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Little Giants not looking past Harding, Paeth says

By BOB MARKER
News-Messenger Sports Editor

Biz Paeth can look back and see some good in a bad experience. He might even call it a godsend even though the disaster was a nightmare at the time.

The Little Giants, 14-8, will take on Marion Harding Thursday in the Class AAA District Basketball Tournament at Anderson Arena in Bowling Green. It's a matchup of two cinderella teams with Harding being number one in the underdog column and Ross second.

The Little Giants, although second seeded in the Ashland sectional, bounced Lexington, 18-3 before last Saturday's game and the favored team to be in the district tourney, will play for the honor of facing the winner of tonight's Findlay-Mansfield Madison game. That title game is Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

Paeth, while talking about his team's third meeting with Harding, reflected back on possibly's Ross's lowest point of an otherwise outstanding season. That was a 64-53 loss to Port Clinton.

"If there was anything good in a loss like that," he could smile now, "it happened before the tournament. If we had played poorly and won, I don't think the lesson would have been learned."

That lesson was obvious for the Little Giants: you have to be ready mentally as well as physically to beat any team.

"If they (Harding) beat us," Paeth promised, "it won't be because we are not mentally ready. The kids know that and they are not going to overlook them."

Paeth is fighting the "third time around" blues. His team stopped Marion twice 60-58 and in a laugher, 81-56, at Ross in the last meeting.

"Our kids have played Harding," he said, "and they are a Buckeye Conference team and all Buckeye Conference teams are tough."

The Ross coach disclosed some of his thoughts during the sectional title win over Lexington.

"When we got down 10-2, I thought 'We don't want to get embarrassed.' Then when we got close, I wanted to win."

His latter thought was honored 59-56.

Getting ready for the Harding game is just one problem Paeth is facing.

"I told the kids that this was going to be a crazy week in Fremont," he explained. "I told them that people are going to be talking to them and telling them that they are the greatest thing on earth, but I told them they have to take it in perspective. Those same people might not talk to them the next day."

Another little fact that the Ross coach pointed out to his team was obvious but amusing.

"I checked with the director of the district tournament," he smiled, "and I told the kids that he said they don't give teams any extra points for victories."

That was in reference to the 2-0 record that Ross has against Harding this season.

Paeth agreed that Harding is healthy and playing the best ball of the season at this point.

"They have momentum, too," he added, "the scouts came back and told us that this is not the same Harding team that we saw before. They are 3-0, not 7-16; they have really been rolling."

Ross and Harding will match up pretty well when the teams take the BGSU floor. The Little Giants lineup will have 6-3 Mike Held and 6-1 Gary Harms at forwards with 6-3 Rob Bollenbacher at center. Gregg Hedden, 6-0, and Tom Woleslagel, 5-11, will be at the guards. Jerry Ameling, 6-3, and Randy Bury, 6-0, will come off the bench to spell the forwards and center.

Harding will likely start 6-4 Ralph Hill at center with 6-2 Sam Carter and 6-3 John Scowden at forwards. The guards are 6-1 Gene Klepzig and 5-8 Fred Ross.

Harding eliminates Ross

By TOM STOREY
N-M Sports Writer

BOWLING GREEN — There wasn't that much difference between the two teams in the couple of basketballs, Marion Harding, Coach Robert Pacsi said.

But it was enough to send the Presidents to a 51-46 triumph over Ross in the district semifinals here Thursday night. They gave Marion Harding a 10th at Finney in the finals at 7:30 p.m. Saturday.

Ross finishes its season at 14-9, the finest in over 20 years for the Little Giants.

"I think both teams played good defense and it was a typical Buckeye Conference game," Pacsi offered. "A defensive game calls for a lot of pressure shots. We were able to hit a couple of big buckets when they didn't. That was the difference."

Harding's key buckets came in the beginning of the final eight minutes.

