

Little Giants Fall In Sectional Final

Less is more for Madison against Ross

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MANSFIELD — Mansfield Madison made the most out of the distance of its hits, to say the least, during a Division I sectional final against Fremont Ross on Tuesday.

The Rams laid down seven bunts — two of them suicide squeezes — on their way to a 10-0 run-rule victory over the Little Giants at Madison.

If not for Shawn Elswick's 400-foot blast over the center-field fence, Madison

Division I

(19-3) may have set some kind of record for offensive efficiency.

"That's been a strategy all year for us," Mansfield head coach Doug Rickert said. "This is not the usual Madison team where we go out there and bang the baseball. We haven't been hitting the ball well the past two weeks.

"We've been concentrating on getting

bunts down. This is the fastest team I've ever had, so we're going to steal bases and move runners."

Madison advances to meet either Ashland or Tiffin Columbian in the district semifinal on May 19.

The Rams' mad bunters provided more than enough offense to back up ace Rory Meister, who fired a one-hit shutout at the Little Giants (8-8). Meister struck out six and walked one to

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improve to 7-0. He entered the game with an 0.89 earned-run average.

"He had a real nice slider," Ross head coach Rob Schimmoeller said. "He was fooling the kids with that slider down and away."

Ross starter Kyle Hintze avoided major trouble until the fourth inning. He allowed a run in the first and left the bases loaded in the second and third innings.

But in the fourth, Madison scored five runs, the first three coming without the ball leaving the infield.

Eric Holzwarth reached on a Ross error and Tad Thomas walked, forcing Schimmoeller to replace Hintze with Jon Franks. Cory Rupert greeted Franks with a bunt down the third-base line. Franks fielded the ball, whirled and threw the ball past Hintze, who was covering third base. Holzwarth scored on the play.

"We worked on that in the gym all winter," Schimmoeller said of

Madison's bunting. "Usually we make those plays. We had it set up on that play at third. We just didn't make the play."

Meister followed with a sacrifice bunt to move runners to second and third. Chris Schwamberger then executed a suicide squeeze bunt to bring home Thomas. An infield hit by Vince Fanello scored Rupert to make it 4-0.

Elswick closed out the inning by ripping a ball just to the right of the flag pole for a two-run homer.

Madison finished the game early with four more runs in the bottom of the fifth inning — the frame included two more bunts — to end Ross's postseason.

Despite its lopsided ending, Tuesday's game featured a heated exchange between the two teams that nearly erupted into fisticuffs.

In the bottom of the third inning, Ross first baseman Joey Garza and Madison first-base coach Jayson Stone exchanged words after a close pickoff attempt. As the inning unfolded, Garza and Stone, along

with various Madison baserunners, jawed back and forth. Finally, before a pitch, Garza picked up a handful of dirt and flung it in the face of Fanello, who was leading off first base. Both coaches sprinted onto the field, but order was restored without further incident.

Schimmoeller said he heard the first-base coach cursing Garza before the altercation.

"It wasn't right what the coach was saying to him. ... It was a little playgroundish. It shouldn't have happened," Schimmoeller said.

In the top half of the next inning, Ross catcher Cody Myers took a pitch off the earflap of his batting helmet. Myers was OK and stayed in the game.

"Both teams are out here, and nobody wants to lose this game and have the rest of the season just to play your conference games. When it was over, both teams shook hands, and I think it's fine," Rickert said.

Ross visits Napoleon on Friday.