

Little Giants flex muscles



JENNY MIELKE of Ross starts out of the box after laying down a bunt in the first inning of Tuesday's Division I sectional semifinal at Alumni Field. Mielke was out on the play, but the Little Giants escaped for plenty of offense during an 11-2 victory over Ashland.

Ross dissidents bunt for power hitting in sectional opener

By TIMOTHY A. WOLFRUM
Staff writer

Tourney trail

■ **What:** Division I sectional tournament.
■ **Tuesday:** Ross 11, Ashland 6. Little Giants swept an early run in the fifth inning, Ross pitcher Courtney Abbott fires a four-hit shutout.

■ **Next:** Ross vs. Tiffin Columbus, 5 p.m. Thursday.
■ **Where:** Fremont's Alumni Field.

The Little Giants rapped out eight hits, including a double and two triples, and scored eight times in the fifth on the way to an 11-2 victory at Alumni Field.

The offensive barrage contrasted last year's sectional contest between the two teams, when Ross

managed just one hit out of the infield and five runs total during a 4-6 victory. "Wow, they did it a few little better than I had planned on them," Williams said. "We were playing them to do a bit of

hunting. We'd kind of screwed around with our defense a little bit and I think took some of the hunting away from them. "Then they started swinging out of the ball and hitting it over our heads, so they didn't need to bunt. At that point, I was ready to see them start hitting the ball. The big inning didn't surprise the Little Giants, even though they are best known for scoring through bunts and leady base running. "Our whole lineup is pretty much slotted," said Kresy Lopez, who started the inning with her second double of the game and finished 3-for-2 with three runs scored. "If you get an all on one good day, you

just better watch out." Ross (15-2) advances to Thursday's sectional final against Tiffin Columbus, a 4-1 winner over Mansfield on Tuesday. Lopez got the Ross of Ross started in the third inning by letting a double over Arrow centerfielder Chelsea Puck's head. Garcia walked and both players moved up on two wild pitches by Ashland starter



LOPEZ

See GAZETTE, B2

Giants use eight-run fifth inning in victory

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Jolene Edwards, Lopez scored on the second wild pitch, and Garcia came home on a Jenny Mielke sacrifice fly.

The Little Giants took a 3-0 lead in the fourth when Tiff Nitschke singled and freshman pinch-runner Kristen

Hammer manufactured a run by moving to second on a wild pitch, to third on a stolen base and home on yet another wild pitch.

Lopez opened Ross's eighth-run fifth against Arrow reliever Brittany Goon with a blast to left field for her second double of the game. Later, the Little Giants strung together five straight

hits, capped by back-to-back, opposite-field homers by Ashleigh Horn and Alyson Hickey. Horn's triple plated two runs, Hickey's one.

Aimey Watkins, Abby Gilbert, Nitschke, Garcia and Emily Bibler also had hits in the inning. Gilbert said his team is capable of outbursts, even

though it prefers playing tight to the vest.

"That's the kind of hitting I expected us to do for a long time," he said. "We've got hitters. We have been winning with defense and hitting. Today, we got the hits."

Ross returns to regular season play at Ashland Wednesday at 4:30 p.m. while Tiffin Columbus is at

Tornadoes oust Giants



Photo Messenger/Doug Hise

TIFFANY NITSCHKE (2), Ainsley Watkins (3) and the rest of the Fremont Ross softball team prepare for their postgame bat around the bases following a 2-0 loss to Tiffin Columbus at Alumni Field.

Columbian pitcher throws two-hitter in win

By MICHAEL PIDANCK
Staff writer

Using great pitching and a stingy defense, the Fremont Ross softball team reeled off wins in 14 of its first 15 games. "I'm not sure this is one of her better outings," Ross coach Mike Gilbert said of Abbott.

"But Tiffany Garcia made two nice plays in right, and we didn't have any errors. I think as long as you can play with no errors, you're going to win most games."

Ross senior Courtney Abbott pitched a five-hit shutout for her fifth victory. She struck out two and walked one.

Once again, Abbott benefited from a staunch Ross defense. The Little Giants didn't commit an error and got outstanding play from rightfielder

and gave up just two hits in the complete game win. No Little Giants advanced past first base.

"She does a good job for us," said Tornadoes coach Mike Hamppe after his team improved to 11-1. "She had pretty good control tonight and we had great defense tonight, so I'm happy."

Ross wanted a line pitcher's performance by Courtney Abbott, who allowed four hits and two unearned runs while fanning seven over seven innings. But two days after Ross pounded out 10 hits in an 11-0 semifinal win over Ashland, the Little Giants mastered just two singles, opposite field hits by Abby Gilbert in the first inning and by Amanda Schaller in the sixth.

"Courtney pitched well," coach Gilbert said. "That's her third day in a row (pitching) and she pitched well enough to win, we just didn't give her much support. If you don't score a run, you're not going to win."

Katie Foss was 2-for-3 for the Tornadoes, and had a hand in both of her team's runs. In the top of the first, Foss's lead-off with a single, hustled all the way to third on a passed ball and scored on a groundout by Kalia Dura.

"When they score quick like that, you know there weren't going to many runs, so it's tough," Gilbert said. "You know it was going to be a one-run invasion, bad game, and that's what it turned out to be."

before April Vanover's one-out single in the fifth. She went to second on an error to third on a walk to Jessica Sharp and scored on a base hit to right by Foss.

"We had a couple breaks today and they didn't," said Hamppe. "Hey, that's anybody's game, whoever gets the breaks wins and we get them tonight. That's a great (Ross) ballpark over there."

Ross was nearly untouchable, allowing just one fair ball to be pulled. After Gilbert's two-out single in the fifth inning, the Ross returned 10 in a row, six via the strike out.

"I don't think it was intimidation," coach Gilbert said.

See GAZETTE, B3

Ross blanked by tornadoes

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"She's one of the better pitchers we've faced and today was her day. She pitched a heck of a game."

When the Little Giants did put the ball in play, the Tornadoes defense was up to the challenge. Columbian made just one error—a dropped fly ball—and took away the Little Giants' trademark short game. Every time a Ross hitter laid down a bunt, a Columbian infielder pounced on it and made the easy out.

"We knew they liked to bunt. Hamppe said, 'We read their clip-pings and we had some scouts

looking when we were over here Tuesday, and we knew they bunted well. Defense is the name of the game and we did a nice job."

Columbian advances to the district semifinal at 5 p.m. Tuesday against Lexington at Hoss.

The Little Giants are now forced to re-focus on the Great Lakes League race beginning Tuesday at Sandusky.

"Any time you play in a tournament it's kind of gravy," Gilbert said.

"If you win in the tournament, that's good. If you don't win, it's a hard loss because you know it's an ending. But I'm proud of the girls, they played, they didn't give up, but they just didn't win."



Photo Messenger/Doug Hise

EMILY BIBLER backs to first base during sixth inning action. Bibler had re-entered the game to run for pinch-hitter Amanda Stralder, who had singled pinch-hitting for Bibler. The Little Giants collected just two hits and dropped a 2-0 decision to Tiffin Columbus.