

## LITTLE GIANTS EXIT PLAYOFFS WITH HEARTBREAKING LOSS

by Bill Bray | Oct 29, 2022 | Football



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FREMONT – For the third week in a row, the Little Giants defense gave up 42 points and lost their first-round playoff game of Division II, Region 6 to North Royalton 42-41.

Ross (6-5) trailed by only a touchdown, 21-14 at the break. North Royalton (7-4) scored first at the 8:14 mark of the second quarter as neither team reached their opponent's endzone the entire first 12 minutes. The Bears' first score was a Joseph Kinney to Cody Miller 17-yard pass. Sasha Sunjevaric nailed the extra point as North Royalton was off to the early lead.

The Ross offense, which accumulated 505 yards of total offense, answered with a 38-yard pass from Kaden Holmes to Ricky Howard with 7:27 remaining in the second quarter. The extra point attempt by Carter Rodriguez never got off the ground, and Ross stayed behind 7-6.



Ricky Howard (left) and Adam Hrynciw celebrate after the Howard touchdown pass from Kaden Holmes during second quarter action.

Cody Miller, North Royalton's whirling dervish, put the next six Bears' points on the board with a 20-yard dash. Sunjevaric added the point after once again, and North Royalton was up 14-6.

It was a back-and-forth scoring parade as it again was Fremont Ross' turn to provide the sparse crowd some excitement. With 1:00 remaining in the half, Holmes completed a 21-yard pass to his favorite receiver, Bryson Hammer. To make up for the botched extra point from an earlier PAT attempt, the Giants chose to go for a two-point conversion. Holmes found Hammer, and the score was tied at 14-14.

The final score of the half was from the Bears as they used just 43 to hit paydirt on a Kinney to Joey Sainato pass covering 10 yards. The extra point was good, and North Royalton had its 21-14 lead at the break.

Ross, as has been the hope for the last several weeks, was hoping to stop the Bears offense since they received the ball to start the half, and as has been the case just like the last few games, the defense could not accomplish a stop. It was Kinney again, connecting this time with Paul Kalevakis for a 29-yard score. Sunjevaric added the extra point and just that quick, 1:45 into the third quarter to be exact, North Royalton built the lead to 28-14.



Adam Hrynciw grabs the pass from Holmes and makes his way to the end zone.

The Ross offense, having one of their better performances of the season, came back again to close the North Royalton score to seven points at 28-21. This time Holmes connected with Adam Hrynciw with a 13-yard strike in the northern endzone. Rodriguez was good with the boot, and Ross closed the gap once again.

But again, the Little Giant defense could not produce a stop as North Royalton grew the score to 35-21. Miller ran the ball in from four yards out, and Sunjevaric added the PAT, and Ross found themselves down 35-21 with 1:56 remaining in the third period.

The next score with 9:58 remaining in the fourth quarter came on a 37-yard sprint from Miller. Miller led all rushers with an unbelievable 327 yards on 41 carries, a per carry average of 8.0. With that North Royalton scoring run, the Bears were up 42-21 with 9:58 remaining in the contest.

But the Ross offense never quit down the stretch. The two young men who have given the fans so much excitement over the last four seasons were not done yet. Holmes cocked his arm and threw a 75-yard scoring strike to Hammer. With 9:39 remaining, the Little Giants' offense began digging out of the hole their defense had dug for them, trailing 42-28.

Then came an onside kick attempt from Carter Rodriguez that Ross was able to recover. With the Ross offense rolling on all cylinders, Holmes found Owen Shanahan for 14 yards and a score with 8:44 remaining, and Ross had clawed back to within seven at 42-35.

The final score of the contest sealed Ross' fate for the night, the game, and the season. At the 1:54 mark, Holmes used his feet for a three-yard touchdown run with 1:54 left, making North Royalton's advantage one point at 42-41. "We knew on that last drive we were going to go down and score," a disappointed Chad Long said. "Heck, we couldn't stop that running back the entire night; it was the right call (going for the two-point conversion), we had to do it. I'll never second-guess it, you know me, I am going to go for the win. For a moment, it looked as though Long's call was going to be successful until Holmes



unfortunately underthrew the ball to a wide-open Anthony Vann. Vann, though trying to make a good catch out of it, fell just short as the ball touched the ground on the apparent catch. One official called it good, but was quickly overruled by one of the other officials, and the game was over.



Jabari Heidelberg (78) and the entire Ross defense had their hands full as North Royalton's Cody Miller (22) rumbled for 327 yards rushing.

Statistically, Ross won the total offense category, gaining 505 yards to North Royalton's 438. Individually, Kaden Holmes connected on 20 of 30 passes for 293 yards and five touchdowns. After Miller's monster rushing performance of 327 yards, Holmes was next with 129 yards on 16 carries to lead the Little Giants. Hammer, Holmes' favorite target over the last few years, was the man again Friday night as he gathered in 147 yards on eight catches and two scores.



Mason Villarreal has been the "real deal" all season as the senior co-captain set a single season record for tackles.

Defensively, Mason Villarreal will exit the Don Paul Stadium locker room as Ross's single-season leader in tackles. Villarreal's 7.5 tackles and 15 assisted

tackles gave him a season total of 145.5, 15.5 ahead of Shane Heberling, who had held the single-season tackling record set in 1994.

Twenty seniors wore the purple and white for the final time. But 20 seniors that won't soon be forgotten, especially if anyone looks at the record books. "We have a lot of memories," coach Long said about his senior class. "A lot of great memories. They set so many records and gave so much excitement to all the fans and the coaches. There is a lot to be proud of. They had one heck of a career, and a lot of them played all four years. They will be hard to replace," Long said. "But it's the next man up for next year."