

"Every break they could

catch, they caught — and it went against us," Fought said.

All 13 of Defiance's hits were singles.

Meanwhile, Ward struck out seven of Ross's nine hitters twice. Only Hickey and Brett Hufford escaped without fanning. That kept the optimism at a minimum when Hickey clubbed his second homer of the season.

"Yeah, we were down 9-3 and guys had multiple strikeouts," Fought said. "The kid was in control the entire time. (The home run) brought life, but you still have only three outs to play with."

Ross now turns its focus to finishing the Great Lakes League season on a strong note. The next hurdle is Thursday at Napoleon, followed by Friday's game against Toledo Whitmer, which was ranked second in the Div. I state coaches poll this week.