

2004 Season Review

KIDWELL TAKES ROSS CONTROLS

Master motivator

"I think he can have a lot of success (at Ross). I think he can get the most out of the kids there."

— Hopewell-Loudon senior Jason Bodart on Derek Kidwell

Giants bank on coach providing a needed spark

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

Brad Britton, the 47-year-old athletic director at Hopewell-Loudon, was ready to put on the pads.

Football coach Derek Kidwell was giving a post-practice speech to his Chieftains on the eve of their playoff game against Carey this past season.

"It was outstanding," Britton said of the speech. "I just know I was ready to go out and play when he was done."

"He doesn't just have knowledge

Growing up in the game

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

Derek Kidwell is a self-proclaimed "football junkie."

He always has been.

"Other people learned to play football in junior high or high school," said Kidwell's newest boss, Fremont Ross Athletic Director Art Bucci. "Derek was weaned on it."

The 30-year-old Kidwell was named the Little Giants head coach on Wednesday.

Ross will be Kidwell's second head-coaching position.

He led Hopewell-Loudon to a 27-17 record and two eight-win campaigns in the last four seasons.

See ROSS, B2

of X's and O's, but also the knowledge of handling kids," Britton continued. "That's a special thing. He's such a great motivator. That's his strong suit."

On Wednesday, the 30-year-old

Kidwell was named Fremont Ross's football coach after four seasons at Hopewell.

He takes over a history-rich Little Giant program that has produced three Super Bowl participants —

Charles Woodson, Rob Lyle and Bob Brudzinski — but is now in desperate need of a revival.

"We need someone to get us on our feet," Ross sophomore quarterback Aaron Opelt said. "We need someone to give us a little spark, get us going."

Kidwell is replacing Chuck Lindsey, who went 1-19 in two seasons — the worst two-year span in school history.

He will be the fifth coach in eight years at Ross.

Only 45 players came out for varsity football this past season.

Ross Athletic Director Art Bucci said there are 560 boys at the Division I high school, and in past years there were close to 150 players in the entire program.

See KIDWELL, B2

Kidwell prepared to inspire excitement

Continued From B1

"I've always respected Fremont Ross and the tremendous athletes the school has produced," Kidwell said. "Now it's going to be my job to get those kids back out for football."

Kidwell knows that the lack of interest will be his greatest obstacle to overcome at Ross.

"The biggest challenge for me is to sell the program," he said. "That's the first thing we have to do — get the kids excited about Fremont Ross football again and have them take pride in Fremont Ross."

"We are going to hit the hallways to get the athletes on the field," he continued. "We'll go door-to-door if we have to. But that's one of the main reasons I really went after the job so aggressively. I know of the potential of the job and of the athletes here."

Jason Kovach is one player who bought into Kidwell's program at Hopewell.

Kovach didn't play football his first two years, but thanks to Kidwell's persistent pleading he came out his junior year and was a first-team all-Ohio wide receiver as a senior last season.

"He gets people excited," Kovach said. "He influenced me. Mr. Kidwell is the greatest coach I've ever had."

Jason Bodart, who started at quarterback Kidwell's four seasons at Hopewell, said the coach's ability to relate to young athletes is second to none.

"He is able to communicate with the kids really well, really get them motivated," Bodart said. "I think he can have a lot of success (at Ross). I think he can get the most out of the kids there."

Bodart said that the first thing Kidwell sold the Chieftains on was the importance of strength training.

"He told us, 'If you aren't in the weight room, you aren't going to play,'" Bodart said. "We listened to him. We all got stronger."

Kidwell was even key in Hopewell possibly getting a new weight room.

The school is in the initial stages of getting the facility.

"Our athletic boosters have been looking for a project," Britton said. "Derek was gung-ho about the idea of a weight room. He's influential. He sold them on the idea."

"Derek is such a good salesman."

Britton said Kidwell's departure will certainly be felt at Hopewell.

"I don't know of anybody in our program who wasn't excited to play for him," Britton said. "We hate to see him go."

Ross well on way with new leader

Continued From B1

Kidwell's father, Dick, was a longtime football coach at Fostoria High School.

While playing for his dad, Derek quarterbacked Fostoria to the 1991 state championship and was named Ohio's Mr. Football in the process.

Kidwell was a letterman at Bowling Green State University before quitting the team during the 1995 season.

But while many college students were busy tending bar or delivering pizza, Kidwell assisted with his father's Fostoria squad.

During his senior year at Bowling Green, Kidwell was the offensive coordinator for Fostoria's 1996 state championship team.

From Fostoria, Kidwell went to Lima Senior, where he coached quarterbacks for three seasons. The Spartans reached the playoffs in two of Kidwell's three years.

Hopewell then hired Kidwell to turn around a stagnant program.

Hopewell had just one eight-win season in the 27 years prior to Kidwell's arrival. The Chieftains also went just 2-8 the year before Kidwell arrived.

Kidwell, though, went 4-6 in his first season and barely missed the playoffs his second year as the Chieftains finished 5-5 after a Week 10 setback.

The Chieftains went 8-3 and reached the Division VI playoffs in each of the last two seasons — the best two year-stretch in school history.

"He turned around one program," Ross junior lineman Fred Shearon said. "Hopefully, he can do the same here."

Last year, the Chieftains shared the first Midland Athletic League crown in school history. Kidwell was named conference coach of the year.

Hopewell lost 31-14 to Carey in the first round of the playoffs last season.

Kidwell's passion and enthusiasm are well-known. And his reputation as an offensive guru also precedes him.

This past season, Jason Bodart quarterbacked the Chieftains' spread offense to a 35-7 victory over St. Joseph Central Catholic. Bodart finished with 407 passing yards in the game.

The Chieftains had the most total yards in the conference this past season.

Kidwell said he will likely bring the same offense to Ross.

"Once I'm able to evaluate my QBs and prospective receivers, and if I like what I see, we may totally open it up like we did the last couple of years at Hopewell," Kidwell said.

Kidwell is confident his offense can be successful with the number of standout athletes a Division I school like Ross offers.

"It's something like basketball on grass," he said of his scheme. "I think that really benefits some kids in Fremont. If we can get them out, we are going to light up some scoreboards and have a lot of fun."

Kidwell said he was most relaxed during the interview process at Ross when discussing football basics.

"X's and O's-wise, I was very comfortable with that," he said.

Hopewell Athletic Director Brad Britton can see why.

"He has a tremendous amount of football knowledge for such a young coach," he said. "And as he gains experience, he's only going to be a better coach."

Plenty of Hope

Derek Kidwell had one of the best runs in Hopewell-Loudon history. Here are his four seasons, and the three seasons prior to his arrival:

20038-3
20028-3
20015-5
20004-6
19992-8
19985-5
19975-5

Back at it



FREMONT ROSS'S Ryan Ottney, left, Tyler Fligor, center, and Adam Wilhelm take a water break during the first official day of practice on Monday. News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

Excitement abounds during first official day of season

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

Joe Diller lifted weights all summer to prepare for football season.

He went to first-year coach Derek Kidwell's Fremont Ross football camp. He went to conditioning practices at Ross during the last month.

And Diller went to seven-on-seven camps, at which his football equipment consisted of only a helmet.

So, Monday's first official day of practice was special for Diller. He got to put on pads.

"It's great to wear them

"I've been involved in football for 41 years, but I look forward to every fall with as much enthusiasm as I ever did."

— SJCC coach Rick Wonderly

again," said Diller, who last wore his pads during Ross's season-ending loss at Sandusky last October. "It's the little things that you have to love."

Practices for fall sports opened across the state on Monday.

And while his players were thrilled to be able to simply

wear shoulder pads, Kidwell was ecstatic just to be on a practice field at Ross.

"We have been looking forward to this for a while, for the simple fact that you can up the intensity and the speed a little bit," Kidwell said, comparing the first practice with his initial camp last month.

"The kids already know our offense and defense a little bit. It just gets a little faster out there. We are excited."

Rick Wonderly still loves the first day of practice, even though he's beginning his 16th year at the St. Joseph Central Catholic helm.

"I haven't lost any enthusiasm," Wonderly said. "I've been involved in football for 41 years, but I look forward to every fall with as much enthusiasm as I ever did. And when I don't have that, I won't do it again."

See FALL, B2

Fall sports season officially opens

Continued From B1

Kidwell said there were between 80-85 players at his first practice as a Little Giant.

He said he is looking forward to practices later in the week, when his players put on full pads and separate themselves more.

"We are anxious to see what happens on Thursday and Friday, when we can start hitting," Kidwell said. "That's when people will separate themselves as football players and non-football players."

Kidwell certainly noticed a sense of enthusiasm from his players on Monday.

"It was a good atmosphere," he said. "They are excited, and we are looking forward to the challenge at hand."

"The good thing with these kids is that they enjoy it out here," he continued. "It's a fun environment for them to be around. They are smiling and laughing it up, along with working hard. That's one of the things that I always try to get across. It's high school football, and we want to make it fun for you also."

Diller said he and his teammates are anxious to move on after last year's 1-9 campaign.

"It's a whole different attitude from last year," he said. "Everybody is so excited and ready to play. We're excited."



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

Starting up

FREMONT Ross quarterback Aaron Opelt warms up on the sidelines during the Little Giants' scrimmage with Mansfield Senior and Toledo St. John's on Tuesday at Harmon Stadium. A couple hundred fans watched the scrimmage, the first for new Ross coach Derek Kidwell.

Friday's games

Toledo Central Catholic at Ross

■ **OUTLOOK:** The Little Giants appear to be as cool as can be entering a new era. "The head coach's attitude carries over to the kids," said first-year boss Derek Kidwell. "We are confident. ... They feel good about themselves and our chances." The Little Giants went 1-9 last year and lost the opener to Central Catholic 33-0, but there is definitely a new atmosphere at Ross. Central Catholic will use a 4-3, cover-2 defense to match up with Ross's spread attack. That could be a mismatch in the Little Giants' favor. Three-year starting quarterback Dan Amato will lead the attack for coach Greg Dempsey, a TCC graduate. The Irish will mostly utilize a power game, with the power-I as their main offensive formation. TCC finished 3-7 last season. "We feel like we are evenly matched with these guys," Kidwell said. "If we don't have any turnovers, we think we'll be OK."

TOLEDO CENTRAL CATHOLIC 23, ROSS 0

False start



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

FREMONT ROSS quarterback Aaron Opelt scrambles away from Toledo Central Catholic's Anthony Oliver on Friday. TCC won the season opener 23-0.

Little Giants shut out to open Kidwell Era in Fremont

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

One of the most anticipated seasons in Fremont Ross history started with one of the most promising plays imaginable.

Toledo Central Catholic's Neil Mitchell fumbled the opening kickoff, and Ross's Cory Bowling recovered the ball at TCC's 38-yard line.

But the Little Giants failed to generate any points, and the dream start soon turned to a nightmarish and familiar finish.

Chris Willis ran for 140 yards and three touchdowns as visiting TCC won 23-0 on

"Everything that could go wrong went wrong."

— Fremont Ross coach Derek Kidwell

Friday to spoil new Ross coach Derek Kidwell's debut.

"Everything that could go wrong went wrong," Kidwell said.

That's not the way it was supposed to happen.

Kidwell and his new spread offense brought an unprecedented buzz to Harmon Stadium.

But the Little Giants failed to quickly erase the memory of a 1-19 two-year stretch.

"The system that is in place

will work," Kidwell said. "Nobody said that we were going to be a great team over night. We have to work at it."

The Little Giants' offense sputtered against TCC.

Junior quarterback Aaron Opelt ran for more yards (60) than he threw for (43), scrambling out of necessity much of the time.

Opelt finished just 5-of-13, and Ross was outgained in yardage 293-136.

"He is going to get better

every week," Kidwell said of Opelt. "He has to feel it. It happens a little faster out there on Friday night than it does in the scrimmage or on the practice field."

"I just told him, 'You have to have confidence in yourself because we have confidence in you. You have almost 70 kids relying on you because our offense is only going to be as good as your decision making and your playing,'" Kidwell continued.

Even when Ross got the ball inside TCC's 3-yard line, things didn't go the Little Giants' way.

On a fourth-down play with about four minutes left, Keith Williams fumbled on what seemed to be the 1-inch line. It was the Little Giants' third turnover of the game.

The Fighting Irish took over and ran out the clock.

"It's a little disappointing," Ross senior lineman Joe Diller said. "If we would have won this, we would have shut up everybody who didn't believe we could do it."

See HIGHLY-QUOTED, B2

Highly-touted offense fails to put points on the board

Continued From B1

After the opening fumble, Ross got down to the 24-yard line. But Opelt's fourth-down pass fell incomplete.

"If we score there, it's a different ballgame," Kidwell said.

Ross also failed to score following an interception by Seth Frasure at the TCC 34-yard line early in the second half.

"Good teams take advantage of those situations," Kidwell said. "They are like piranhas. They see the blood, and they go after it. We need to do that, and we didn't do that there. We gave that team confidence.

"That's all kids need," he continued. "They need confidence and a little bit of proof, and, boom, they are going to run with it. That's what they did tonight."

TCC owned just a 3-0 halftime lead, but the Fighting Irish dominated the second half.

Willis capped off a nine-play, 69-yard drive with a tough 1-yard run to put TCC up 9-0. Willis was met at the line by Diller but fought his way into



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst
FREMONT ROSS senior Seth Frasure runs back an interception during the Little Giants' 23-0 season-opening loss to Toledo Central Catholic on Friday.

the end zone with 7:06 left in the third quarter.

Willis next scored on a 4-yard run with 26 seconds left in the third that capped a 16-yard drive that followed a Ross fumble.

A 5-yard run by Willis with 7:36 left in the fourth quarter capped the scoring.

