

DIVISION I VOLLEYBALL DISTRICT SEMIFINAL ■ FREMONT ROSS VS. SANDUSKY AT MANSFIELD SENIOR

Little Giants hope to extend program's surge

BY KEVIN SHIELDS
Sports writer

FREMONT — When Lauren Blasko arrived in Fremont from Michigan, she had no idea what to expect in her first job as a varsity volleyball coach.

Now that she's gone through a season and seen all the hard work her girls at Fremont Ross have put in, though, it's made her realize how lucky she was to discover them.

The Little Giants, who've had numerous coaches in past few seasons, won just six matches a year ago and were last in the Greater Buckeye Conference.

But with Blasko's new fast-paced offense and her concentration on team conditioning, Ross

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LAUREN BLASKO
Fremont Ross coach

(15-9, 6-4 GBC) improved nine games and finished tied for second in the GBC with Napoleon.

Tonight the Little Giants square off with arch-rival Sandusky in a Division I district semifinal. Game time is set for 7 p.m. at Mansfield Senior High School.

"It's been such a positive sea-

son," Blasko said. "I got really lucky and I've been really spoiled with what I've had. These girls are really hard workers and you don't get a lot of the drama you get with most other girls sports. They come to work and we've seen a lot of benefits from it."

When you're a Ross team play-

ing the Blue Streaks, however, records and accomplishments tend to get thrown out the window.

"Because of Sandusky being our rival, our girls tend to play a little emotional against them," Blasko said. "I've been telling them that even if things don't go there way, we just need to outlast them in the end."

"I think we're the better conditioned team of the two squads, but we're anticipating a good match."

Sandusky got the better of Ross in the teams first match, but the Little Giants got revenge in round two, winning in five games.

"They're a very scrappy team," Blasko said. "My leaders are going to be instrumental to our game."

In Saturday's sectional final win over Lima Senior (25-15, 25-11, 25-15), one of Blasko's leaders continued her strong play. Senior setter Christy Meggitt, whose been peaking as of late, led Ross with 11 kills in the match.

"Christy is that player that works hard for me no matter what," Blasko said. "As a setter she has an important role on my team. She always has to be looking at what is open. And she's also been holding the block real well."

Other key role players have been Blasko's other setter, sophomore Melanie Edris and senior Alex Ferguson.

"Alex just works hard all the

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time, and she puts up a block and holds the block," Blasko said. "And Melanie has done a great job of stepping up all year."

Edris is one of many new players at the varsity level for the Little Giants, who are dominated by youth.

"As a team we've had our ups and downs," Blasko said. "We've got so many sophomores in huge positions. But they've improved so much.

"They went from basket cases the first game to going out there

and just being confident."

Most of Ross' success came during an eight-game win streak, which occurred when they last beat the Blue Streaks.

It finally came to an end when the Little Giants fell to Oregon Clay and Findlay in back-to-back contests. The Trojans took this year's GBC crown.

"To see them come into themselves, is such an amazing thing and what I'm most proud of," Blasko said.

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Ross falls short, but takes another step

BY KEVIN SHIELDS
Sports writer

FINDLAY—In building up any program, it's about taking those steps forward.

Regardless of the outcome of Saturday's district final at Liberty-Benton High school, the Fremont Ross volleyball team had already taken a large step in that direction. But the Little Giants' season ended Saturday with a loss to 25-17, 25-17, 25-17 Findlay in the Division I district finals — a game Ross hadn't reached in more than a decade.

"This was big for us," Little Giants first-year coach Lauren Blasko said. "We got a young team, and this will set a precedent for how we're going to play next year."

Before Blasko's arrival from Michigan, Ross (16-10) won just six games last fall. Under her guidance, though, the Little Giants tied for second in the Greater Buckeye Conference, which was won by the Trojans (21-4).

Ross fell to Findlay twice during the regular season, but it wasn't intimidated Saturday.

"Fremont came to play," Findlay coach Bob

Moran said. "They played us tougher that game than they did the first two games. They were digging balls and had nothing to lose and everything to gain, and they played hard."

"Last time we played Findlay we were scared and played horrible," Blasko said. "Tonight, we redeemed ourselves a bit and we played hard. We just let them get too many runs."

One of those runs by the Trojan's came at the start of game one where they scored six of the match's first seven points. The Little Giants closed within three points twice at 9-6 and 12-9, but they couldn't stop Findlay's front line, which features three players taller than 5-feet, 10-inches.

"Our blocking really struggled," Blasko said. "We were just going up instead of blocking the hitter's arm and that gave them free reign at the net."

After 2-2 tie, Findlay also led start to finish in game two, pulling out to a 10-point lead (18-8) after an ace from Emma Schleucher.

"We just try to keep that momentum going,"



Jonathan Bird | News-Messenger

Christy Meggitt, of Fremont Ross, stretches in an effort to keep the ball up Saturday against Findlay.

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Moran said. "I tell them it doesn't matter if they get one or get two points, they just need to keep working on them. We did a good job of getting at least two points from Ross's mistakes today."

Schleucher finished with 11 kills, 11 digs and four blocks for the Trojans. Kayce Krucki also tallied a double-double with 14 kills and 20 digs, as both were set up most of the time from Emily Lauth's game-high 42 assists.

If not for the efforts of the Ross's back row, both girls may have had a lot more totals.

"Our back row really stepped up when at times we had no block," Blasko said. "McKenzie Schneider and McKenzie Gallagher were digging up balls and really did a nice job defensively."

Gallagher posted 14 digs for the Little Giants and Schneider, who led Ross with six kills, had nine.

Ross finally tasted its first lead early in game three thanks to kills from Melanie Edris and Carly Schwartz.

Just like the first two games, however, Findlay struck with big runs, going on a six-point and four-point run to pull away.

"Despite being down, we worked really hard and we never hung our heads," Blasko said. "I'm really proud of my girls for that."

All that's left for Blasko now is to look toward next season.

"We're losing two girls next year, so we'll have some big shoes to fill in those spots," Blasko said. "But the majority of our team is coming back and I think we're really going to be able to build off of this and I'm looking forward to seeing what our girls can do next season."

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