

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYOFFS: ROSS VS. MANSFIELD SR.

Ross-Mansfield has history of epic games

By VINCE GUERRIERI
Sports Editor

As the Fremont Ross boys basketball team was shooting foul shots in practice Wednesday, Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It" blared in the background.

The song's refrain has been modified into a chant at basketball games when an opposing player is at the foul line — "You're not gonna make it! NO! You're not gonna make it!" — and Little Giants at the charity stripe expect to hear it during Thursday's playoff game against Mansfield Senior.

"They started laughing" when they heard the song, said coach Mark Gedeon. "Just getting them a little more focused."

The matchup against the Tygers will be the 65th meeting of the two teams,

longtime rivals in the now-defunct Buckeye Conference. And if the past is any indication, it will be an epic matchup.

"Both schools have a lot of tradition," said Mansfield's Mel Sutton. "It should be a great game."

The last seven meetings between the two teams have been in the playoffs. Of those, six came in Gedeon's tenure as coach — all but one, including Thursday's 7 p.m. matchup, have been played at Willard. Four went into overtime, and all but one were decided by five points or less.

"It has become a great rivalry over the years," said Mansfield coach Gregg Collins. "The players in both programs are used to winning."

Gedeon's 2-4 against the

Tygers, but that's par for the course, as the Little Giants have a 20-44 record against Mansfield. In the most recent matchup, in 2003, Ross was the favorite, ranked 11th in the state Associated Press polls. But it was a blowout loss for the Little Giants, as Ross didn't score until nearly four minutes into the game, and the Tygers put together two runs of 11 points or more to put away Ross easily, 65-61.

Gedeon said only senior Aaron Opelt was part of that team, sitting the bench as a freshman. Opelt, who plans to play football next year at the University of Toledo, said the playoff matchup against an old rival is enough to get him excited.

"If you can't get pumped for that, I don't know what can," Opelt said.

Senior Terry Abney, whose brothers played against Mansfield, understands the magnitude of the matchup.

"This is a big game," he said.

Mansfield was ranked second in the final Associated Press D-I poll, and lost only one game this year — their season finale to Massillon, snapping a 38-game winning streak. Gedeon said the loss has probably refocused the Tygers — who he called the best-pressing team Ross has seen all year. Mansfield also returns many of the players from a team that went to the state semifinals last year, and like Ross, also has a deep bench.

Gedeon said the team's been running five-on-six and even five-on-seven drills to get accustomed to

Mansfield's speed.

However, neither Gedeon nor his players believes the Tygers are unbeatable.

"We've just got to take care of the ball and get past the press," Abney said.

Abney also said that the Little Giants will need to turn the ball over as few times as possible and keep the Tygers from getting offensive rebounds.

Another key will be Ross's big man, Adam Gries. Abney said he's got to get the ball a lot, and Opelt thinks any matchup with him will favor the Little Giants.

"I don't think there's anybody on the team that can stop Gries," Opelt said.

Ross is no slouch, either. It finished the regular season 15-5, winning its first Greater Buckeye Confer-

ence title and fourth league title overall under Gedeon's guidance as coach. Opelt also noted that Mansfield's schedule included just nine D-I teams.

However, Ross has fared poorly this year against ranked teams, falling to Willard on the road and at home against Toledo St. Francis.

Opelt said he doesn't think much about the fact that Thursday could be his final high school basketball game. Abney said it occurred to him, but regardless, he's in no hurry to end the season.

"You just want to keep playing," he said.

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Tygers' defense too much

Down two at
halftime,
Little Giants
outscored
16-5 in third

By KYLE TIMMONS

News-Messenger correspondent

WILLARD — Thursday's district semi-final match-up between Fremont Ross and second-ranked Mansfield Senior resembled a heavy-weight, knockdown battle.

But it was the Tygers delivering the knockout punch on defense in the third quarter, as they knocked the Little Giants out of the tournament with a 58-45 victory at Willard — the Tygers' third straight win in the postseason series between the two teams.

Mansfield's ferocious de-

fensive attack caused 11 Fremont turnovers as they outscored the Little Giants 16-5 in the quarter and ran away with the victory.

"That's the key," Mansfield coach Greg Collins said of his team's attacking style of defense. "We knew that whoever got the easiest baskets would win."

"For (Ross), they want to get the ball inside to Gries. Our way is to get steals and get transition lay-ups. That's the key, to get points off defense."

Things weren't so easy though early on for the Tygers, as it took them nearly five and a half minutes to score their first field goal as the Little Giants asserted themselves defensively and kept Mansfield's shooters in check.

Fremont junior Cory Clayton threw the game's opening punch early with a basket as the Little Giants began the game with a 4-0

lead as senior guard Travayon Wolverton added another basket.