"They were a little better than I thought," Diller said. "They were a little bigger. We just got beat in the weight room. We got overpowered that game. They wore us down."

Friday's outcome was certainly not what Kidwell anticipated in his first game at Harmon Stadium since 1991 — when, as a quarterback, he led Fostoria to a regular-season victory over Ross en route to a state championship.

"I'm disappointed," he said. "I mean, 23-0. We weren't hoping for that. We weren't expecting that."

Kidwell's greatest challenge in the next week will likely be convincing the Little Giants that they are a different squad from the last two seasons.

They lost last year's season opener to TCC 33-0.

"They have to believe in the system that is put in place," Kidwell said. "If they don't believe in it, it's going to be a long season. They have to believe in it and have trust in one another and trust in the coaching staff."

"We trust them," he said, "and we are not going to give up on them."

Kidwell to be disciplined by OHSAA

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

First-year Fremont Ross coach Derek Kidwell seems to have made his first mistake even before his first game.

Kidwell will soon be disciplined by the Ohio High School Athletic Association for illegal practices during the opening week of the season, according to Ross officials.

It is believed that a one-game suspension will likely be the disciplinary action taken.

New OHSAA commissioner Dr. Daniel Ross was to notify Ross athletic di-

rector Art Buccell of his decision by letter perhaps as early as this afternoon. The letter, at the latest, should be received by Tuesday.

According to the OHSAA, "four days of acclimation (are) required of all football players. Acclimation simply means getting used to the temperature and humidity during physical activity."

"During the first three days of coaching and practice, players may wear shirts, shorts, helmets and shoes," the rule continues.

"Pads are prohibited as well as full-contact drills. On the fourth practice

day, full pads may be worn but full-contact continues to be prohibited."

Kidwell's Little Giants wore pads on the opening day of practice, which was Aug. 9. Kidwell could not be reached for comment.

The OHSAA conducted a brief investigation the week before this past Friday's season opener.

Ross and OHSAA officials discussed the matter the day of the opener. It was decided by OHSAA officials that Kidwell would be allowed to coach until further notice.

That meant he could coach in the opener against Toledo Central Catholic.

The Little Giants fell 23-0 to TCC in Kid-

well's debut.

Ross travels to Toledo St. Francis on Friday.

If Kidwell is suspended from his head-coaching duties, his likely temporary replacement will be his offensive line coach and father, Dick.

The elder Kidwell is a coaching legend, having been named to the Ohio Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

During his time as Fostoria's head coach, he went 174-50-3 with two state championships.

He had an overall record of 214-94-4 as a head coach.



KIDWELL



Nick Mathews
Mathews musings

Sour start to season at Ross

The Fremont Ross football program's bright, shiny new image has lost its luster.

Already.

The unprecedented enthusiasm that followed new coach Derek Kidwell's hiring has diminished after a 23-0 season-opening loss to Toledo Central Catholic and an OHSAA rules violation.

This is not the start to the Kidwell reign Ross followers envisioned.

Many Little Giant fans believed the hype and thought this year's group was going to storm through visiting TCC this past Friday and erase the memories of a 1-19 two-year stretch.

That didn't happen.

And no Ross fan could have believed that Kidwell — with four years' prior experience as a head coach and one of the best young football minds in Northwest Ohio, if not the state — would pull a stunt that would get the school in trouble with the Ohio high school sports governing body.

That did happen.

Ross officials are still awaiting a letter from new OHSAA commissioner Dr. Dan Ross that will detail the disciplinary action against Kidwell. It didn't arrive on Monday, but it should have hit Ross athletic director Art Bucci's desk today.

Kidwell's Little Giants participated in illegal practices the first week of the season. His players wore football pads on the opening day of practice, and that is prohibited by OHSAA rules.

It is a ridiculous regulation. Athletes participate in camps and seven-on-sevens during the summer. They don't need any "acclimation" time, which is how the OHSAA refers to the first few days of practice with a football uniform that consists only of a shirt, shorts, shoes and a helmet.

Nonetheless, it is a rule.

Kidwell knew the rule. He simply chose to ignore it.

He is not the only Ohio coach to disregard the rule. A few may not have gotten caught. Most probably did.

The penalty for the violation is minor.

It will likely amount to a one-game suspension, according to Ross officials. More accurately, it will be about a five-hour suspension.

Kidwell will be allowed to coach until two hours before Friday's kickoff with Toledo St. Francis. He will be allowed to talk to his players a half-hour after the game.

He will not be allowed to attend the game, though.

It's a very light slap on the wrist. Kidwell will leave the Little Giants in good hands on Friday — his father's hands. Dick Kidwell is the Little Giants offensive line coach and a member of the Ohio Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

So, the reality is that the violation will only slightly affect Ross — if even that.

Therein should lie the problem to fans.

Kidwell doesn't seem to have been afraid of the consequences of allowing his players to wear pads. So, he cheated. That wasn't a proper act by a coach who provides an example for nearly 100 young athletes.

Add to the whole situation that his Little Giants were overwhelmed by one of the weaker opponents they will see this year, and you have one sour start to the campaign.

Things won't get any easier this Friday as the Little Giants travel to face a St. Francis squad that should finish near the top of the Toledo City League.

This group of Little Giant coaches and players has the wonderful opportunity to resurrect the program and prove that Ross football is no longer a joke.

But people are most assuredly still laughing — outside the community and, even worse, inside the community.

So far, this hasn't been a repeat of the last couple years.

It's been worse.

Nick Mathews is The News-Messenger sports editor. Columns appear on Tuesdays — or whenever the mood strikes. He can be reached at nmathews@fremont.gannett.com or 334-1042.

Kidwell 'not ashamed'

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

First-year Fremont Ross coach Derek Kidwell said he is "not one bit" sorry for violating an OHSAA regulation but if he could relive the situation he wouldn't break the rule again.

"Would I change it? I probably would to avoid the punishment," Kidwell said in his first comments on the matter. "I got Fremont Ross some bad publicity.

"But I feel strongly about



KIDWELL

"I feel strongly about what I did. I'm not ashamed of it. The fact of the matter is that I am there to protect the kids in any way possible. That's what I did."

— Ross coach Derek Kidwell

what I did," he continued. "I'm not ashamed of it. The fact of the matter is that I am there to protect the kids in any way possible. That's what I did."

Kidwell had his Little Giants wear football pads in practice before the allowed date set by the OHSAA.

As expected, Kidwell was given a one-game suspension

by the OHSAA for violating rule 1.12, according to a press release received from Ross officials on Tuesday.

According to the OHSAA, pads are not allowed during the first three days of practice. During that time, a football uniform must consist only of a shirt, shorts, shoes and a helmet.

Kidwell's Little Giants wore pads on the opening

day of practice, which was on Aug. 9.

Kidwell is allowed to coach the Little Giants until two hours before Friday's kickoff with Toledo St. Francis. He can talk to his players a half-hour after the game.

He is prohibited from traveling with the team or attending the game.

Also as part of the punishment, the Ross football program has been placed on probation from Aug. 25, 2004-Aug. 25, 2005.

The period of coaching instruction between June 1-July 31, 2005, will also be limited to five days instead of the normal 10 contact days.

See KIDWELL, B3

Kidwell says he broke OHSAA rule to protect his players

Continued From B1

Kidwell said that he allowed his players to wear pads early during his previous four-year stint at Hopewell-Loudon as well.

"I put pads on kids to protect them, so they are healthy and stay healthy," he said. "I think the community will support us. We didn't cheat. I am not trying to get an upper hand."

Kidwell chose not to scale down practices to more conditioning-based drills during the first few days.

"You have to do the stuff that you do on the football field in practice," Kidwell said. "It is blocking and form tackling and everything else that is incorporated in the game of football.

"In the summer, that's when you do all

"I'm willing to take the one-game suspension. I understand it is a rule and that I violated that rule. ... It's an old rule that needs to be reviewed and changed."

— Ross coach Derek Kidwell

the conditioning," he continued.

Kidwell said he understands and accepts his punishment.

"I'm willing to take the one-game suspension," he said. "I understand it is a rule and that I violated that rule. ... It's an old rule

that needs to be reviewed and changed."

Kidwell said it is a regulation that coaches have attempted to alter for some time now.

"The (Ohio Football Coaches Association) has tried to have this rule changed before," he said. "This has been approached to the state before. There are very few coaches out there who agree that you should not have pads on."

Kidwell said his players "were upset" when he informed them of the suspension.

"I explained everything to them," he said. "We have a family concept. I want them to know what's going on. Hopefully, they use it as a motivational tool (on Friday).

"I think they appreciate the fact that I would do anything to protect them," he continued.

Friday's games

Ross at Toledo St. Francis

■ **RECORDS:** Ross 0-1; St. Francis 1-0

■ **LAST WEEK:** Ross lost 23-0 to Toledo Central Catholic; St. Francis won 33-7 over Perrysburg

■ **OUTLOOK:** The Little Giants face their second consecutive Toledo City League opponent, and, this time, they face one of the conference favorites. St. Francis scored the final 26 points of its opener against Perrysburg. Quarterback Brandon Spewiek was 8-for-15 for 129 yards, but the Knights are successful because of their powerful ground game. Brian Bingle ran for 117 of the Knights' 231 yards. Ross had a difficult time stopping the run last week as TCC amassed 240 yards on the ground. Ross's new, spread offense also sputtered, piling up only 136 yards. The Little Giants will also be playing without their leader, first-year coach Derek Kidwell, who will be serving a one-game suspension from the OHSAA. Ross lost 29-0 to St. Francis last year.

**ST. FRANCIS 21,
ROSS 14**

Better, but not enough

By **MATTHEW HORN**
Sports Writer

TOLEDO — Senior Cory Bowling had been waiting for the opportunity since he was a young boy.

Fremont Ross coach Derek Kidwell informed Bowling early in the week that he would start at running back at St. Francis on Friday after Keith Williams injured his hand in the Little Giants' first game.

Bowling picked up the spare, running for 108 yards, but Toledo City League favorite St. Francis defeated Ross 21-14.

"Coach told me on Monday that they needed me at running back and all I could do was smile," Bowling said. "I've wanted to be a running back at Ross since I was a kid."

See GIANT, B2

Giant improvement for Ross

Continued From B1

"I had doubts going against one of the top teams in Northwest Ohio, but after I broke that long run I knew it was time to shine."

Bowling's 45-yard run down the left sideline set the Giants up at the 3-yard line. Kyle Cook followed with a touchdown run on the next play as Ross took a 7-6 lead with 1:54 remaining in the third quarter.

"I saw the hole and hit it," Cook said. "The line did a good job. They did a good job all night."

Adam Wilhelm maximized his first catch of the season, hauling in a 34-yard touchdown from Aaron Opelt as the Giants tied the game at 14-14 midway through the fourth. Wilhelm caught an underthrown ball after it was tipped by a St. Francis defender.

"I saw the ball was going to be a little short," Wilhelm said. "I was either going to make the catch or make the tackle at the 1(-yard line). It happened that it bounced off his hands and I caught it."

Cook recovered a fumble to set up Wilhelm's score.

Brian Bingle scored the game's final touchdown for St. Francis with 1:24 left.

On a night when first-year coach Derek Kidwell was serving a one-game OHSA suspension for a minor rules violation, Wilhelm, Cook and Bowling,

three players who weren't on the roster last season, made significant contributions.

"We played for Derek," Bowling said. "He asked us to get him a win. We came up short, but I think he'll be really proud of us."

Ohio High School Coach's Association Hall of Famer Dick Kidwell certainly was. He coached the team on Friday.

"We made giant strides from Week 1 to Week 2," Kidwell said. "The kids came in and focused. That's one of the best teams we'll see."

And, after viewing the Giants first game on tape and shutting them out 29-0 last year, St. Francis coach Dick Cromwell noticed an improvement.

"They've done a nice job," he said. "They spread it around and ran it up the middle."

Dick Kidwell said the team now needs to believe in itself.

"We took a good team down to the wire," he said. "We had to convince ourselves we're a good football team. Confidence comes from winning."

"We convinced ourselves. Now, we just have to win."

Wilhelm said the Giants showed they've taken steps in the right direction following a trying two-year span.

"We rallied together," he said. "We feel like we've taken a step in the right direction. We have another step to go — win."

"Hopefully that will come next week."

High School

St. Francis 21, Ross 14

Ross 0 0 7 7 — 14

St. Francis 0 6 8 7 — 21

SCORING SUMMARY

Second quarter

SF — Brandon Speweik 5 run (kick failed).

Third quarter

R — Kyle Cook 3 run (Blair Ellenberger kick).

SF — Robert Garza 4 run (Jake Be-
ham pass to Jon Sheehan).

Fourth quarter

R — Adam Wilhelm 34 pass from
Aaron Opelt (Ellenberger kick).

SF — Brian Bingle 11 run (Sean Davis
kick).

TEAM STATISTICS

	R	SF
Rushing yards	126	190
Passing yards	109	75
Total yards	235	265
Comp.-Att	9-19	4-13

RUSHING: Ross — Corey Bowling
18-108. St. Francis — Robert Garza 33-
122.

Records: Ross 0-2, St. Francis 2-0.

