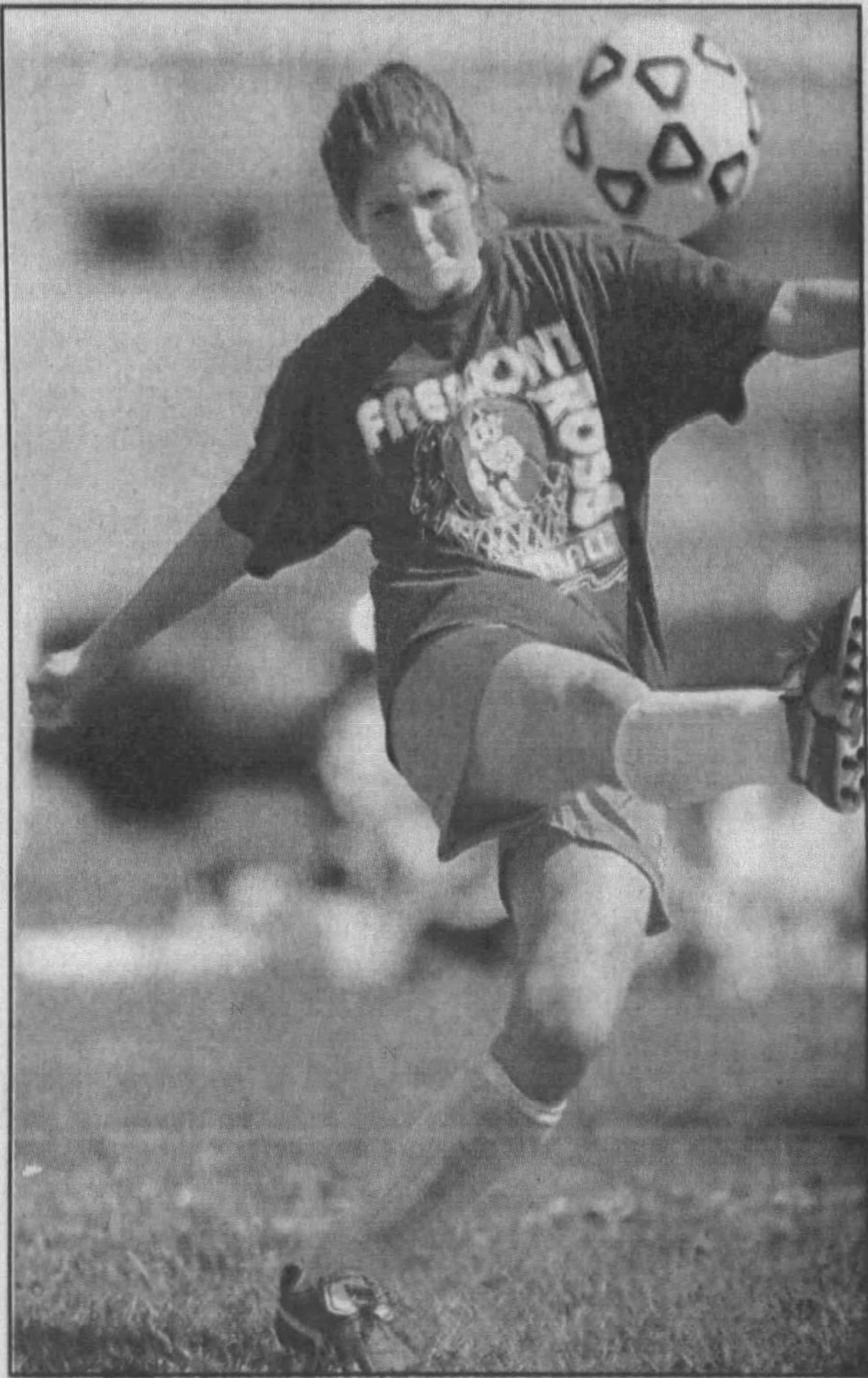


Ross set for sectional



News-Messenger file photo

GOALKEEPER CHRISTINA SZYMANOWSKI and the Fremont Ross girls soccer team enter their first state tournament today, as the Little Giants play Mansfield Madison in a sectional at Findlay.

Ross ousted



News-Messenger/Scott Tappa

CHRISTINA SZYMANOWSKI, red jersey, makes one of her 24 saves, while Katie Stainbrook, 18, and Megan Theller, 7, defend during Ross's 9-0 sectional loss Tuesday.

Rams top Little Giants in sectional

By **SCOTT TAPPA**
Sports editor

FINDLAY — Six years ago, the Mansfield Madison girls soccer program was in its first season, and most likely expected to struggle.

Not so. The first-year Rams advanced to the regional finals before bowing out of the state tournament.

Tuesday night at Findlay High School, Madison showed Fremont Ross that not every team experiences similar success in its first try at tournament play, beating the Little Giants 9-0 in both teams' sectional opener.

"One of the first things I said to the girls after the game was, 'Look where we're at now, look where we want to go,'" said Ross

Girls soccer

coach Scott McVeigh, whose team finished 9-6-1. "We want to have a Mansfield Madison- or Findlay-caliber program down the road, but you can't expect that in one year. They know that."

Madison eliminated any suspense early on, as Jessica Ward and Jillian Firestone scored goals in the first two minutes, 46 seconds. The Rams controlled play in the first half, taking a 6-0 lead, and rarely letting the ball enter their defensive end.

"Those two quick ones, they definitely stunned us," McVeigh said. "Not that we quit, but we were kind of dumbfounded. It took us awhile to get back in it, it took some of our

enthusiasm out of it."

Madison kept the pressure up in the second half, scoring three goals.

"All-around, they were a sound, fundamental team," McVeigh said. "It seemed like every girl out there had a good leg. They just controlled us with passing, passing, passing."

Facing 40 shots, Ross goalkeeper Christina Szymanowski held up well, making 24 saves, including one on a penalty kick in the first half.

"She was real vocal tonight," McVeigh said. "She saved that penalty kick, that was a great save. She definitely made a lot of goal-saving saves. She played her heart out."

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Ross falls in sectional

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McVeigh also praised the play of freshman forward Alison Clark, who generated several scoring opportunities for the Little Giants.

"I thought she played a heck of a game," he said. "Her and Christina in goal, those were the two that stuck out to me big time."

The coach said he was pleased with how his team's initial season unfolded, with the Little Giants winning nine games, third place in the Great Lakes League and the respect of many observers.

"From the first day of practice, we've made so many believers out of people, a lot of people who didn't expect us to win two games this year," McVeigh said. "We turned a lot of those people who were doubters into believers and even fans."

"We definitely made a lot of strides in our play, we've come a long way in just one year. I told them 'Don't hang

your heads over it, it's all a learning process.'"

Five seniors will depart from this year's team, reserves Jessica Steinberger, Katie Stainbrook and Beth Hoelzle and starters Marie Erchenbrecher and Allyson Hickey.

"Allyson Hickey's the toughest one to replace, her spot will be tough to fill," McVeigh said. "I told her on the bus that I wish I had her another two years. Marie, we'll definitely miss her speed, she picked up the game so quick in her first year playing."

The rest of the team will be back next year, when McVeigh hopes to see the team move up in the GLL standings and win a tournament game. But the fun of the program's first season will remain.

"They have a real sense of pride," McVeigh said. "They're the starting team, they're the ones who started to build upward."