Midway through the first quarter Mansfield's Jarmel Sutton put the Tygers (21-1) on the scoreboard with two free throws and it wasn't until two minutes later that Dwaine Lentes tied the ballgame at 4 with 2:34 left in the opening period.

Following another Lentes' basket, Little Giant senior Adam Gries earned his first two points.

Mansfield would outscore Fremont the remainder of the quarter 6-3 and the Tygers won the opening quarter 12-9.

The Tygers then opened a 14-9 lead on a Rashad Reed basket and the Little Giants faced their biggest deficit of the opening half.

But it didn't take Fremont long to rebound as Clayton added two more of his 12 points and teammate Travis Miller nailed a 3-

point shot as the Little Giants tied the game back up at 14.

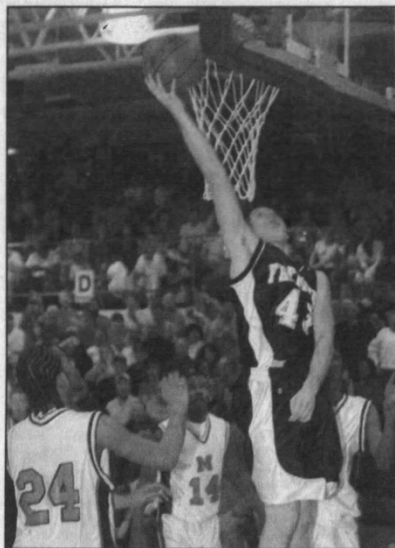
It was Miller's only basket of the night and Fremont's only 3-pointer in the contest.

On Fremont's next possession, Gries powered his way for his only two points of the second quarter and Clayton added another basket to give the Little Giants an 18-14 lead, capping a 9-0 run.

"When you have all that time when Adam doesn't even get a shot for a long time, it hurts," said Ross coach Mark Gedeon. "We were definitely a little tentative at times tonight."

Gries led Fremont (16-6) with 14 points, playing in his final game with seven other seniors.

Mansfield responded with a big run of their own, scoring seven unanswered



News-Messenger/Jennifer Young-Bower

ROSS'S RYAN OTTNEY goes up for a shot against Mansfield Senior on Thursday. The Little Giants lost.

See ROSS, B2

Ross falls to Mansfield

Continued From B1

points, led by Reed who finished the game with 15 points.

With just two second remaining in the half, sophomore Ryan Croudup drove through the lane and scored two of his eight points as he was fouled.

Croudup missed his free throw attempt and the Tygers had a 24-22 half-time lead.

Croudup and Gries each tallied baskets to keep the Little Giants in the game at 26-26 before the Mansfield defense took over causing several Fremont miscues.

Gedeon attributed the loss to Mansfield's defensive intensity as Fremont collapsed under Mansfield's defensive prowess.

"It was a big difference," Gedeon said of the Tygers' defense. "We knew that was their strength, their quickness and the intensity that they bring.

"Unfortunately, the way the game was called, that was not to our liking. We've

got to be able to dribble unimpeded there and my definition of 'unimpeded' is a little bit different for myself, as opposed to some other people here."

Reed dropped in a 3-point shot and Jarmel Sutton dropped in two buckets to spark a 14-0 run spanning most of the third quarter and the Tygers found themselves up 40-27 entering the final quarter.

After opening up a 19 point lead on a right-handed dunk by Sutton the Tygers knew they had the game in check.

Clayton, Croudup and Gries each mustered two baskets in the final quarter but to no avail.

"Gries is a tough player," Collins said. "To contain him at all, you have to put more than two players on him."

Clayton's fourth quarter buckets brought Fremont to within 11 points at 52-41 with about three minutes left but that would be the closest the Little Giants would get.

Seniors Aaron Opelt and Wolverton each finished with two points in the game.

High School Boys

Mansfield Sr. 58, Fremont Ross 45

Division I District semifinals
at Willard

MANSFIELD — Javario Byrd 1-1-3, Dwaine Lentes 4-0-8, T.J. Lindsay 3-1-7, Tre'Vonn Lucas 1-2-4, Dennis Minard 3-0-6, Rashad Reed 6-0-15, Antwoine Smith 1-4-6, Mel Sutton 3-3-9. Totals 22-11-58.

ROSS — Aaron Opelt 0-2-2, Travis Miller 1-0-3, Traveyon Wolverton 1-0-2, Cory Clayton 5-2-12, Ryan Croudup 4-0-8, Adam Gries 5-4-14, Ryan Ottney 1-0-2, Paul Hershey 1-0-2. Totals 18-8-45.

Mansfield	12	12	16	18	—	58
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Ross	9	13	5	18	—	45
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3-point goals: Mansfield 3 (Reed 3), Ross 1 (Miller).

Rebounds: Mansfield 39 (Sutton 7, Lucas 7), Ross 31. Turnovers: Mansfield 14, Ross 27.

Records: Mansfield Sr. 21-1, Fremont Ross 16-6.