Friday's games

Ross at Tiffin Columbian

■ **RECORDS:** Ross 0-2;
Columbian 1-1

■ **LAST WEEK:** Ross lost to
Toledo St. Francis 21-14;
Columbian lost to Clyde 21-14

■ **OUTLOOK:** Both teams are coming off 21-14 setbacks. But the games were surprising to many for different reasons. Playing without coach Derek Kidwell, who was serving a one-game suspension by the OHSAA, Ross essentially played even with a Toledo City League favorite. The Little Giants led 7-6 late in the third quarter and were tied at 14 in the fourth. St. Francis scored the winning touchdown with 1:24 left. Cory Bowling led the Little Giants' charge with 108 rushing yards. Columbian, meanwhile, was upset by Clyde. Columbian was the preseason favorite in the Northern Ohio League. The Tornadoes were outscored 14-0 in the second half as Clyde fullback Matt Guhn scored two touchdowns. Running back Frank Perna ran for 109 yards and a touchdown against the Fliers, and quarterback Greg Kiser was 9-of-32 for 119 yards. A sour taste likely lingers for many Ross players and fans after a 56-7 loss to Columbian last year.

TIFFIN COLUMBIAN 35, ROSS 13

Tornadoes breeze to win

Young Little Giants still learning tricks to Kidwell's offense

By MATTHEW HORN
Sports Writer

TIFFIN — New Fremont Ross coach Derek Kidwell has referred to his offense as basketball on grass for its quick strikes and ability to rack up points.

So far, the only similarity between the two sports is that traveling is uncommon. That's traveling as in moving the ball consistently.

It took Hopewell-Loudon quarterback Jason Bodart four years as the starter to master the nuances of Kidwell's scheme.

Aaron Opelt, Kidwell's signal caller at Ross, has had three games.

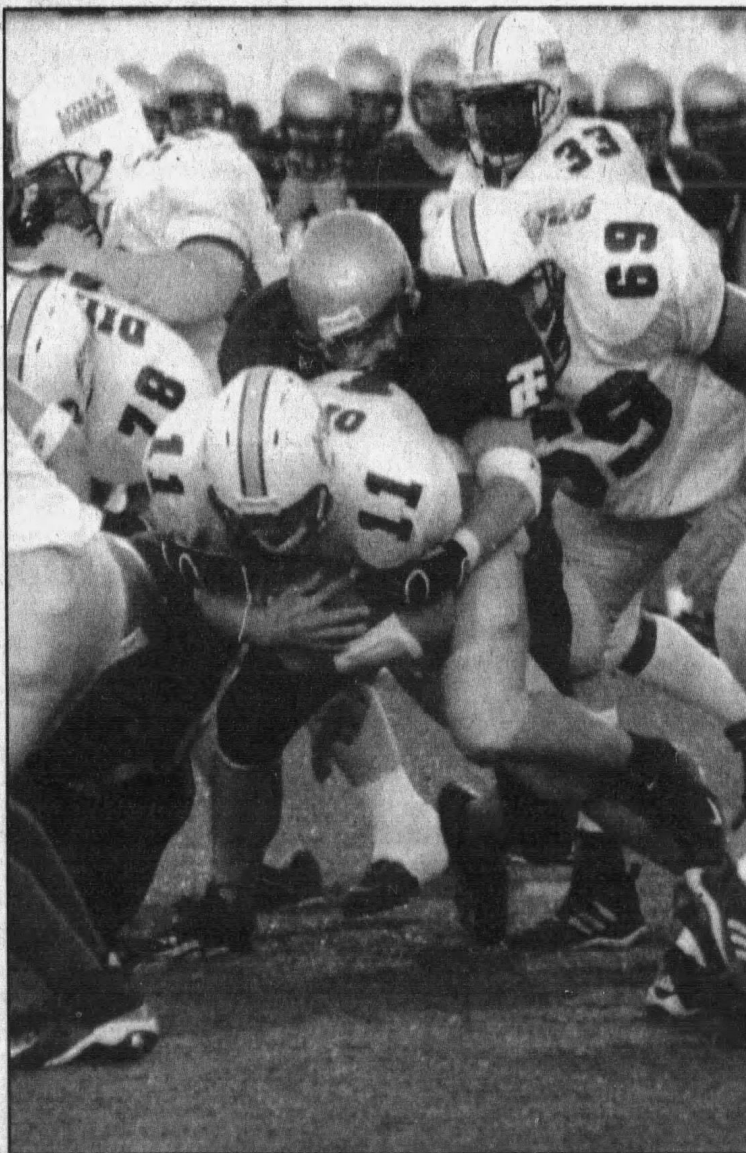
The junior is trying to overcome the tendency to leave the pocket early to scramble and telegraph his passes. Opelt showed improvement in both areas, but Tiffin Columbian defeated the Little Giants 35-13 on Friday at Tiffin Columbian.

Opelt completed 12 of 25 passes for 178 yards and one score.

"He's battling," Kidwell said. "He just needs to feel it under game situations.

"It took Bodart until his senior year — that's when he took off."

Opelt did give the routes of his receivers' more time to develop before trying to make something happen himself.



News-Messenger/Ken Dummering

FREMONT ROSS QUARTERBACK Aaron Opelt gets tackled in the Little Giants' 35-13 loss to Tiffin Columbian on Friday.

See **TORNADOES**, B2

Tornadoes blow by Little Giants

Continued From B1

Many of his 17 rushes (51 yards) came when he could have held the ball a little longer to make something happen down field.

Only four of Opelt's completions covered 10 or more yards and only one went for more than 20. Adam Wilhelm caught his second touchdown in two weeks, grabbing a pass on a crossing rout around his own 40 and racing up the middle untouched for 60 yards.

The play covered 88 yards.

Opelt has no qualms with his offensive line.

"They're awesome," he said. "It just all needs to fall into place. They can't do much better — I have time. We need to capitalize. I missed a few open receivers for big yardage."

The Giants (0-3) trailed only 14-7 at the half despite beginning the game without starting linebackers Kyle Cook and Joe Garza due to injury.

"That's football," Kidwell said of his depleted squad. "You have to fight through it but the way we run our defense, those are our horses."

Ross recovered three Columbian (2-1) fumbles in the first half but could only capitalize with one touchdown. Keith Williams charged in from 1-yard out late in the second quarter.

The Giants were also forced to

play without starting running back Cory Bowling after only five productive first-quarter carries. Bowling rushed for 108 yards last week but left with an injured ankle with 25 yards on Friday.

"That took away our energy," Kidwell said of Bowling's injury. "He ran hard his first couple runs."

"It's easy to prepare for no running game."

Coming off a loss to Clyde in Week 2, the Tornadoes started Friday's game like a whirlwind. Quarterback Greg Kiser completed a 68-yard touchdown pass to Josh Moore on his second snap.

"We've gotten beat with play action all three weeks," Kidwell said. "Every big play has been on play action."

Ross began the second half with a three-and-out series and Columbian responded with a touchdown from Judd Lutz to go up 21-7. Lutz added a 32-yard scoring run in the third.

"Good teams answer the call and take the momentum back," Kidwell said. "We have to stay mentally focused."

Now, it's time for his Giants to come out swinging.

"I told the kids, anybody who doesn't believe in the system can turn their stuff in," Kidwell said. "We're going to win. It will take time. It's going to be a work in progress. We didn't expect it to happen overnight."

Tiffin Columbian 35, Ross 13

Ross	0	7	0	6	— 13
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Columbian	7	7	21	0	— 35
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SCORING SUMMARY**First quarter**

TC — Greg Kiser 68 to Josh Moore (Matt Hoffman kick) 11:15

Second quarter

TC — Frank Perna 1 run (Hoffman kick) 11:31

FR — Keith Williams 1 run (Blair Ellenberger kick) 2:55

Third quarter

TC — Judd Lutz 1 run (Hoffman kick) 7:49

TC — Lutz 32 run (Hoffman kick) 4:24

TC — Kiser 10 to Justin Reinbolt (Hoffman kick) 2:48

Fourth quarter

FR — Aaron Opelt 88 to Adam Wilhelm (kick failed) 2:26

TEAM STATISTICS

	R	C
First downs	10	12
Rushes-yards	30-91	46-202
Passing yards	178	104
Total yards	269	306
Comp.-Att.-Int.	12-25-1	5-8-0
Punts	6	1
Fumbles-lost	3-1	3-3
Penalties	9	1

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Ross — Opelt 17-51, Cory Bowling 5-25, Keith Williams 7-14, Aaron Hinkle 1-1. Columbian — Perna 15-70, Lutz 13-91, Kiser 8-28, Josh Perkins 2-(-7), Tim Focht 2-3, Kyle Gilbert 2-(-4), Greg Bishop 4-21.

PASSING: Ross — Opelt 12-25 — 178. Columbian Kiser 5-8 — 104.

RECEIVING: Ross — Mike Abbott 1-6, Paul Hershey 4-51, Tyler Fligor 3-18, Wilhelm 2-92, Rob Hall 1-6, Brett Johnson 1-5. Columbian — Josh Moore 1-68, Derek Reinhart 1-17, Justin Reinbolt 3-

CLEVELAND BENEDICTINE 34, ROSS 26

Ross can't close the door

Little Giants give up 10-point lead to defending champs

By **MATTHEW HORN**
Sports Writer

Charles Jones figures the Fremont Ross offensive linemen should dine on him in the near future.

This despite a 34-26 loss to reigning Division III state champion and seventh-ranked Cleveland Benedictine on Friday.

Jones rushed for 114 yards on 19 carries and the Little Giants maintained a 26-20 lead late into the fourth quarter.

Jones wasted little time in demonstrating to Benedictine that Ross was not intimidated by the state power. He ripped off a 19-yard run on the Giants' first offensive play and followed with a 29-yard burst up the sideline on his next carry.

But Jones fumbled out of the end zone just before crossing the goal line. The two teams then exchanged punts before Corey Chestnutt recovered a fumble.

"I thought I had broke the plane," Jones said of his near-miss. "Coach had an excellent game plan. The line did an excellent job.



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

FREMONT ROSS'S Cody Ruiz fails to catch a pass late in the Little Giants' 34-26 loss to reigning Division III state champion Cleveland Benedictine on Friday.

I think I'll be taking them out to dinner next week."

Bryan Burel capitalized on the following series by pounding it in from the 1-yard line to give Ross a 7-0 lead.

Aaron Opelt completed a 28-yard touchdown pass to Brett Johnson on 4th-and-9 to put Ross up 14-7 midway through the second quarter. Opelt lofted a perfect pass down the right sideline for Johnson, who had

four catches for 77 yards.

The Giants then forced a three-and-out series before Blair Ellenberger kicked a 27-yard field goal for a 17-7 lead but Benedictine answered with a one-play 79 yard drive as Joe Laffey and Sam Amidon hooked up. Amidon had four catches for 120 yards.

See GIANTS, B2

Giants stumble late in setback

Continued From B1

Ross drove to the 25 but couldn't quite get into field goal range as Opelt threw an incompletion to end the half.

"We lost 10 points with the fumble and missed opportunity," Giant coach Derek Kidwell said. "I'll take the blame with some bad play calling to end the first half. If we get those 10 points it's a different game."

But it is still a game Ross can feel great about. Opelt opened the second-half scoring with a slithering 29-yard touchdown run to make the score 23-14 early in the second half.

Opelt rushed for 39 yards and completed 12-of-34 passes for 222 yards and the one score. Opelt made good decisions with the exception of his first of two interceptions and showed impressive poise.

"Aaron is getting more and more comfortable," Kidwell said. "He's seeing more. His progression is what I thought it would be. It wasn't going to happen overnight."

Opelt completed passes to eight different receivers, including a 36-yard completion to Adam Wilhelm, a 53 yarder to Tyler Fligor and a 24 yarder to Billy Boukissen in the first half alone.

"That's what this offense is — find the mismatches and take advantage," Kidwell said. "Aaron made some outstanding reads in the first half."

Justin Garcia intercepted a Laffey pass and returned it to the Benedictine 3 to set up a 24-yard Ellenberger field goal for the Giants' final points.

"Garcia does a lot for us," Kidwell said. "He made a play."

Jahmal Brown scored from the 7 to pull Benedictine within six to end the third quarter. Brown rushed for 154 yards and two touchdowns on 23 carries.

"Our defense stepped it up close to the end of the third and took the momentum," Brown said. "We took them a little too lightly. This was a good wake-up call for us."

Benedictine snuck out of Fremont with the victory after Laffey connected with Chris Austin for a 10-yard touchdown on 4th-and-7 with 4:41 remaining in the game.

Kidwell isn't interested in moral victories. But he certainly was encouraged by the performance of his kids.

"I'm proud as head coach and the community should be proud," Kidwell said. "If we get that effort at practice and on Friday night we'll be very good. The kids should have their heads up. They know we let a tough one get away."

"The playoffs are shot but if we can play with St. Francis and Benedictine, I don't see why we can't make a run at the league. We're hungry for a victory. Once we get it we'll skyrocket. It will be fun and I hope a lot of people join the ride."

Cleveland Benedictine 34,

Fremont Ross 26

Benedictine 0 14 6 14 — 34

Ross 7 10 9 0 — 26

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

FR — Bryan Burel 1 run (Blair Ellenberger kick) 2:34

Second quarter

CB — Joe Laffey to Mykol Gardiner 18 pass (Alex Steigerwald kick) 10:23

FR — Aaron Opelt to Brett Johnson 28 pass (Ellenberger kick) 6:33

FR — Ellenberger 27 kick 3:44

CB — Laffey to Sam Amidon 79 pass (Steigerwald kick) 3:27

Third quarter

FR — Opelt 29 run (kick failed) 10:01

FR — Ellenberger 24 kick 2:27

CB — Jahmal Brown 7 run (kick failed) :00

Fourth quarter

CB — Laffey to Chris Austin (Steigerwald kick) 4:41

CB — Brown 6 run (Steigerwald kick) :31

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Ross — Charles Jones 19-114, Opelt 8-39, Burel 4-6, Keith Williams 1-0. Benedictine — Brown 23-154, Austin 17-59, Laffey 3-1.

