

Little Giants take title, off to state

By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

Ross makes second state tourney in 37 years

FINDLAY — History has a tendency of finding a way to repeat itself when you least expect it.

And on Thursday, it caught the Fremont Ross golf team off-guard.

Nearly seven years to the date since the Little Giants last qualified to the state golf tournament with a 316 at Red Hawk Run, they did it again in 2011.

Brandon Hoelzer's even-par 72 led three Ross golfers that finished with scores in the 70s and the Little Giants pulled a major upset, shooting a 316 to win the Division I district boys golf tournament.

Hoelzer won district medalist honors, topping Norwalk's Dustin Lieber in a playoff.

Ross edged out Findlay for the overall team title, as the Trojans shot a 317. Ashland, which had two players make double bogey at the 18th hole, was third at 320 and

Three Rivers Athletic Conference champion St. John's Jesuit was fourth at 322.

The top two teams and top two individuals not on a qualifying team advanced to next week's Division I state tournament in Columbus.

"This was a true upset," Little Giants coach Jim Scharer said. "Everyone pretty much expected that 2004 team to go. They were very talented and were just a tremendous group of kids.

"But for us to come here after finishing in fourth place in our league and have all three of the teams in front of us here, not to mention, the Northern Lakes League champion in Bowling Green, it's just an honor to beat those kinds of teams."

That Ross team from 2004 included Andrew Aseltine, Spencer Schabel, Grant Hilty, Kevin Vas-

sar and Scott King, who each averaged less than 81 strokes over 18 holes.

This year's squad didn't have those same kind of statistics, but it had two seniors in Hoelzer and Clay Schwartz that provided a great one-two punch.

Schwartz shot a 79 for the Little Giants Thursday, as did No. 3-man Albert Baumann. Throw in Brandon Weiker's 86 and it was all it took for Ross to make only its second trip to the state tournament in the last 37 years.

Asked if he could've predicted a district title, Scharer still looked a little shell-shocked when he responded.

"Never in my wildest dreams," he said. "But that shows the greatness of high school sports. Anything can happen on any given day."

But, just like many great ac-

complishments, this one had its adversities to overcome. All three of the Little Giants' lowest scorers had rough patches in their rounds that nearly cost them the strokes they needed to win.

Hoelzer was 1-under par after his first nine holes. He then started off his second nine in a similar fashion, before running into trouble on his 12th hole, three-putting a tricky green and scoring a double-bogey that put him back to 1-over par.

"I was just telling myself to keep my composure and that I could at least make it back to even," he said. "But I had to go to state. I didn't want this to be my last tournament."

Hoelzer birdied the seventh-hole to even it up again, before paring-out.

He thought all along he was playing for one of the top-two in-

dividual spots, until he came to the clubhouse and started hearing some of the scores.

"We came in and I heard Clay shot a 79, so I was like, OK, let's see what Albert shoots," Hoelzer said. "Then Albert comes in with a 79 and then Brandon comes in and shoots 86 and coach said that was 316. I thought he was kidding."

Hoelzer missed the state tournament by a stroke as a junior and lost in a five-man playoff as a sophomore. Knowing he'd finally accomplished his goal, he went out and birdied the first hole to win his playoff with Lieber.

"It's absolutely unbelievable," Hoelzer said. "It's extremely exciting to be going down to state, especially for me and Clay in our senior years."

Baumann also overcame trouble as he recorded a triple bogey on his 10th hole. However, he

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played his final six holes in 2-under par.

Baumann saw St. Joseph Central Catholic getting ready for the Division III state tournament this week and he wanted a piece of the action as well.

"I saw them packing up for state and it made me that much more enthusiastic for today," he said. "I really wanted to go to state and that was motivating me. I was playing with a lot of confidence."

Schwartz's big mishap came on a par-3 when he had three shots land in the water.

"If he doesn't have those shots go in the water and he just two-putts for par, he would've shot a 73," Hoelzer said. "He played re-

ally well, despite what happened on that hole."

Ross' scoring nearly followed Scharer's exact plan. He told Hoelzer he needed to shoot a 73. He told Schwartz he needed to shoot 77, Baumann that he needed a 81 and Weiker that he needed an 85, thinking 317 was the mark that would make state.

"If there is such a thing as a gameplan in golf, they followed it to perfection," Scharer said.

"I'm absolutely elated for these kids. Since those two seniors walked in the doors at Ross, this has been their dream."

As for the plan of attack heading into the state tournament at the Scarlet Course at Ohio State.

"We're just going to have fun and enjoy it," Scharer said.

Email Kevin Shields at kshields@gannett.com.