

FREMONT ROSS

Fremont Ross (7-18, 2-12) has only one starter from two seasons ago on the current roster for fourth-year Little Giants coach Jared King.

Ross will rely upon seniors Jonathan Szymanowski (IF), Erick Jimenez (P-IF), and Garrett Ebert (P-OF) for leadership, and also must get contributions from junior Owen Wright (P-OF) and sophomore Alejandro Melchor (P-IF).

Szymanowski batted .281 with 10 runs batted in and seven doubles in 2019.

King points to pitching depth as a strength, and the obvious inexperience as a potential trouble area.

“Although we have nine seniors, I consider us to be a very young team, because we only have one player with any significant time at the varsity level,” King said. “We have a good mix of older and younger guys that have some talent and are willing to compete. We will be solid on the mound, and defensively. Our biggest challenge will be gaining experience on the fly.”

The Little Giants were beaten 10-0 in the 2019 D-I sectionals by St. Francis.

SPORTS



Jared King has a deep pitching staff as Ross baseball coach. The bats have been a pleasant surprise. MOLLY CORFMAN/THE NEWS-MESSENGER

Ross' Wright pitches like an ace to open season

Matthew Horn
Fremont News-Messenger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Fremont Ross junior pitcher Owen Wright allowed one ball to be put into play Saturday.

It traveled 3 feet in front of the plate and resulted in an out at first base as Wright tossed a perfect game in the Little Giants' 25-0 shutout of Fostoria in five innings.

Wright notched 14 strikeouts.

"The most impressive stat, he threw 50 pitches and 40 were strikes," Ross coach Jared King said. "In high school, if you command the strike zone, you set yourself up for success. He might not get the exact same results against the top teams, but he mixes up his fastball and offspeed.

"He's a crafty left-hander. If you locate, you can give teams fits. Hopefully, he can build on the momentum."

Wright played junior varsity two years ago.

"He's grown into his body," King said. "He was small in stature and he sprouted up. He's stronger. He has

more velocity. He works in the offseason with a trainer. You can tell he has a passion for the game and a drive to get better."

He throws a fastball, curveball and changeup.

"He has confidence in himself and doesn't dwell on a bad pitch," King said. "He refocuses. When he's not on the mound, his defense is fluid in the outfield and he has a pure swing as a contact hitter. He's played a lot of baseball.

"He has a high IQ. I have all the faith in the world in him. He'll be a key guy. The competition will get harder in a tough league. [The Three Rivers Athletic Conference is] one of the toughest conferences in the state of Ohio."

Sophomore Brayden Guhn is the catcher, senior Gage Figley plays first base, sophomore Adam Hrynciw is at second and Hondo Melchar plays third. Seniors Erick Jimenez and Jon Szymanski, and Melchar share shortstop.

Hrynciw scored five runs, and he, Wright and Jimenez had five RBIs apiece against Fostoria. Jimenez hit a home run.

Junior Micah Olvera is in left field,

senior JT Lozano and sophomore Dylan Wright share center, and Owen Wright and senior Garrett Ebert split right.

Senior Ryan Weaver can catch and play second as a utility player. Senior Osirus Johnson's bat is in the mix.

"One through nine complement each other to get on base and drive them in," King said.

Owen Wright, Melchar and Ebert front the rotation. Dylan Wright, Olvera, senior Ethan Beardmore, Jimenez, senior George Dorsey and Lozano can also pitch.

"It's the deepest staff we've had in a while," King said. "We're a young team. We have nine seniors, but only one returning for varsity. We're looking for young guys to step up with experience trial by fire and produce right away.

"If you asked a couple weeks ago, I'd have said our strength was pitching. Our weakness in the past was the way we swung it. We've been swinging great the last week or two."

Weaver, Figley, Szymanski, Jimenez, Olvera, Owen Wright and Johnson

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would have been varsity last season before the pandemic canceled the year. Szymanowski, who was second-team all-conference as the team won seven games two years ago, is the only one with significant experience.

Ross had around 40 kids for tryouts this season. Many coaches wonder if the pandemic is a factor in low numbers.

“Usually there are about 60,” King said. “We had to cancel a third junior varsity team. We’ll battle through it. For

scrimmages and drills, we’ve been frustrated with kids struggling with drills they should know.

“I have to remember, the kids are young and they missed a year of developing on varsity with our system, how we want to play and then executing. My hat’s off to the staff. It’s coming around.”

Ross had 22 RBIs against Fostoria.

“The approach has been great, executing and driving in runs,” King said. “If we continue to trend that way, the sky’s the limit. We had five strikeouts. As a whole. They pushed runs across early and never let up.

“We have a lot to work on, but it’s an extremely talented group.”