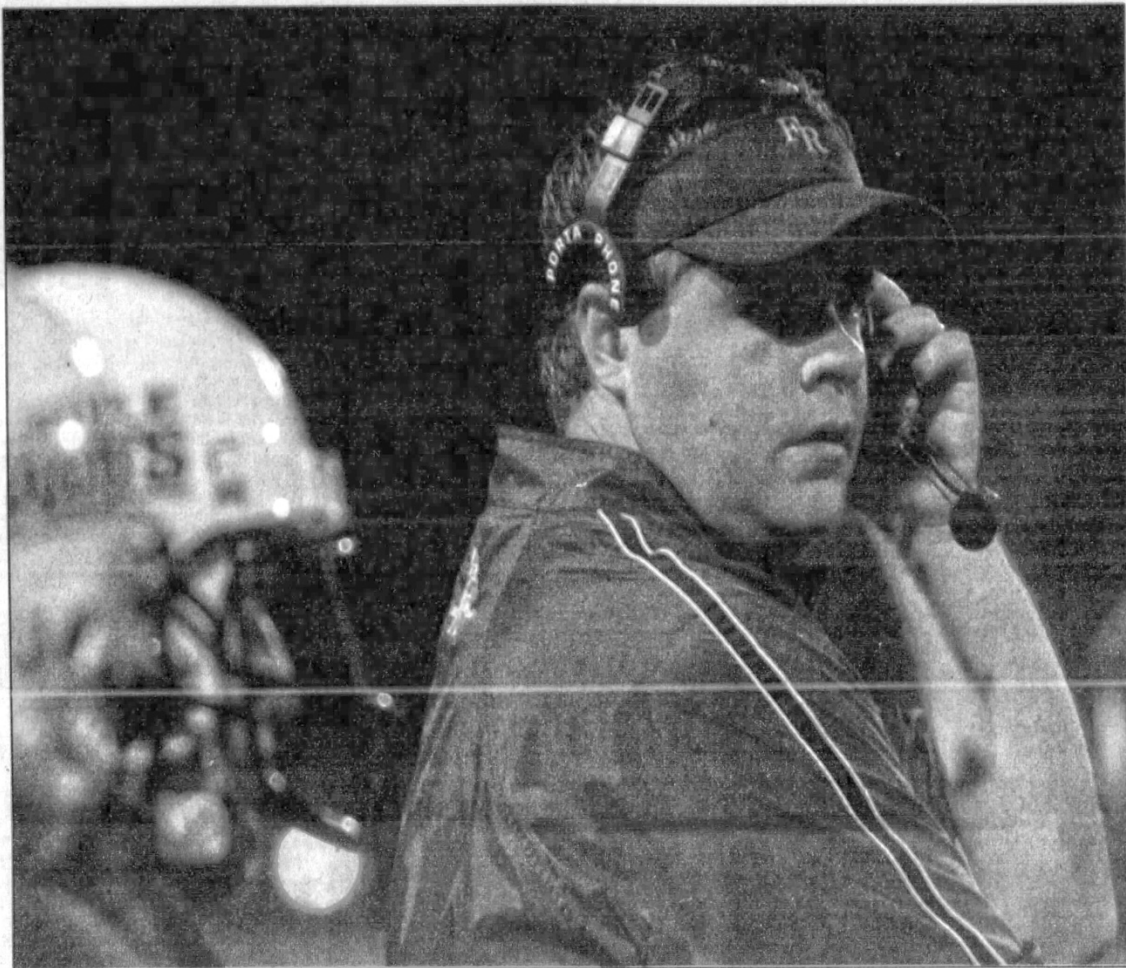
PASSING: Ross — Opelt 12-34 — 222, Benedictine Laffey 7-14 — 161.

RECEIVING: Ross — Johnson 4-77, Seth Frasure 2-8, Cody Ruiz 1-16, Billy Boukissen 1-24, Tyler Fligor 1-53, Adam Wilhelm 1-36, Paul Hershey 1-8, Mike Abbott 1-0. Benedictine — Amidon 4-120, Gardiner 2-31, Austin 1-10.

Record: Ross 0-4, Benedictine 3-1.

ROSS 27, COLUMBUS ST. CHARLES 13

Reason to smile



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

FREMONT ROSS coach Derek Kidwell looks on during the Little Giants' 27-13 win over visiting Columbus St. Charles on Friday. It was Kidwell's first win at the Ross helm.

Dominant second half gets Little Giant coach all wet

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

Aaron Opelt couldn't help it.

He took a couple peeks. On a few occasions in the closing minutes of Fremont Ross's 27-13 victory over visiting Columbus St. Charles, the Little Giants quarterback didn't pay attention to the play on the field while he was on the sidelines.

He looked over his shoulder, catching a glimpse of the raucous and packed home stands at Harmon Stadium.

"I looked up there a couple of times to see them on their feet," Opelt said. "It hasn't

"It means a lot to me for these kids. ... It's never about myself. It's about these young individuals."

— Fremont Ross coach Derek Kidwell

been like that for a couple of years. It's nice."

Opelt threw for 221 yards and a touchdown and ran in the go-ahead score and Ross outscored St. Charles 20-0 in a dominant second half to give coach Derek Kidwell his first victory at the Little Giant helm.

It was also the first home win for many of the Little Giants. Their only victory last

season was on the road at Lima Senior.

Anthony Brown had a touchdown run and Blair Ellenberger capped off the game's scoring with his second field goal of the contest with 3:23 remaining.

About two minutes later, the Little Giants gave Kidwell a victory shower.

"I'll take it," Kidwell said. "I usually sniff it out. I

haven't gotten this wet before, but I'll live with it."

The win certainly brought a smile to Kidwell's face, but it was more special to him to see his players enjoying themselves.

"It means a lot to me for these kids," Kidwell said. "We are going to win a whole lot of games here in Fremont, whether people believe it or not. It's not about the

Derek Kidwell show. It's never about myself. It's about these young individuals.

"That's what you coach for — to see these kids smiling," Kidwell continued.

St. Charles running back Walter Williams was the one smiling in the first half.

He had 124 yards rushing before halftime — and even had runs of 56 and 46 yards wiped out because of penalties.

Williams had a 37-yard gain to help set up Nathaniel McGill's 1-yard plunge with one second left in the first half.

See LITTLE GIANTS, B2



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

ABOVE, FREMONT ROSS senior Seth Frasure runs for yards in the Little Giants' 27-13 victory over Columbus St. Charles on Friday. Below, Cory Bowling runs past St. Charles' Thomas Vaccaro. The Little Giants outscored St. Charles 20-0 in the second half.

Little Giants get first victory of year

Continued From B1

That gave the Cardinals (1-4) a 13-7 lead at the break.

They outgained Ross 187-104 in the first half. And 33 yards of the Little Giants' total came on a touchdown pass from Opelt to Adam Wilhelm.

In the second half, though, Ross (1-4) held Williams to just 18 yards and the Cardinals to just 26 yards as a team.

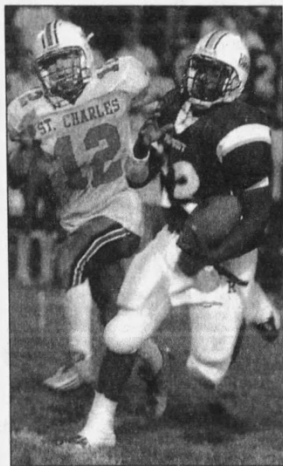
Ross, meanwhile, had 196 second-half yards to finish with 300 for the game.

"We just challenged them (at half-time)," Kidwell said. "We said, 'Step up and be the men you want to be, and we'll win.' And that's what our kids did."

Said St. Charles coach Jeff Liebert: "We just never got started in the second half. It was frustrating, disappointing."

Ross drove down to the St. Charles 9-yard line to open the second half. Opelt, though, was sacked for a 15-yard loss on third down.

Ellenberger drilled a 41-yard field goal to pull the Little Giants within 13-



10 just 3:36 into the third quarter.

Ross pulled ahead for good on a 9-yard option keeper by Opelt with 1:41 left in the frame.

And once the Little Giants got ahead, they stayed ahead. They had

leads late in losses to Toledo St. Francis and Cleveland Benedictine earlier this season.

"That's a sign of kids being resilient," Kidwell said. "They are tired of coming up on the short end of the stick. They did what they had to do."

The Little Giants added to their lead with a picture-perfect drive early in the fourth quarter.

They drove 71 yards on six plays and a pass-interference penalty. Opelt, who finished 12-of-22, had strikes of 25 and 35 yards to Paul Hershey and Brett Johnson, respectively, on back-to-back throws in the series.

Brown ran the final 10 yards on two carries for the score.

The fullback's 4-yard touchdown run gave Ross a 24-13 lead with 7:12 left in the game.

Ellenberger's 31-yard field goal in the closing minutes gave the Little Giants their most points in a game since Week 10 of the 2000 season.

That's about when Opelt started catching glimpses of the cheering fans. "This is awesome," Opelt said. "It's hard to explain."

His smile said it all.

High School Boys

Ross 27, St. Charles 13

St. Charles	7	6	0	0	—	13
Ross	0	7	10	10	—	27

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

SC — Williams 44 run (Carducci kick), 9:46

Second quarter

R — Wilhelm 33 pass from Opelt (Ellenberger kick), 7:36

SC — McGill 1 run (run failed), 0:01

Third quarter

R — Ellenberger 41 field goal, 8:24

R — Opelt 9 run (Ellenberger kick), 1:14

Fourth quarter

R — Brown 4 run (Ellenberger kick), 7:12

R — Ellenberger 31 field goal, 3:23

TEAM STATISTICS

	SC	R
First downs.....	9	14
Rushes-Yards	40-154	32-79
Passing yards.....	59	221
Total yards.....	213	300
Comp.-Att.-Int	9-16-1	12-22-0
Fumbles-lost	1-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	11-105	7-80

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

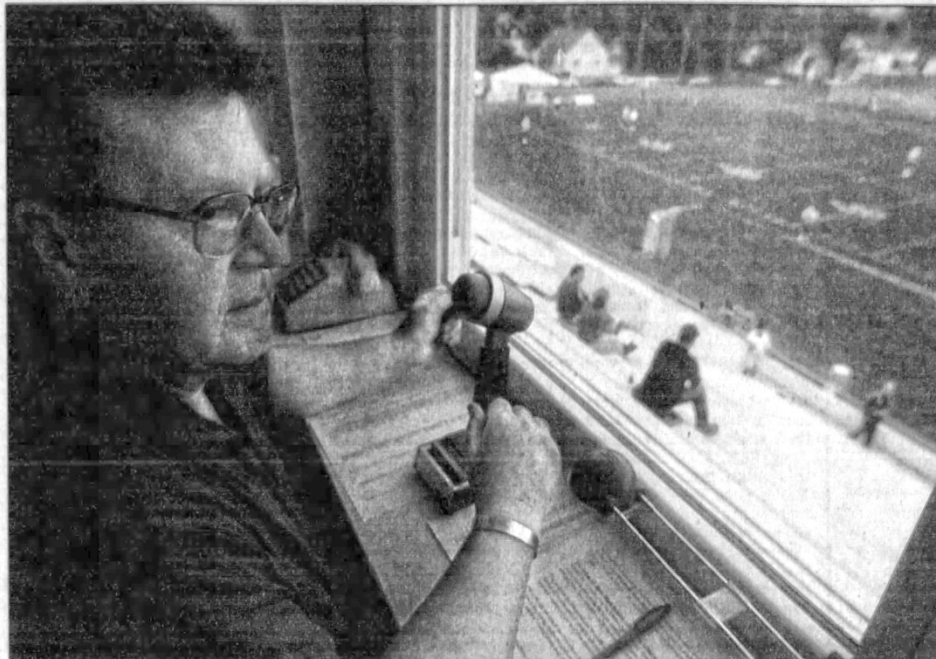
RUSHING — St. Charles: Williams 24-142; Kaltenecker 5-3, Frash 4-(-33), Larimer 6-37, McGill 3-2. Ross: Bowling 9-36, Jones 4-3, Opelt 14-18, Frasure 2-9, Brown 3-13

PASSING — St. Charles: Frash 9-16-1-59. Ross: Opelt 12-22-0-221.

RECEIVING — St. Charles: Kuppich 2-19, Kaltenecker 1-2, Kelleher 1-9, McJoynt-Griffith 1-(-5), Williams 1-9, Michalec 3-25. Ross: Hershey 3-69, Frasure 1-10, Fligor 2-15, Wilhelm 3-61, Boukissen 1-16, Johnson 1-35, Hall 1-10.

Records — St. Charles 1-4, Ross 1-4

Giant voice



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

LARRY JACKSON, a Fremont Ross graduate, is in his 20th season as the public address announcer for the Little Giant football team.

Jackson has seen a lot in 20 years behind mike

By MATTHEW HORN
Sports Writer

Shortly after Art Buccì took over as athletic director, Fremont Ross almost did the community a severe disservice.

It would not have been Buccì's fault, but he may have still had trouble living it down.

The Little Giants were about to jettison public address announcer and superfan Larry Jackson.

"I called to ask if he was coming back, and he said he'd gotten a letter saying we didn't want him back," Buccì said. "Somebody indicated we didn't need his services. We had no idea who did it. There's no way we'd do that."

"I don't know what Larry would do without Fremont," Buccì continued, "and I sure don't want to know what we'd do without Larry Jackson."

Jackson is currently in his 20th year as the announcer for football.

And while it's possible you wouldn't recognize Jackson these days as he's shed 54 pounds since May, his voice remains an unwavering constant in the community.

Jackson has seen the Little Giants in good times, including unbeaten regular-season campaigns and a Mr. Ohio in

"I don't know what Larry would do without Fremont, and I sure don't want to know what we'd do without Larry Jackson."

— Fremont Ross athletic director Art Buccì

Charles Woodson.