The Presidents held a slim three-point lead heading into the fourth quarter, but reeled off six unanswered points in the final five minutes with just over five minutes left in the game. That was all the breathing room they needed as they turned back the Little Giants' comeback attempt down the stretch with some crucial foul shooting.

In the final two minutes, with Ross applying full court pressure, the Presidents went to the charity stripe 12 times and came up with only seven made foul shots.

The Little Giants crept to within four with 3:03 left but a free throw by Greg Klepzig and two by Ralph Hedges put the lead to 51-44 with 12 seconds left. Randy Hedges knocked in a meaningless basket as the buzzer sounded for Ross.

It was a slow moving

game, except for an occasional fast break, and both teams had trouble getting untracked. But in the end, it was Marion's shooting that was the difference.

The Presidents shot 18 of 41 from the field for 44 percent while Ross could connect on only 17 of 52 shots for 33 percent.

"Ross did a heckuva job," Pacsi said. "They played great defense. We were just fortunate that we made a few more shots than they did."

Marion's man-to-man defense completely took away Ross's offense and the Presidents controlled the boards to eliminate the Little Giants' running game.

"Ross is a very good shooting team," Pacsi said. "We knew that if we allowed them to run their offense, we would be in trouble. So we worked real hard on being conscious

where the ball was and we didn't want to give them any uncontested shots."

Hill, Marion's 6-3 center, did a great job of rebounding, grabbing 16 rebounds and blocking four shots.

Overall, the Presidents

had a 44-28 edge on the boards.

Fred Ross was the only effective weapon for Marion. He scored 15 points, most of which were 20 foot jump shots, before making out with over two minutes to play.

Mike Held led Ross with

14 points, but was only six of 16 from the field and grabbed three rebounds.

Ross had beaten Harding twice during the regular season, once by 28 points, but that didn't bother Pacsi.

"I think it was in the back of their minds (Harding's players) but we never made mention of it," Pacsi said. "I didn't even

show them the films."

"The past three weeks we've gained a great deal of confidence. You can't teach confidence, but unless you've got the experience and confidence, the x's and o's won't help. We went through a lot during the season and we're starting to put it together."

"The players see the hard work paying off and are getting confidence in themselves and their ability."

Marion finished the season 4-16 but have won four straight tournament games.

Harding Score by quarter

Harding 8 10 12 16-48

Ross 8 10 12 16-48

HARDING: Ross 8-15, Klepzig

4-9, Hedges 2-9, Carter 3-6,

Scherner 4-6, Hedges 4-4,

total 18-51

ROSS: Held 6-14, Hedges 5-8,

Hill 6-12, Woleslagel 1-1,

Ameling 3-6, Hedges 3-7, Elcher 0-

4-4, Hedges 17-12-46

Season record: Harding 8-16,

Ross 14-9



MARION HARDING'S tight man to man defense effectively shut down the Ross offense all night during the district semifinals at Bowling Green

Thursday night. Here the President's John Scowden (50) stops Tom Woleslagel. (N-M photo by George Lundskow)

Lakota advances to district final

By CHRIS CELEK
N-M Special Writer

TOLEDO — Happy Lakota teachers stood around joshing about "showing 'em up here in the district," how to play basketball, and Dave Worstein just smiled.

Lakota's coach grinned, naturally, because his Raiders had just whipped Swanton 62-56, but also because the kids from Kansas didn't show anyone at Waite High School Thursday night how the game's played. The Raiders were just in better shape.

"We respected Swanton and knew they are a good team, but it was our conditioning that came through," Worstein said. "Not that they weren't in good condition, but all that pressing paid off for us.

"All that pressing"

held the Bulldogs to 12 points, and squeezed Swanton's high-jumping John Bell real hard.

The scouting report warned that Bell could leap and score from nearly everywhere on the floor, but he did not in the quarters. In the final period, however, Lakota worked Bell over and the 6-4 Bulldog found the basket just once.

Besides being in peak physical condition, the swashbuckling Lakota team had a raiding party.