Fremont Ross coach Jared King is anxious to return to the diamond, but he understands the coronavirus outbreak is having an impact on everything. MOLLY CORFMAN/THE NEWS-MSGENGER

Ross coach King hopes we learn from virus

Matthew Horn
Fremont News-Messenger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Fremont Ross baseball coach Jared King always implored his players to seize the day.

You never know how things might change. He wasn't referring to the coronavirus outbreak.

Something like that never crossed his mind, mostly because it's outside the realm of most of our imaginations.

But, here we are. The Ohio High School Athletic Association informed member schools Monday that spring sports are canceled.

The announcement followed Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine's decision to keep school facilities closed for the remainder of the academic year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Before Monday's announcement, the OHSAA's mandatory no-contact period for all interscholastic sports had been in effect until at least May 3. The closure of school facilities includes all athletic facilities for any interscholastic training, practice or competition.

"This hits not only the athletes hard, but the coaches and the parents," King said. "You grow up thinking you'll never live to see something like this. It's in movies. It's tough to deal with. All we can do is stay together and use each other as a support system and move forward."

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It was cliché to remind players to play every game like it's their last. King, who continued his career at catcher at Ohio Northern after graduating from Ross, believes it.

"I always tell them you don't know when it will end," King said. "You never know."

In the past, that meant things like injuries. Maybe personal adversity off the field.

"You were looking at never knowing about circumstances," King said. "This year, nationwide this is hitting everyone at once. It's not just high school, but professional. You never know when it will be your last time."

"You have to keep the mindset not to take the game for granted and give it your all."

Ben Lamson, Tim Gibbs, John Lotycz, Connor Malan, Ian White and Sam Pratt are seniors for King.

"They're great young men," he said. "They're fun to be around. Positive. This year, I saw them stepping up as leaders to give the underclassmen a platform to follow. They're respectful. They have bright futures."

"My heart goes out to them. It's not ideal for any of our kids, but especially the seniors. It's extremely difficult to not be able to go out on that field the last time."

King organized voluntary workouts three times a week since September. He updated players on Twitter and Facebook before the season was canceled.

He hopes baseball can continue to provide an escape, regardless of what that looks like.

"I texted with some and recommended some workouts," he said. "I encouraged playing catch with a brother or dad or cousin at home if they could, practicing social distancing. Gave them some workouts hitting."

"You can roll up a sock and soft toss off the side of the house. It presents a

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challenge compared to the field, but I'd like to see them working on their game even if they don't have resources. To keep in the right frame of mind."

King was head coach the last two years. He was an assistant for his father, Mark King, before that.

"Seeing them grow and building those relationships, the biggest thing that hurts is them not being able to complete," King said. "I'm one of the biggest competitors out there and I understand their hurt."

"Please reach out if I can help. My heart goes out."

The Little Giants weren't surprised by Monday's announcement. Still, King had been holding out a little hope and even used Zoom to talk to coaches about schedules with a May return.

"We had it in the back of our minds it was heading this way," King said. "It doesn't make it any less heartbreaking."

King plans to look into incorporating seniors into a few ACME games later this year.

"We'll take time to reflect," King said. "You don't want to jump forward too much. We hope to get on the field for some summer ball, contingent on what the state allows."

The longer athletes of all ages are prevented from training and playing games on the field, the more it will hurt the development for most. Health and welfare, however, must dictate future decisions on when athletes can resume.

"You lose a whole year as far as experience," King said. "The younger guys coming up, I had a few sophomores make the varsity team and you want the JV guys to get reps. Now, they're unable."

"Going through the mental aspect to stay sharp in certain situations and getting back to the mind frame. It's a mental game. It can be hard to get back into."

King is an educator and hopes we all can learn from the coronavirus ordeal.

"We love baseball, but it's a sport for entertainment," King said. "It's not life or death, and this pandemic can be life or death, so we have to take the lessons and perspective and shape our young men going forward."

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Jon Szymanowski led Ross on offense as a sophomore and senior. DOUG HISE/CORRESPONDENT

Little Giants on Wright track

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Brandon Wright took his son Owen Wright to Detroit for a Tigers game when he was 3.

Too young for love at first sight, he was smitten within a few years and he started to have major dreams before he was a teenager. The pandemic forced his sophomore season to be canceled, after coach Jared King had the group together just long enough for Wright to make varsity for the first time.

He made certain he was ready as a junior, earning first-team status in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference. He had eyes on 100 strikeouts before the season, finishing with 86.

"We saw he had tools to work with," Little Giants coach Jared King said. "His most impressive stat was throwing 60-plus innings. To have the stamina and durability to do that in high school is impressive. There were only one or two games we had to pull him.

"He kept his pitch count low. He pitched with confidence. Those are the areas he improved."

His ERA was 2.07 ERA over 67½ innings. He was 5-5 with a save.

"I wanted 100 strikeouts, but I'm surprised I pitched as good as I did," he said.