And he's been there for lean times like the last few years.

Jackson, who graduated from Ross in 1966, said that this past Friday's victory over Columbus St. Charles stands out in his mind.

"After not winning a home game in almost three years, watching the fans give those kids a standing ovation and not leaving, even from the press box that was great," he said. "There have been so many memories — Charles, Aaron (Opelt) breaking the passing record. I have seen so many things in 20 years, and Friday was certainly one of them."

Jackson said the hiring of Derek Kidwell as football coach was an excellent decision.

"Since he's been here, I've watched these kids get so excited about football again," Jackson said. "And not just at the high school. These kids are enthusiastic — there are

80 kids out. I think it was a great choice and will be a great choice for a long time. I think the whole community supports him."

The upcoming boys basketball season will be Jackson's 21st as the PA announcer. He said Woodson likely could have continued playing basketball at the next level instead of winning the Heisman Trophy at Michigan if he had the desire to do so.

"He's probably the greatest athlete I've ever seen," Jackson said. "He was almost just as good at basketball. I saw him do some incredible things on the basketball floor."

But a player's talent level is of absolutely no importance to Jackson. He seems to genuinely love each athlete who comes through the program and sincerely enjoys building warm relationships with them.

"I like getting to talk to the kids," he said. "I enjoy going down before games to talk to

the kids, and then watching them play is just great. It's all about watching them play and watching them succeed. I've met a lot of great people in 20 years."

And Jackson, who has missed only five football games — home or road — since 1960, gives no indication the end is in sight.

Marion Harding, this week's opponent, was actually Ross's foe for Jackson's first game in 1984 before he took the job full time in 1985.

"I don't have any real plans of stopping," he said.

"I definitely hope to broadcast the first game at the new stadium. As long as I'm excited, and I don't think that won't be the case any time soon, I expect I'll be at Ross for a while."

So does Buccì, who said that Jackson follows a methodical routine before each game. His ritual includes telling the Little Giants that they are about to win the ensuing contest.

He has already told some of the Ross players of an imminent victory on Friday.

"I told some of them we were going to beat Marion Harding," he said. "I tell them we're going to win every Friday. The last few years it may not have been so believable. Now, they believe it."

Marion Harding at Ross

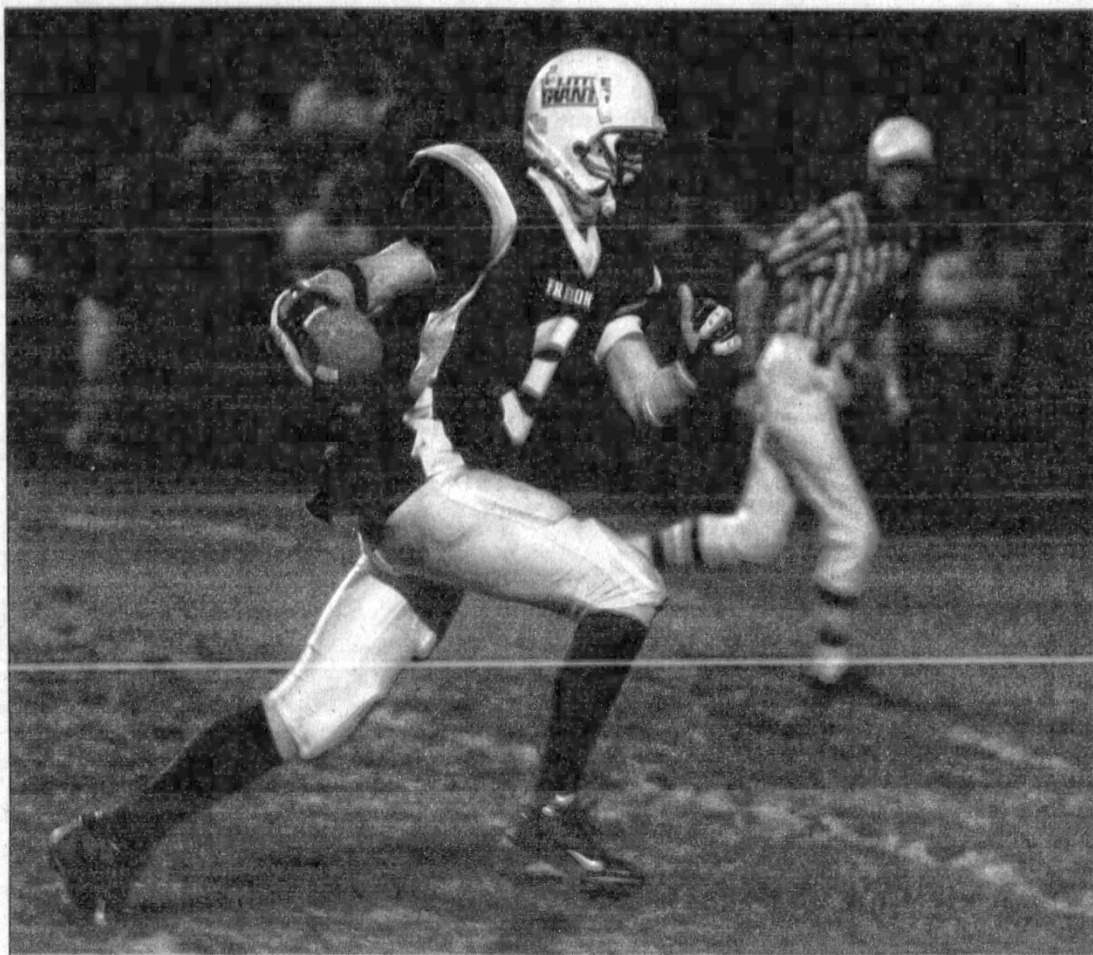
■ **RECORDS:** Marion Harding 4-1; Ross 1-4

■ **LAST WEEK:** Marion Harding lost 21-19 to Westerville South; Ross beat Columbus St. Charles 27-13

■ **OUTLOOK:** Marion Harding heads into the Greater Buckeye Conference opener as the undoubted league favorite. The Presidents suffered their first loss of the season last week against a talented Westerville South squad. Marion trailed 21-7 in the fourth quarter but rallied and had a chance to send the game into overtime. Quarterback Aaron Pitts hit tight end Anthony Marsano for a 3-yard score with 37 seconds left to pull Marion within 21-19. Pitts was stopped short on a bootleg on the two-point conversion. Harding has outscored its opponents 173-74. Running back Bryson Faggs has run for a GBC-best 901 yards and 10 touchdowns this year. Marion has averaged the most total yards on offense (396.60) in the league. Many Little Giants likely still have a sour taste in their mouths from last year's Marion game. The Presidents won 48-0 in a game that was canceled at halftime because of inclement weather. Last week, Ross topped St. Charles for the first win in the Derek Kidwell Era. The Little Giants dominated the second half, outscoring the Cardinals 20-0. Ross quarterback Aaron Opelt has thrown for a GBC-best 901 yards. He is 50-of-115 with four touchdowns and six interceptions. The Little Giants' rushing defense, which will be severely tested against Marion, is second-to-worst in the GBC, allowing 202.6 yards a game.

ROSS 21, MARION HARDING 14

'We're back'



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst
FREMONT ROSS'S Seth Frasure returns an interception 12 yards for the game-winning touchdown in the Little Giants' 21-14 victory over Marion Harding on Friday.

Little Giants shockingly impeach the GBC's Presidents

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

Following Fremont Ross's stunning 21-14 victory over state-ranked Marion Harding on Friday, one phrase — one wonderful phrase to the ears of the ecstatic Little Giants fans, players and officials — reverberated at Harmon Stadium.

"We're back," said Ross senior Joe Diller.

Seth Frasure intercepted a half-back pass and returned it 12 yards for the game-clinching score in the fourth quarter as the Little Giants shocked the Presidents, the defending Greater Buckeye

"This shows how good we can really be. This is a big-time turning point for us."

— Fremont Ross senior Joe Diller

Conference champions who were ranked No. 10 in Division I in the Associated Press poll and seventh in the computer rankings.

"This shows how good we can really be," Diller said. "This is a big-time turning point for us."

With the biggest victory since maybe the 1997 season — in which Diller's brother Andrew played on the play-

off-bound Little Giants — Ross improved to 2-4 overall and 1-0 in the conference.

"We don't have any harder opponents left on our schedule, so I can see us winning out," Diller said. "We are definitely in the driver's seat in the league."

First-year coach Derek Kidwell's squad has already doubled its win total of one from the previous two-sea-

son span. Ross, which topped Columbus St. Charles last week, won consecutive games for the first time since Weeks 9 and 10 of the 2001 season.

It was the second straight heartbreaking setback for Harding (4-2, 0-1), which lost 21-19 to Westerville South last week.

Frasure's incredible play was certainly the highlight

of the Little Giants' big victory.

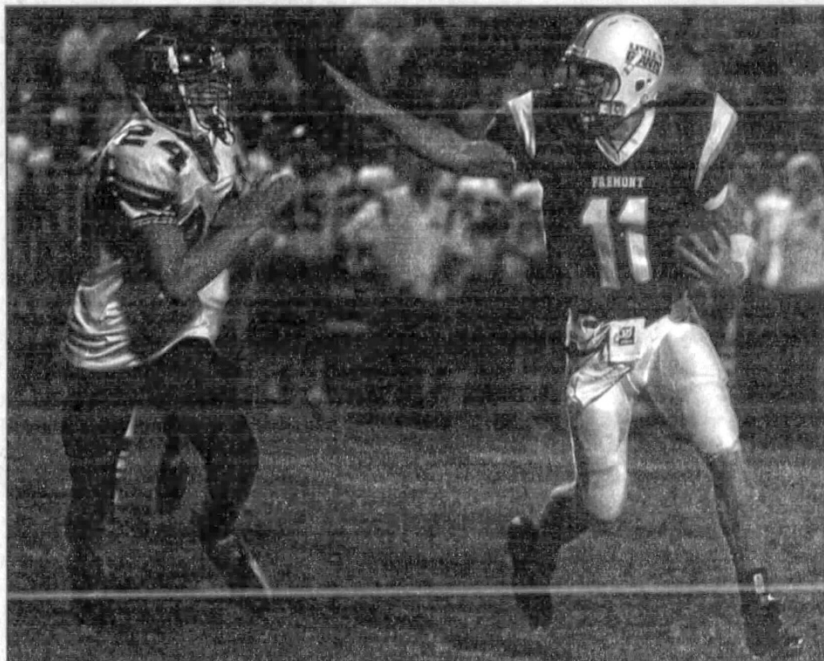
On third-and-13 from the Harding 17-yard line, quarterback Aaron Pitts pitched the ball right to Bryson Faggs.

Faggs tried to pass the ball back to the left side of the field to Pitts, but Frasure read the play perfectly and made a great leaping catch.

Frasure sprinted into the right corner of the end zone untouched with 6:50 left in the game, holding the ball high above his head in celebration.

See LITTLE GIANTS, B2

FREMONT
ROSS quarterback Aaron Opelt tries to ward off Marion Harding's Nick Padgett during the Little Giants' 21-14 victory over the state-ranked Presidents in the Greater Buckeye Conference opener for both teams on Friday. Opelt threw for 177 yards and a touchdown in the victory. Ross, which beat Columbus St. Charles last week, won consecutive games for the first time since Weeks 9 and 10 of the 2001 season.



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

Little Giants surprise reigning GBC champs

Continued From B1

"I had to do that," Frasure said of the minor showing of jubilation. "You know you want to celebrate more, but you can't do it."

"We have been waiting all year for a cornerback to come up with an interception for a touchdown," he continued. It was great timing for the Little Giants.

"I stayed on the backside because when (Pitts) pitched it to (Faggs), he didn't come up," Frasure said. "He kept going horizontally instead of vertically. I knew there had to be something coming. Two linemen pulled forward. I just stayed back, and I baited it."

Said Kidwell: "That's preparation. That is breaking down film and the kids paying attention during the week. He read his keys and stayed home. And he made a play that he was supposed to make."

Harding coach John Brady blamed himself for the "stupid" call — and the Presidents' setback.

"I lost the game for this team, not them," Brady said. "We were doing fine driving the ball and pounding it, and then I got stupid and threw a trick play. That is all my fault — no one else's. That was a horrible call down there."

On Marion's next possession, the Presidents moved the ball down to the Little Giants' 10-yard line.

Pitts, though, threw an incomplete pass on second down. On third-and-seven from the 10, Faggs was stopped for no gain by Joe Garza.

Pitts' fourth-down pass went through receiver Tommy Conley's hands in the back of the end zone with 1:50 left in the game.

Marion forced the Little Giants to go

three-and-out and got the ball back on the Ross 41 with 56 seconds left.

Robbie Hall, though, sealed the victory with his second interception of the game — a diving catch with 31 seconds left.

Ross quarterback Aaron Opelt took a knee, and the fans at packed Harmon Stadium went crazy.

"It's exciting to see the fans get behind us and support us," Kidwell said. "The community deserves this. It's not just the football team. It's the community, too."

"They were on hard times, and they need to get some life back in them," he continued. "And it's neat to see them responding to what we put on the field and our kids responding to them. It works hand and hand."

Faggs, who finished with 173 yards rushing, opened the game's scoring with a 68-yard jaunt on Harding's opening drive.

The Little Giants, though, answered. After a 34-yard kickoff return by Cory Clayton, they marched 49 yards on 11 plays in 5:07 to tie the game.

Goalline fullback Bryan Burel plunged in from 1 yard out to make it 7-7 with 5:05 left in the first quarter.

"I think it shows a lot of character on our kids' part," Kidwell said. "One long run early in the game, and we could have folded down and given up, but we didn't. We came back and got an answer offensively."

