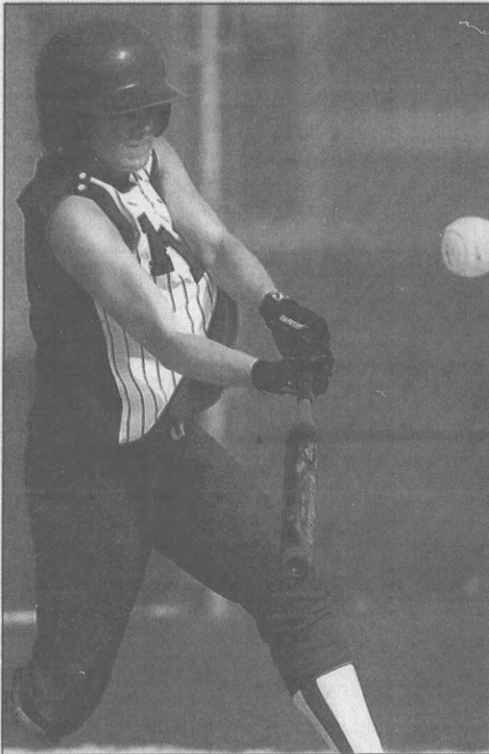


# GIANTS WIN SECTIONAL

Div. I softball sectional

## Return of the Giants Zuniga no-hitter snaps recent slump



News-Messenger/Ben French

JEN MIELKE of Ross slaps the ball during Thursday's tournament game at Alumni Field.

By SCOTT BLACK

News-Messenger correspondent

If high-scoring games are your thing, then sorry about your luck.

But if you like great defense and outstanding pitching, then pull up a chair.

Heather Cook of Mansfield pitched a one-hitter with only two walks at Thursday's Division I sectional game at Alumni Field and ended up the losing pitcher.

Ashley Zuniga of Ross was even better.

Zuniga pitched a 2-0 no-hitter and was one walk away from a perfect game as Ross collected the sectional title. Zuniga dominated the Tygers to the point that they only managed one ball out of the infield.

"This really feels great," Zuniga said. "It's my second no-hitter this year and it always feels just great. I was able to push off of the mound real well today to get better speed on the ball, and I had a good changeup. My changeup has come a long way and that helps a lot. I didn't get a lot of strikeouts, so I really needed my defense behind me, and they were just great."

Zuniga and Ross go to 15-5. Ross will play 11 a.m. Saturday against either Ashland or Tiffin Columbian at Alumni Field.

"Heather Cook's a great pitcher. We were very fortunate to beat her," Ross coach Mike Gilbert said. "We've been in a slump lately and hopefully this game will get us rolling again. The kids go out and play every day and sometimes you don't win. It's not a lack of effort; it just happens."

When Mansfield managed

See ROSS, B2

## Ross advances past Mansfield in sectional

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to hit the ball, the Ross defense gobbled up everything in sight, making some spectacular plays in the process.

"We haven't been able to consistently field the ball and handle the other team's runners," Mansfield coach Steve Cote said. "They, on the other hand, did a nice job of moving their runners around when they did get on base. They put themselves in a position to score a run here and there and did their job."

Jen Mielke led off for the Lady Gi-

ants and worked Cook for one of her two walks. Mielke then swiped both second and third base and, when Cook unleashed a high hard one that the catcher couldn't handle, Mielke dashed home.

"I went up there thinking that if I didn't get my pitch I wasn't going to swing. I didn't get it and took the walk," Mielke said. "My job is to get on base and score. Once I got on, I was going. When I saw that ball get by that catcher, there was never any doubt. I just took off. If I don't score in that situation, I feel like I've let my team down."

Ross tallied an insurance run in the second inning when Cook issued her second walk of the game to Amanda Shaffer. Rachel Hammer ran for Shaffer and went to second

base on a groundout and then swiped third base and came home on a throwing error on the play.

Ross had another opportunity to score in the fourth inning when, with one out, Amy Reiter singled for the game's only hit and took second on the outfielder's error. Reiter went to third with a steal but was stranded there as the next two batters popped up and grounded out.

Mansfield's only base runner was the first batter of the game, Beth Ferrell, who walked. Cook almost broke up Zuniga's no-hitter when she knocked a ball through the right side of the Ross infield in the seventh inning. But rightfielder Tiffany Garcia charged the ball and threw Cook out at first base by a half-step. It was the type of play the Ross defense came

up with the whole game.

In the sixth inning first baseman Wojdyla dove head first into the base of the dugout retainer wall to catch a pop foul, and catcher Reiter did the same thing a batter later at the backstop to catch another one. Both were the type of hustle plays that Ross was willing to make to advance in the tournament.

"We have a good defense. If the other team puts the ball in play we're going to get it," Gilbert said. "Believe it or not that play on the hit to right field is part of our game. We practice that play a lot and we've made it five or six times this year. The kids hustle and they know what they have to do."

Mansfield drops to 8-14 as they fall from the tournament.