Wright struck out 12 and allowed three hits in seven innings in a victory over Perkins. He no-hit Postoria over five innings to begin the season.

"The most impressive thing was his ability to keep us in every single game," King said. "He's always poised. He always had control of the baseball, hit his spots and put us in position to win. Every time he was on the mound, the kids had confidence we could win.

"Seven strikeouts per game takes weight off the defense. In high school, a lot of times guys have great stuff, but they can't command. He walked 20. He had command of the zone and he had composure."

Wright leaned on his changeup early in the season and his curve was sharp late.

"In the TRAC and against top-tier teams, he kept them off balance and he could throw a breaking pitch in any spot to make him very effective," King said. "Seeing him in the offseason, I had a good idea he'd be our No. 1.

"We thought he'd be a big arm. I pictured him as a contact guy, but he struck out more than anticipated. That can be attributed to his command of all his pitches around the zone. He got more swings and misses."

He drove in 15 runs and scored 12 while batting .243 in the second spot in the order. He hit .357 with runners in scoring position and seven RBI came with two outs.

"He showed some pop in his bat early," King said. "He picked it up again later. He had a solid glove in the outfield. He continues to grow into his body. If he can add a few miles and get stronger, it will make his offspeed even tougher.



Owen Wright notched 86 strikeouts in his first varsity season for Ross. SUBMITTED

"I'm excited to see what next year holds."

He played junior varsity as a freshman. He would likely have been the second varsity starter as a sophomore.

"My hitting got a lot better," he said. "I didn't do good hitting my freshman year. I hit for a better average. My pitching got better. My velocity increased and I got stronger and bigger."

He throws 83 mph and tops at 86. He throws a four- and two-seam fastball, curve and changeup.

"My best thing is getting ahead," he said. "My curve is probably my best pitch. I'm not throwing as hard as some of the other kids, but my movement is good."

He conditions his arm and trains all through the year with Kyle Harris in Clyde. They've worked together for five years.

"Lifting and throwing pretty much every day in the winter," Wright said. "Keep it locked in. He helps with everything. If my swing isn't where it needs to be, he helps me fix it. If something is wrong, he fixes it."

Wright wants to play baseball in college.

"The highest level," he said. "Trying to win as many games as possible. I don't go 50, always 100."

Micah Olvera is also a senior next season. He batted .320 and scored 11

runs, with four strikeouts in 50 at-bats.

He was 1-0 with seven strikeouts and five walks over 7½ innings in four games. He allowed one run for a 0.96 ERA.

"He was one of the most consistent bats with Jon," King said. "He struggled a little at the beginning. Solid in left field. He moved to the four spot and became an RBI guy. He finds gaps, he's high contact and he can go the opposite way.

"He'll be on the mound more next year."

Sophomore catcher Brayden Guhn bats in the middle of the order and regulates runners against opponents that pressure a defense. Classmate Adam Hrynciw led off and played second base, leading the team with 18 runs and tying Jon Szymanowski with 16 RBI.

Hrynciw's two-run single drove in the only runs in the win over the Pirates.

"Adam was a pleasant surprise," King said. "We knew he'd be good on defense.

Wright's younger brother, sophomore Dylan Wright, played center field for half the season. It was long enough to earn defensive player of the year for

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the team.

The Wrights play for Sandusky American Legion this summer. Guhn plays for Tiffin.

Sophomore third baseman Hondo Melchor took the mound second in the rotation.

"With these young kids, the sky truly could be the limit," King said. "They've been around the game and they have that experience that can be key to getting better the next couple years. Facing

adversity and playing close games against high level opponents, the young guys should be able to use it as building blocks and confidence.

"We've been in tough games. We have guys who have shown they can play. There are some solid JV guys who will get a chance. We have a quality team back and quality guys coming."

Szymanowski played a key role batting third as a senior. He hit .361, with 16 RBI, 15 runs and two home runs. He slugged .542 for a 1.007 OPS and drove in nine runs with two outs.

"Jonathan provided us with the biggest boost on offense all year," King said. "He led us on offense as a sophomore. It

was a bummer to miss his junior year. He's not the most vocal. He leads by example.

"The kids look up to him. He's built like an athlete. Look at him. He goes 100. He has great speed. He improved his defense. He settled in in the outfield."

Ross (11-16, 3-11) lost nine games by less than two runs. It played seven games against four or five teams that qualified to regional and a few more that played in a district final.

The Little Giants won four of their first five games, before a losing skid reached double digits. They beat Bowling Green and Bellevue.

"We played high quality competi-

tion," King said. "It wasn't a cupcake schedule. Losing is disheartening but we competed. We had one game all year at Findlay where we came out flat. Everything else was competitive.

"I'm pleased with what we got out of the pitchers all year. They let the defense play. It's an exciting time. The new school is getting built. We have a new practice area. There are new guys coming out. Hopefully, it translates to more wins."

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