Opelt hit Brett Johnson on a picture-perfect fade pass in the right corner of the end zone to put Ross ahead 14-7 with 11:40 left in the second quarter.

Opelt was 4-of-5 for 64 yards on the drive. The junior, who completed seven consecutive passes in one stretch, finished 12-of-25 for 177 yards.

He threw two interceptions to Hard-

ing's Phillip Shepherd. One was on the Little Giants' opening series of the game on a deflected pass. The other was late in the third quarter when he fired the ball 30-some yards into the end zone after scrambling for a few seconds.

"I thought Aaron managed the game very well," Kidwell said. "He tried to make a play on the (second) interception, and I don't have a problem with that. The first one got tipped. I thought he did a good job of keeping our offense in it."

Opelt found Frasure four times for 66 yards. Frasure helped setup the Opelt-Johnson connection with a beautiful, leaping 23-yard catch across the middle.

"I was pleased with the way he played offensively," Kidwell said of Frasure. "He went up and got the ball and was very aggressive."

"It was nice to see him coming out of his shell and playing good football for us," Kidwell continued. "We are going to need him down the road."

Harding tied the game at 14 on Faggs' 36-yard touchdown with 7:51 left in the third quarter.

Frasure's interception, though, impeached the Presidents.

Kidwell is certainly pleased with the progress of his Little Giants in the recent two games of his initial campaign.

"We didn't come over here to be competitive or improve, we came over here to win," Kidwell said. "And our kids are finally believing that. Tonight, was a huge step in the right direction, knocking off the defending league champ."

Kidwell, though, wouldn't actually say the phrase — "We're back" — that was being repeated after the shocker.

"That will be answered later in the season," he said. "But I guarantee that teams are not going to look at us and chalk us up as an easy victory anymore."

High School Boys

Ross 21, Marion Harding 14

Marion 7 0 7 0 — 14

Ross 7 7 0 7 — 21

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

Marion — Faggs 68 run (Drollinger kick), 10:12

Ross — Burel 1 run (Ellenberger kick), 5:05

Second quarter

Ross — Johnson 5 pass from Opelt (Ellenberger kick), 11:40

Third quarter

Marion — Faggs 36 run (Drollinger kick), 7:51

Fourth quarter

Ross — Frasure 12 interception return (Ellenberger kick), 6:50

TEAM STATISTICS

	Marion	Ross
First downs	9	15
Rushes-Yards	31-202	34-106
Passing yards	61	177
Total yards	263	283
Comp-Att-Int 7-18-3 ..	12-25-2	
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	5-54	9-75

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING — Ross: Bowling 21-78, Opelt 10-23, Burel 3-5; Marion — Faggs 27-173, Slater 3-16, Pitts 1-13

PASSING — Ross: Opelt 12-25-2-177; Marion: Pitts 7-17-1-61, Faggs 0-1-1-0.

RECEIVING — Ross: Frasure 4-66, Hershey 3-35, Abbott 1-25, Johnson 3-39, Wilhelm 1-12; Marion — Harraman 2-16, Jackson 2-17, Shepherd 2-19, Faggs 1-9.

Records — Ross 2-4 (1-0 GBC); Marion 4-2 (0-1).

"(Coach Derek Kidwell) specified patience all season. It takes reps. We're really close to reaching our potential."

— Fremont Ross senior Seth Frasure



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

FIRST-YEAR FREMONT ROSS coach Derek Kidwell has the Little Giants on a two-game winning streak.

Talk of the town

Little Giants creating big stir recently

By MATTHEW HORN
Sports Writer

Consider Seth Frasure acclimated to Division I football. And consider him a member of a giant family.

The defensive back/wide receiver, who transferred from St. Joseph Central Catholic to Fremont Ross for this year, returned an interception 12 yards for a touchdown and a second consecutive victory for the Little Giants this past Friday.

"That's the kind of thing you dream about as a football player," Frasure said. "You are almost in shock. I just did what I was coached to do, but it does give me a confidence boost with everybody talking about it."

More preps, Page B3

- Preview capsules of every football game involving area teams.
- Clyde tennis team finishes second in Sandusky Bay Conference.

In fact, with the two straight wins — including Friday's 21-14 decision over state-ranked Greater Buckeye Conference counterpart Marion Harding — the Little Giants are undoubtedly a topic of conversation around town — and possibly Ohio — for a multitude of reasons.

And, unlike the recent past, the banter is certainly all positive as confidence has been instilled in the entire team.

First-year Ross coach Derek Kidwell has officially put his stamp on the program. The Little Giants are learning to play a new brand of football — together — and the transformation is far from being based solely on the fact that Kidwell likes to deploy an empty backfield.

Kidwell said Ross's suc-

cess stems directly from what the group does leading up to Friday.

"They don't need to say anything," Kidwell said of the apparent change in the squad's mentality. "You can tell by their attitudes and effort. They're having fun. They're smiling a lot. We've become a good practice team, and if you practice well you play well."

"The kids have bought into the system and are seeing the benefits. It's nice to play meaningful football games in October."

Starting quarterback Aaron Opelt appreciates the freedom to make decisions in Kidwell's offense.

"It's all us on Friday," he said. "The coaches can't put uniforms on and play for us. We are well-coached to go

out on Friday. When we get out there, it's our game. I have a lot more freedom. I can adjust out there. Last year, when a play was sent out, that was the play that was run. We have a lot of independence."

Kidwell has been pleased with Opelt's development.

"He has to feel comfortable," Kidwell said. "It's a growing process. He looks more and more comfortable each week. It's not a one-man show. The line has to protect and the backs have to pick up the blitz. He hasn't forced the issue recently. He's letting it come to him."

Frasure said that patience is a theme Kidwell has attempted to drive home all year.

"He told us it wouldn't happen overnight," Frasure said of Kidwell's scheme clicking. "He specified patience all season. It takes reps. We're really close to reaching our potential."

See ROSS, B3

Ross owns two-game win streak

Continued From B1

Frasure said he noticed a difference in the offensive unit in the 27-13 victory over Columbus St. Charles.

"We came together on offense and defense," he said. "The defense got the offense on the field to show people what we had, and the offense kept the defense off the field. The wide receivers are getting really comfortable."

That includes Brett Johnson — who hadn't played football since the ninth grade but has evolved into one of Opelt's favorite targets — Adam Wilhelm, who is new to the sport, and sophomore Paul Hershey.

Kidwell said Johnson and Opelt have already forged a comfort zone and Wilhelm has actually pined for — and received — an expanded role.

"(Johnson) has been making some big-time plays. He's one of our go-to receivers," Kidwell said. "He's made catches when we needed them. We knew (Wilhelm's) speed all along, it was just a matter of getting comfortable. He came and told the coaches he would take a hit. We knew then he'd do anything for us."

Now, the Little Giants want to continue feasting on GBC foes and stand alone in the conference.

They have already defeated the preseason favorite and travel to Napoleon (6-0, 1-0) on Friday.

But, in order to continue on their current path, the Little Giants will have to shore up their run defense and eliminate big plays from their opposition. Legendary assistant coach Dick Kidwell has told his players that each game will include five momentum altering big plays — and Ross would obviously like each of the five to work in its favor.

Derek Kidwell would also like to see his running backs supplement the aerial attack with at least 100 yards per contest.

And he wants to see a road victory.

"We are confident we can win the GBC with this group of kids. We haven't proven anything yet," he said. "To be a good football team you have to hop on a bus, leave Fremont and win on the road."

The giant family's next opportunity to prove a bit more will come on Friday.

NAPOLEON 25, ROSS 14

Slow start dooms Ross

Unbeaten Wildcats jump ahead 18-0, hold on for victory

By RYAN AUTULLO
News-Messenger correspondent

It had the makings of a coming out party.

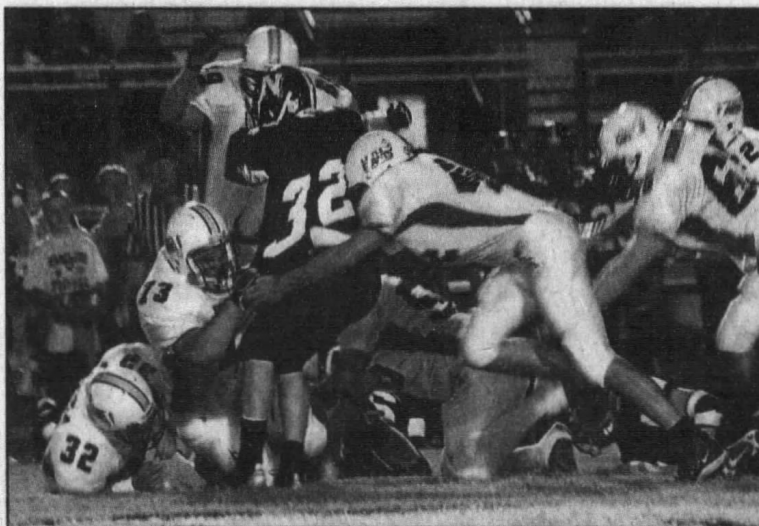
Fremont Ross, coming off last week's upset victory over state-ranked Marion Harding, needed a little more validation. A win over unbeaten Napoleon would have given Ross the inside track to the Greater Buckeye Conference championship.

Unfortunately for the Little Giants, they arrived casually late to their own fiesta on the way to a 25-14 setback on Friday.

With 4:50 left in the first half, quarterback Aaron Opelt threw a strike to Paul Hershey for a 13-yard gain and a fresh set of downs.

The completion was bittersweet as it was Opelt's first of the night, as well as the team's initial first down.

"We came out extremely flat in the first half," said first-year Ross coach Derek Kidwell. "And you



News-Messenger/Ken Dumminger

NAPOLEON RUNNING back Brad Weaver is surrounded by Fremont Ross defenders on Friday. Weaver ran for 118 yards in the Wildcats' 25-14 win.

can't do that in a championship-caliber game."

The Little Giants barely had time to make their rounds, and the game had already begun to spell trouble.

Ross's Cory Clayton fumbled on the kickoff following Zack Kruse's 8-yard reverse touchdown run.

The Wildcats took control and marched down to the Little Giant

2-yard line. However, they were forced to settle for a field goal, making the score 10-0 with 35 seconds left in the first quarter.

Napoleon went for the knock-out blow on its next series.

On third-and-6, quarterback Todd Small's play-action didn't fool anyone — especially the Ross secondary.

See GIANTS, B2

Giants stumble against Wildcats

Continued From B1

He improvised, however, and ran 37 yards down to the Little Giant 17-yard line. He found Kruse for a score and an 18-0 lead two plays later.

"The key was our play-action passing," said Napoleon coach John Snoad. "Our kids played with passion and heart."

Snoad was one of three finalists for the vacant Ross job, won by Kidwell during the off-season. Snoad downplayed the fact after the game, wishing not to take anything away from the effort of his players.

Ross (2-5) came storming back from down 18-0.

On fourth-and-6, Opelt and Hershey hooked up for 7 yards to move the sticks. On the next play, Opelt found Brett Johnson down the sideline for a 24-yard completion, setting Ross up at Napoleon's 6-yard line. After attempts at running the ball were negated, Opelt hit Seth Frasure on a fourth down, 4-yard slant for the Giants' first score.

Frasure wasn't finished.

On the ensuing drive, he made a spectacular fingertip interception that just barely stayed in his hands.

Ross cashed in on the momentum swing immediately.

The next play, Opelt rifled a pass to a streaking Adam Wilhelm down the

Ross sideline. Wilhelm, who was a double state placer in track last spring, outran the Wildcat defender for an 85-yard touchdown reception to cut the Napoleon lead to 18-14.

Opelt was 12-of-33 on the night for 224 yards — including 112 to Wilhelm.

The momentum shifter may have had Kidwell a little too confident as he opted against punting on fourth-and-1 at the Little Giant 39-yard line.

Opelt was stuffed on a botched play, resulting in a turnover on downs.

Hindsight is 20-20, but Kidwell backed his reasoning.

"I told the guys at half-time that the first drive would be important," he said. "My fullback didn't run the right play."

Bad turned worse with 3:20 left in the third.

On Ross's first play of a drive, Charles Jones lost the handle on a pitch from Opelt and Napoleon recovered.

"I gave my back-up running back an opportunity, and he lost the rock," Kidwell said.

Todd Small ran it in from 2 yards later in the drive on fourth down for the game's final score.

Ross running back Cory Bowling competed in the game despite the death of his mother last weekend in a automobile accident.

He finished with 33 yards on 11 carries.

High School Boys

Napoleon 25, Ross 14

Ross 0 14 0 0 — 14

Napoleon 10 8 0 7 — 25

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

N — Kruse 8 run (Gilson kick).

N — Gilson 20-yard field goal.

Second quarter

N — Kuse 14 pass from Small (Small run).

R — Seth Frasure 4 pass from Aaron Opelt (kick good).

R — Adam Wilhelm 84 pass from Opelt (kick good).

Fourth quarter

N — Small 2 run (Gilson kick).

TEAM STATISTICS

	R	N
First downs.....	8	12
Rushes-yards.....	21-32	49-249
Passing yards.....	217	73
Total yards.....	249	322
Comp.-Att.-Int.	12-34-0	5-12-2
Fumbles-lost	2-2	4-0
Penalties-yards	5-43	4-40.

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Napoleon — Weaver 24-117.

Records: Napoleon 7-0 (2-0 GBC),
Ross 2-5 (1-1 GBC).

ROSS 15, LIMA SENIOR 6

Cory's cause



FREMONT ROSS'S Adam Wilhelm runs for yards in the Little Giants' 15-6 victory over Lima Senior on Friday.

News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

Playing with purpose, Bowling helps lead Little Giants to win

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

Everything is for mom.
Every carry. Every yard.
Every first down.