"They knew what to expect from Swanton, which was 18-4 entering the tournament's semifinal contest, and the Raiders executed just the way they had practiced."

Hedge, Lakota's postman, missed the first toss of a one-and-one situation, but teammate Al Wiseman hauled the rebound and

that four corner offense for Lakota went to 12 points, and squeezed Swanton's high-jumping John Bell real hard.

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"You've got to give them credit," Swanton is a good team," Worstein said. "Their offense and defense is very good and they're a real swift team, but we were ready for them."

Hedge led all scorers with 19 big ones, and Wasserman added 14. Worstein had praise for both. "This was one of the few games that Terry took the ball to the basket. He played real intelligently. So did Wasserman."

The pair drove inside against Lakota reserve star Paul Hoffman all week to get accustomed to the shot-blocking abilities of Swanton's Bell and Younkin, Worstein said. And the Lakota coach admitted even wider when he described how that preparation paid off.

Score by quarters

Lakota 18 13 14 17-62

Paeth: Bad way to end a good season

By BILL STEWART

News-Messenger Staff Writer

BOWLING GREEN — "It's a bad way to end a good season."

That was the best way Ross Basketball Coach Biz Paeth could describe his feelings after the Little Giants' disappointing 51-46 loss to Marion Harding in the Class AAA District semifinals here Thursday night.

The Ross coach was definitely down, but he couldn't help but think back at the season as a whole that produced a 14-9 record and a surprising sectional title en route to the district tournament here.

Thursday night's game between the two Buckeye Conference squads was like a time bomb that never went off for the Little Giants. One kept waiting for something to explode, but it never occurred.

The two teams struggled to an 18-18 deadlock at halftime and the only real spurt of the game came when Marion Harding reeled off six unanswered points at the beginning of the fourth quarter to go ahead 39-30.

"At halftime Tom Woleslagel said 'come on guys they are just waiting for us to win,'" Paeth related. "But we just couldn't get our momentum."

"At the beginning we were a little bit tight and I think they were tight too," Paeth continued. "Once things aren't going well in a game you tend to get tighter and tighter. We couldn't get over the hump."

Ross came out in the second half and temporarily abandoned its 2-3 zone and went to a man to man defense and began to put more pressure on the Prexies, who lost to Ross twice during the season and go into Saturday's finals with an 8-16 record.

Paeth said the Little Giants were beginning to get some momentum before Greg Hedden injured his eye when Marion's leaping center Ralph Hill was called for goal tending under the hoop to put Ross ahead 24-22 early in the third quarter.

"I think the only time in the game when we had some momentum was when Hedden got hurt," Paeth observed. The Ross senior left the game and had to have five stitches near his eyebrow. From then on, the Little Giants struggled on offense and gradually saw the game slip away. They made only 17 of 52 shots from the field for just under 33 percent.

Ross's two victories over the Prexies included an 81-55 romp at the Fremont gym in late January. Was it a disadvantage psychologically going against a team you had beaten twice during the year?

"I really don't think that was the reason," Paeth said. "Although they come in here with nothing to lose. More pressure is on us, because we are expected to win."

He credited Harding for playing a good defensive game and getting the Little Giants out of their tempo and patterns. Ross tried to get its running game going against Harding whenever it could, with only limited success.

"We just couldn't get untracked," Paeth said. "And that's certainly a credit to them."

"We knew man to man they matched up with us real well, but they weren't that deep," he said. He credited Harding guard Ted Simmons for coming off the bench down the stretch when leading scorer Fred Ross ran into foul trouble. Paeth thought Simmons might rattle, but he didn't.

He described the squad as mentally ready for the game and said they had one of their best practices of the year on Wednesday night.

The Ross contingent of fans certainly made its presence known at the Bowling Green State University arena. The students, who were dressed in purple, turned out in the highest numbers of the season and far outnumbered Marion's fans in numbers and volume.

"It was a thrill to be here," Paeth said. "There was great backing and the kids did a great job."