And especially every victory.

"I'm doing this all for her," Fremont Ross senior Cory Bowling said on Friday after the Little Giants beat visiting Lima Senior 15-6 — the first victory since a fatal car accident claimed his mother Tabitha Jones on Oct. 3.

"I wanted to win this for



BOWLING

"I'm extremely proud of the kid. ... He has definitely dealt with adversity in a positive way."

— Fremont Ross coach Derek Kidwell on Cory Bowling

her really bad," he continued. "My mom wanted me to do this. ... This feels good."

Bowling rushed for 107 yards on 28 carries and quarterback Aaron Opelt threw for 177 yards and two touchdowns as Ross improved to 3-5 overall and 2-1 in the Greater Buckeye Conference.

"I'm extremely proud of the kid," Ross coach Derek Kidwell said of Bowling. "A lot of kids, you don't know how they would react from

that. He has definitely dealt with adversity in a positive way."

The Little Giants held Lima Senior (4-4, 0-3) to just 148 yards of offense as they rebounded from last week's loss to Napoleon and stayed alive in the conference race.

Ross is one game behind Napoleon and Findlay, where the Little Giants travel to on Friday.

"We needed this one really bad," said Bowling, who un-

believably played against Napoleon on the day after his mother's funeral. "We needed this win to win the other games, to build momentum."

The miserably sloppy conditions at Harmon Stadium were apparent on the game's first play.

Lima's Ted Stepleton tried to retrieve the opening kickoff from Blair Ellenberger at his own 6-yard line. Stepleton dropped the kickoff and quickly picked it up, but he

struggled to regain his footing.

Ross's Billy Boukissen tackled him at the 4-yard line.

Three plays later, Ross's Corey Chestnutt sacked quarterback Michael Macklin in the end zone for a safety.

The Little Giants led 2-0 just 1:40 into the game, and they never looked back.

"That is always tough," Lima coach Rick Vaughn said. "Field position is very key in a game like this."

Opelt, who finished 10-of-27, hit Adam Wilhelm for a 30-yard scoring strike to put Ross ahead 9-0 with 3:04 left in the first quarter.

See STELLAR, B2



FREMONT ROSS quarterback Aaron Opelt dives for yards in the Little Giants' 15-6 victory over Lima Senior on Friday. Opelt, who threw for 177 yards and two touchdowns, helped Ross improve to 3-5 overall.

News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

Stellar defensive effort helps lift Giants

Continued From B1

Opelt then put Ross up 15-0 when he connected with Seth Frasure for a 63-yard touchdown with 2:51 left in the first half.

Lima capped the game's scoring with a diving 22-yard grab by Marlon Godsey from Macklin just 20 seconds before the break.

Ross, which needs just one more victory for its first four-win season since 2001, finished with just 275 yards of total offense.

"I'll take it for the kids," said Kidwell, a former assistant coach at Lima Senior. "They haven't experienced this much. A win is a win."

"Defensively, I thought we

played very well," he continued. "Offensively, we have to clean some things up. The weather played a factor, but we still have to go out and do what we are capable of doing every night."

Kidwell is growing concerned with the Little Giants' inconsistency, exemplified by their second-half shutout.

"We haven't played four good quarters in a row yet," Kidwell said. "Once we do that, I think we are going to be a very hard team to deal with."

Bowling's strong running also helps make stopping the Little Giants a tough task. When he is able to gain yards, that opens up the passing lanes for Opelt.

On the Little Giants' first scor-

ing drive, Bowling opened the series with three straight carries for a total of 15 yards. On the next play, Opelt hit Wilhelm on a slant route for a touchdown.

"He is looking forward to carrying the load for us," Kidwell said. "That's why we keep rewarding him, keep giving him the ball and keep pounding it with him. We tell him to keep being patient because one of these nights, he's going to have another break-out game."

And Bowling, who has a bum ankle, is still not at 100 percent — physically or emotionally.

"He's playing on a lot of guts," Kidwell said.

Kidwell said the Ross football family has helped Bowling dur-

ing this tough time.

"We preach family, and he's leaning on his buddies right now," Kidwell said. "We as a staff told him that we care for him, we love him and we support him. If he ever needs us, we are here for him."

Said Bowling: "(The Little Giants) are giving me a lot of support every day. I really admire that. I need it. I need a lot of positive support to get through what I just went through."

Bowling said being on the football field — and bowling over opponents — has helped him cope with his loss.

"It keeps me focused," Bowling said. "It takes my mind off things, helps me get through the tragedy that I had. I need it."

High School Boys

Ross 15, Lima Senior 6

Lima	0	6	0	0	—	6
Ross	9	6	0	0	—	15

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

Ross — Corey Chestnutt safety, 10:20

Ross — Adam Wilhelm 30 pass from

Aaron Opelt (Ellenberger kick), 3:04

Second quarter

Ross — Seth Frasure 63 pass from Aaron Opelt (kick failed), 2:51

Lima — Marlon Godsey 22 pass from Michael Macklin (run failed), 0:20

TEAM STATISTICS

	Lima	Ross
First downs	5	12
Rushes-Yards	28-67	42-98
Passing yards	81	177
Total yards	148	275
Comp-Att-Int	5-14-1	10-28-1
Fumbles-lost	4-1	4-1
Penalties-Yards	6-40	7-80

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Lima — James Allison 9-36, Michael Macklin 12-39, Earmon Henderson 1-(-1), Malcom Keith 5-(-4), Matt Beggin 1-(-3). Ross — Cory Bowling 28-107, Aaron Opelt 10-(-21), Keith Williams 2-5, Kyle Cook 2-7.

PASSING: Lima — Matt Beggin 0-3-0-0, Michael Macklin 5-11-1-81. Ross — Aaron Opelt 10-27-1-177, Kyle Cook 0-1-0-0.

**ROSS 30,
FINDLAY 14**

Ross rolls by Findlay on the road

By RYAN AUTULLO

News-Messenger correspondent

FINDLAY — Joe Hershey had a message for anyone willing to listen on the sidelines at Findlay on Friday night.

During a first-quarter timeout, the longtime Fremont Ross athletic trainer known to many simply as "Doc" repeated the phrase, "Throw the ball to No. 13."

Hershey's opinion may have been slightly biased, but the doctor got what he ordered.

On fourth-and-3, Hershey's son Paul reeled in a 28-yard pass from quarterback Aaron Opelt for the game's first score and helped set the tone for a decisive 30-14 road victory.

"He's one of my biggest fans," Paul Hershey said. "He's always cheering."

Maybe Joe Hershey should have stopped the bleeding for Findlay.

See GIANTS', B2

Giants' stellar effort too much for Trojans

Continued From B1

The Little Giants scored on their next three possessions as well, taking a 27-0 half-time lead over the Trojans. Blair Ellenberger's 24-yard field goal resulted in the only second-half points for Ross.

"That was our best first half of the season," said first-year Ross coach Derek Kidwell. "We had a nice mix of running and passing. We had success on first-down, and I think that was the key tonight."

Opelt orchestrated the high-powered offense flawlessly. The junior threw for 235 yards on 15-of-28 passing. He also rushed nine times for 63 yards, including a score from 12 yards out with 1:21 left in the first half.

"This game, I was a little bit smarter when I got pressured," Opelt said. "The receivers were getting open, and I was hitting them."

Ross, which improved to 4-5 overall and 3-1 in the Greater Buckeye Conference, was embarrassed by the Trojans last year in a 70-20 drubbing at Harmon Stadium.

But this isn't your older brother's team.

This year's version has an inner arrogance to them, one that almost became detrimental.

The Little Giants were charged with three first-half personal fouls, prompting a lecture from the officials.

"We have a little swagger," said Kidwell, who certainly shares the same demeanor of his squad. "I want that, but there's a fine line. The officials did an excellent job of cleaning

it up."

Findlay fell to 3-6, snapping a three game winning streak that put them in a tie with Napoleon atop the GBC standings.

Napoleon topped Marion Harding 21-0 on Friday to move into first place by itself.

On the possession following Hershey's touchdown, Opelt led Ross on a 92-yard scoring drive capped by a 2-yard touchdown by back-up running back Anthony Brown.

Brown's predecessor, Cory Bowling, cashed in on the next drive from 5 yards out to up the lead to 20-0. Bowling, who has been driven by the death of his mother earlier this month, finished with 105 yards on 17 carries.

"Our offensive line has been the strength of the team all season long," Kidwell said.

The coach was equally as impressed with the other side of the ball. The Little Giant defenders dominated the line of scrimmage and seemingly flew all over the field to make plays.

Findlay's two touchdowns were scored in the game's final minute against a host of Little Giant reserves.

It was a sweet homecoming for defensive coordinator Brad Burrows, who was soaked after players dumped a water jug on him in the game's final minutes.

"He coached at Findlay, so he has a feel for their offense," Kidwell said. "He's one of the best defensive coordinators in Ohio. This is the best game the defense played all season long. This game meant a lot to him."

An Opelt score likely broke the back of the Trojan defense. After Seth Frasure picked off a pass with 4:35 left in the second quarter, Opelt came through in a big way.

On third-and-6, and then again on fourth-and-10 Opelt connected with Rob Hall to move the sticks.

"He's matured so much," Hall said about Opelt. "The line did a great job to give him the time to pick the defense apart."

Hall, who was on the wrong end of last year's route, says the feeling of redemption couldn't feel better.

"It is an awesome feeling," Hall said. "They were still talking when we were beating them. This is a real big rivalry."

"It's going to be bigger now."



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High School Boys

Fremont Ross 30, Findlay 14

Ross	7	20	0	3	— 30
Findlay	0	0	0	14	— 14

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

FR — Paul Hershey 28 pass from Aaron Opelt (Blair Ellenberger kick).

Second quarter

FR — Anthony Brown 2 run (Ellenberger kick).

FR — Cory Bowling 6 run (kick failed).

FR — Opelt 11 run (Ellenberger kick).

Fourth quarter

FR — Ellenberger 24 field goal.

F — Perkins 17 pass from Foltz (Snodgrass kick).

F — Perkins 12 pass from Schneider (Snodgrass kick).

SCORING SUMMARY

	FR	F
First downs	16	18
Rushes-yards	38-146	33-208
Passing yards	159	214
Comp.-Att.-Int.	13-27-2	15-30-0
Total yards	305	422
Punts-ave.	3-37	1-43
Fumbles-lost	2-1	3-1
Penalties-yards	2-10	5-52

TEAM STATISTICS

RUSHING: Ross — Bowling 17-104, Opelt 8-63, Keith Williams 7-39, Brown 1-2. Findlay — Mills 17-81, Kraus 8-17, Oates 3-17, Enright 7-33, Rasmussen 1-2.

PASSING: Ross — Opelt 5-30-0 — 214. Findlay — Kraus 3-12-2 — 26, Foltz 7-11-0 — 85, Schneider 3-4-0 — 48.

RECEIVING: Ross — Seth Frasure 3-35, Tyler Fligor 1-10, Mike Abbott 1-5, Adam Wilhelm 2-32, Paul Hershey 2-35, Kyle Cook 2-51, Cory Clayton 1-8, Rob Hall 3-38. Findlay — Sottoway 1-6, Rasmussen 4-48, Enright 2-35, Messenger 1-1, Kraus 3-41, Perkins 2-29.

Records — Ross 4-5 (3-1 GBC), Findlay 3-6 (3-1 GBC).

Ross enjoying renaissance

By MATTHEW HORN
Sports Writer

The Sandusky basketball team eliminated Fremont Ross from the postseason last season.

Senior Fred Shearon and his Ross teammates were forced to bite their tongues as many of the Blue Streaks brashly mocked the Little Giants by implying the end result would be similar on the football field this year.

"Well, let's play some football," Shearon told them.

Ross will have no problem entering Friday's game with the Blue Streaks bubbling with pride as the Little Giants have an opportunity

Giants eye win over rivals, 5-5 mark

to finish the campaign with a .500 record after winning only one game in the previous two seasons combined.

In addition, if Ross (4-5, 3-1) wins and Findlay tops Napoleon, the Little Giants would earn a share of their first conference title since 1998.

In that scenario, each of those three teams would finish with one Greater Buckeye Conference loss.

"I think we're sending a signal to people on our schedule that Fremont Ross football is back, the

pride is back and opponents are in for a four-quarter battle," Little Giant coach Derek Kidwell said. "Our kids don't quit. It's not the seniors' fault they were in high school when Fremont fell on hard times. That's just motivation to lay the foundation for what we're trying to build in Fremont. They should feel proud because somebody has to lay the foundation."

"The price they've been paying pays off," Kidwell continued.

"They're seeing the rewards. The kids have done everything I've

asked since I got the job. That's why you coach high school football — to see the kids smile and wearing their high school jackets with pride. These kids can go anywhere they want and wear their purple and white with pride, and people will understand they're wearing it with pride for a reason."

A win over Sandusky (3-6, 1-3) would put an emphatic cap on the season as none of the Little Giant seniors have won the grudge match in football.

"To go from how it was to 5-5, I'm sure a lot of people didn't think that would happen," Shearon said.

See WIN, B3

Win over rivals would cap off .500 campaign for Giants

Continued From B1

"To me that would be a good season after what we're used to, of course. We were horrible for two years. Now, we have it in us and we're bringing it back."

"We're not losers and we know it," he continued. "We just had to come out and ball. We couldn't play like we did the last two years. We had it in us to be successful."

To that end, Ross had opportunities to beat Toledo St. Francis and Cleveland Benedictine during the regular season and was not very far from its first winning season since 2000 and a sliver of a shot at postseason play.

Shearon said the team's

resurgence stems primarily from Kidwell's spread offense, which typically takes time for players to pick up.

"This style of offense works better with our athletes," he said. "A (Division I) school like this has athletes, and this offense puts them in position to win."

Josh Feighner, who started at center and defensive tackle as a sophomore before sitting out last year, said the team goes into every game motivated and knowing what the opponent's tendencies are due to Kidwell.

Despite this being Kidwell's first season at Ross, he said a 5-5 mark would mean more to the players than himself. Kidwell will not be satisfied until the road to the GBC title travels

through Fremont.

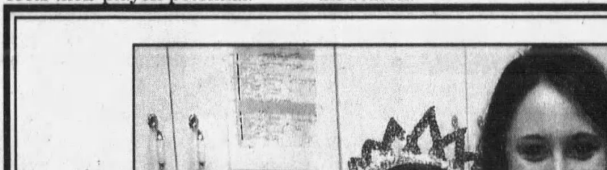
"I didn't take this job with plans on taking baby steps," he said. "We know the system works. We came out of the gate a little slow (0-4). Five-and-five would be good for the kids. We're playing meaningful games in October."

"It's nice to be playing for a share of the title in Week 10, but it's also disappointing and frustrating we're not preparing for Weeks 11 and 12," he continued. "Great football teams strive to extend the season. These kids learned that an early loss affects their playoff potential."

You can't get games back."

But a 5-5 campaign and veined talk of conference titles have reinstalled an intense pride in both the players and community.

"Five-and-five would definitely be really nice when compared to the last two years," Feighner said. "I don't think anybody thought we'd be 5-5 after starting 0-4. (Those two years) would look really distant compared to the beginning of the season."



Friday's games

Sandusky at Ross

■ **RECORDS:** Sandusky 3-6 (1-3 GBC); Ross 4-5 (3-1)

■ **LAST WEEK:** Sandusky beat Lima Senior 44-24; Ross beat Findlay 30-14

■ **OUTLOOK:** Ross enters the 99th meeting of this fantastic rivalry — the second-longest in Ohio — with plenty on the line. If the Little Giants win and Napoleon loses at Findlay, they would finish in a three-way tie for the Greater Buckeye Conference title. Under first-year coach Derek Kidwell, the Little Giants have certainly distanced themselves from the historic 1-19 stretch the last two seasons. The Little Giants face the extremely difficult task of slowing down star running back Ron Pickens. Pickens ran for school-record 347 yards during the win over Lima Senior to break the school mark for single-season rushing yards (1,756). "He's very explosive," Kidwell said. "He's fast and quick. He's not easy to tackle. His motor runs all the time, and he's always working for extra yards. These kids have looked forward to challenges all year." Kidwell said that the Blue Streaks are not shy to throw but that 80-90 percent of their offense involves Pickens. This will be Kidwell's first experience with this intense rivalry. "Sandusky is a different rivalry," Kidwell said. "There are some ill feelings toward one another sometimes."

SANDUSKY 21, ROSS 12

Foul finish for Little Giants

Ross misses out on chance to tie for conference crown

By **NICK MATHEWS**
Sports Editor

Fremont Ross was rolling. But instead of a cool finish to the campaign, the Little Giants lost their cool.

Seconds after they stopped record-breaking Sandusky running back Ron Pickens short on a crucial third-down play midway through the fourth quarter, a referee threw a flag in the air.

Personal foul, Ross. Automatic first down, Sandusky.

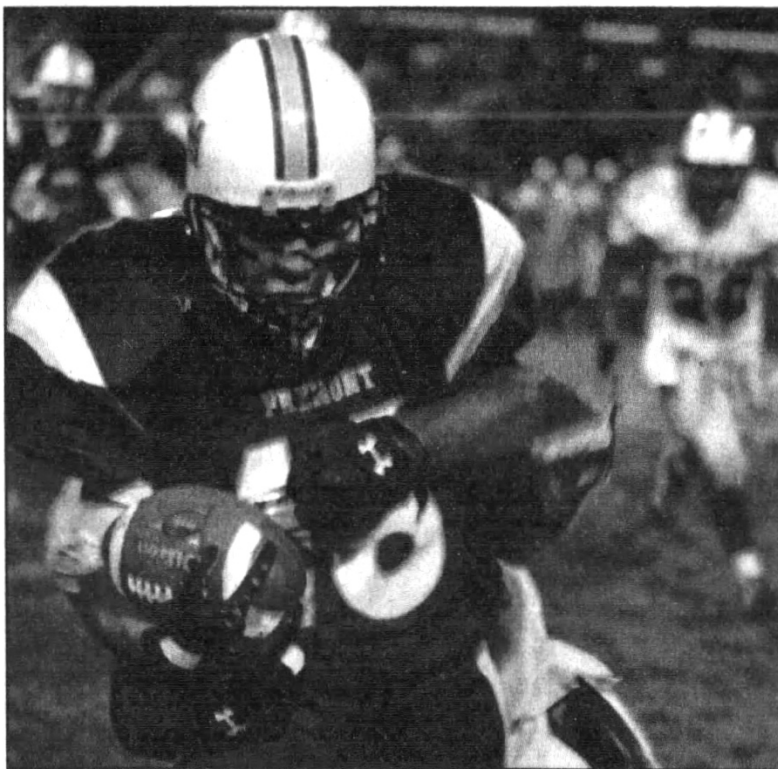
And, eventually, victory Sandusky.

Five plays after the stunning personal foul penalty, the visiting Blue Streaks sealed their 21-12 win with a 43-yard touchdown pass from Matt Feltner to Greg Garrett with 3:42 left.

"We didn't play Fremont football," first-year Ross coach Derek Kidwell said. "We've got to play smarter on the field."

The Little Giants, who finished 4-6 overall and 3-2 in the Greater Buckeye Conference, missed out on the chance to end a two-game losing streak to Sandusky, to capture a share of the first conference title since 1998 and to complete the first non-losing season since 2000.

And all of those goals seemed well within their grasps.



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst

FREMONT ROSS SENIOR Brett Johnson makes a grab in the Little Giants' 21-12 loss to archrival Sandusky on Friday.

The Little Giants certainly had momentum building before the costly penalty.

They flawlessly executed their no-huddle offense and marched down the field, pulling within 14-12 on a 1-yard run by Anthony Brown. Quarterback Aaron Opelt slipped while rolling out on the two-point conversion.

The Ross defense then seeming-

ly forced the Blue Streaks into a three-and-out on their ensuing series, stopping Pickens 3 yards shy of the first-down marker.

But, then, the flag flew.

On Ross's next series, another 15-yard personal foul call severely hurt the Little Giants' chances of moving the ball down the field.

See ROSS, B2

Ross closes year with loss

Continued From B1

Kidwell realized his players lost their composure, but he also wasn't happy with the officials.

"We can't hurt ourselves," Kidwell said. "We are not good enough right now to fight officials and beat a team. I thought it was a poorly officiated game, especially late in the game when the momentum was starting to swing. They took the crowd and our momentum out of it."

Ross got the ball back at Sandusky's 27-yard line with 2:03 left in the game. Tony Zimmerman blocked a Sandusky punt and Steven Snyder recovered it to set up the Little Giants.

Ross moved down to the 2-yard line, but Opelt's fourth-down pass with 1:06 left was broken up by Josh Kaszonyi at the goalline.

"We didn't execute down the stretch," Kidwell said, "and that hurt us."

A victory would have given Ross a share of the GBC title with Findlay and Napoleon.

Findlay upset previously unbeaten Napoleon 24-7 on Friday. Each team finished with a 4-1 mark in the league.

Sandusky opened the game's scoring with 6:35 left in the first quarter on an incredible 69-yard punt return by Jordan Edwards, who transferred from Ross last season.

"For me leaving and coming back here, I just had to win this," Edwards said. "I'm really excited. I was just so pumped up."

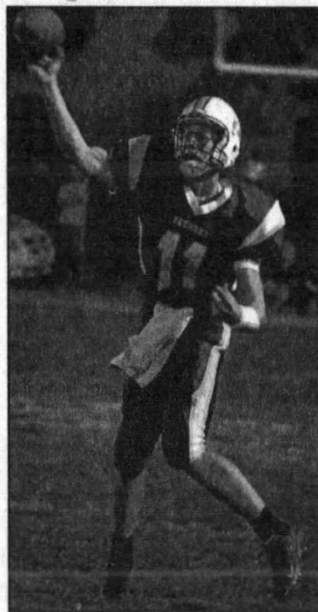
Added Sandusky coach Jim Bollenbacher: "Jordan's such a great kid. That was nice. He was under a lot of pressure this week, but he handled it well like a real champion."

After the score, Bollenbacher stunned the Harmon Stadium crowd with an onside kick. Tristen Sample recovered his own kick.

The Blue Streaks (4-6, 2-3) didn't score after the recovery, but the play certainly made a difference in the game.

"It stole the momentum," Bollenbacher said.

Bollenbacher said the gutsy call was actually made by assistant coach Tom Kiser, who was



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst
FREMONT ROSS'S Aaron Opelt finished 14-of-29 for 156 yards in the Little Giants' loss to Sandusky.

one of three finalists for the Ross head-coaching opening this past off-season.

"That was a great call," Kidwell said.

Cory Bowling pulled Ross within 7-6 on an 11-yard scamper with 43 seconds left in the first quarter. The extra point, though, was wide left.

Pickens, who owns the single-game and single-season rushing marks at Sandusky, had a 1-yard touchdown run to make it 14-6 with 7:55 left in the second half.

"Since we knew that we weren't going to the playoffs, this is like our bowl game," said Pickens, who finished with 169 yards on 40 carries. "This was a good game for us. We had to come out on top of this."

The loss was a sour way to end the season for the Little Giants, who won four of their last six games after starting 0-4.

"I would have liked to finish on a higher note, but we let things slip away tonight," Kidwell said.

Edwards said he is glad to see the Ross program moving in the right direction.

"They are coming back," he said. "I think it is good that they are doing that. I'm glad to see it. But we had to win this. And we did."

High School

Sandusky 21, Ross 12

Sandusky	7	7	0	7	—	21
Ross	6	0	0	6	—	12

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

Sandusky — Jordan Edwards 69 punt return (Tristan Sample), 6:35

Ross — Cory Bowling 11 run (kick failed), 0:43

Second quarter

Sandusky — Ron Pickens 1 run (Sample kick), 7:55

Fourth quarter

Ross — Anthony Brown 1 run (run failed), 8:40

Sandusky — Greg Garrett 43 pass from Matt Feltner (Sample kick)

TEAM STATISTICS

	S	R
First downs	13	14
Rushes-yards	48-175	28-151
Passing yards	72	156
Total yards	247	307
Comp-Att-Int	6-10-0	14-29-1
Fumbles-lost	3-1	3-2
Penalties-yards	9-65	7-70

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Sandusky — Pickens 40-169, Edwards 1-5, Feltner 6-(-4), Denarea Swain 1-5; Ross — Bowling 15-77, Kyle Cook 3-25, Aaron Opelt 9-48, Brown 1-1

PASSING: Sandusky — Feltner 6-10-0-72; Ross — Opelt 14-29-1-156

RECEIVING: Sandusky — Feltner 1-5, Demetris Allen 1-5, Marvin Ritchie 1-9, Mike Sanders 1-12, Garrett 2-41; Ross — Tylor Fligor 1-18, Mike Abbott 2-16, Adam Wilhelm 4-44, Paul Hershey 2-13, Cook 2-21, Rob Hall 1-15, Brett Johnson 2-29

Records — Sandusky 4-6 (2-3 GBC); Ross 4-6 (3-2 GBC)

Awards

High School Football

All-GBC

Offensive Lineman of Year — Matt Wakely (Marion Harding).

Defensive Lineman of Year — Caleb Enright (Findlay), Ivan Frye (Marion Harding).

Offensive Back of Year — Ron Pickens (Sandusky).

Defensive Back of Year — Zak Kruse (Napoleon).

GBC Coach of Year — John Snoad (Napoleon).

Offense

First Team

Greg Mills Findlay
Matt Eller Findlay
Brad Weaver Napoleon
Adam Miller Napoleon
Keil Miller Napoleon
Joe Diller Fremont Ross
Aaron Opelt Fremont Ross
Jerrod Slater Marion Harding
Chris Miller Sandusky
Greg Garrett Sandusky
Marlon Godsey Lima Senior

Place Kicker

First Team

Mark Snodgrass Findlay

Defense

First Team

Zack Kraus Findlay
Ryan Sottoway Findlay
Ronnie Oates Findlay
Kyle Fruth Napoleon
Jacob Lamming Napoleon
Corey Chestnutt Fremont Ross
Fred Shearon Fremont Ross
Phil Shepherd Marion Harding
Kyle Jackson Marion Harding
Hassan Moore Sandusky
James Allison Lima Senior

Punter

First Team

Kevin Meginness Marion Harding

Offense

Second Team

Todd Small Napoleon
Taylor Brown Napoleon

Joe Strzempka Findlay
Jason Brindley Fremont Ross
Adam Wilhelm Fremont Ross
Josh Feighner Fremont Ross
Aaron Pitts Marion Harding
Michael Macklin Lima Senior
Cullen Rasmussen Findlay
Josh Babcock Napoleon
Roberto Rodriguez Marion Harding

Defense

Second Team

Eric Schwab Napoleon
Elliot Vocke Napoleon
Ryan Rowe Sandusky
Randy Leitner Napoleon
Nathan Lahey Findlay
Brian Wingate Findlay
Steve Moore Sandusky
Andrew Leddy Findlay
George Perez Fremont Ross
Nick Padgett Marion Harding
Earmon Henderson Lima Senior

Honorable Mention

For Fremont Ross — Cory Bowling, Joey Garza, Paul Hershey, Rob Hall.

