

GIANTS MOVE ON TO SECTIONAL FINAL

"We got risky, and risks pay off.... Coach scared me a little bit, but it paid off." — Ross junior Brett Hufford

Ross steals tourney win



Hickey's legs, Hufford's bat contribute to win

By MICHAEL BOSI

Staff writer

SANDUSKY — Fremont Ross' most recent job in being a baseball coach who plays the percentages, wushups fundamentals and puts safety first.

But this is tournament time, folks. Enough said.

Fought threw the book of conventions and turned into the tar pits of Sandusky Tuesday as the Little Giants beat Mansfield Senior, 5-4, in the Division I sectional tournament at Jaycee Park.

After his first run was cut in a runner being forced out by a count-off mile at home plate, Fought had Michael Hickey steal second, third at home in the top of the first to give the Little Giants a 3-2 lead.

"We got risky, and risks pay off," Fought said. "Gauss scored me a little bit, but it paid off," said Ross' Brett Hufford, who hit a two-run homer, his third, in the bottom of the first to give his team a 2-1 lead.

Mansfield starter Mike Yoha (23) kept the game close as he escaped several Ross rallies unscathed. The Little Giants had the bases loaded in the second and had a runner fly to left field. Wesley Esquivel tagged up but was an easy out at home as James Diehl's throw.

"The reason you challenge is because in that inning (Diehl) overthrew third base by 2 feet, and in (Yoha's) defense, he hadn't thrown a good ball to anyone," Fought said. "Then he threw a good ball to home and he nails Wesley. You've got to take that chance and see if it pays off."

Ross left a runner at third in the second and the bases loaded in the fourth — a comment all as the team lost 3-4 before the game was over.

"Two weeks ago, we would have let that bug us and we would have been on the other's back," Fought said. "Today that didn't happen. We picked it up and made something out of it."

The Tygers (14-2) got their second unearned run in the fifth inning. Jake Solday singled, stole second and moved to third



when catcher Julian Domiray's throw saluted untouched into center field as no one covered second. Two outs later, Sols 32nd score on Tim Clark's grounder.

At the bottom of the fifth, Hickey reached on a two-out error. He swiped second as Esquivel swung and missed on a 3-and-2 count.

The next low-percentage move: Hickey, with two outs, safely stole third.

With the count 3-and-1, Fought

conferred with Esquivel, making sure the batter knew what was coming next.

Without fear of Fremont Hickey reached on a two-out error. He swiped second as Esquivel swung and missed on a 3-and-2 count.

"I haven't been real hot with the bat lately, so I got on it's a chance to be a sparkplug," said Hickey, who now has four steals. "When I stole third, that was my decision. (Fought) said

if I could get there I could try it." The swipe of home was a first in Hickey's career.

"That didn't happen too often," he said. "With the pitcher in the windup, I got a good jump."

"That," Fought said, "was a nice turning point of the game for us."

Winding pitcher Billy Sheets (6-2) gave up a leadoff double in the top of the sixth but retired

See ROSS WINS, B3

ABOVE: Fremont Ross second baseman Roy Nino, left, bobbles the ball as Mansfield Senior's Zac Bleitz slides into second base in the second inning of the Division I Sectional semifinal on Tuesday at Jaycee Park in Sandusky. LEFT: Brett Hufford is congratulated by his Little Giants teammates after hitting his first home run of the season. The solo shot came in the bottom of the fifth inning and gave Ross a 2-1 lead. Ross defeated Mansfield Senior 5-4 to advance to Friday's sectional semifinal against Mansfield Madison. Game time is 5 p.m. at Jaycee Park.

News-Messenger Andrew Morrison

Ross wins sectional semifinal; faces Mansfield Madison in Friday's final

Continued from B1

the next three batters as he continued his strong performance.

Sheets finished with four strikeouts and got his first win since April 22.

"It's been a while," said the junior right-hander.

"I think we're starting to get it back together in the last two

games and we're starting to work as a team now like we did at the beginning of the season."

Hickey led off the bottom of the sixth with a single and back-to-back doubles by Terry Cisco and Roy Nino gave Ross a 5-2 lead. Both teams had to survive two runs in the top of the top of the seventh. One batter earlier, the Little Giants (9-5) turned a

double play, reducing the impact of Clark's blast to the right-center field gap.

For the first time (the double play) is big, because you need one," Fought said. "When you turn a double play out of it and leave that runner at third, No. 1, it gives you momentum and No. 2, it deflates

day was ruled out after he barreled into Sheets on a pop-up along the first base line.

LITTLE GIANTS NOTES: Top-ranked Mansfield Madison awaits the Little Giants. The sectional

final is scheduled for Friday (5 p.m.) at Jaycee Park, with the winner advancing to the district tournament at Findlay. The Ross game against Fostoria, originally scheduled for Tuesday, will be

made up Thursday at Alumna Field. A resumption date for the May 2 rainout at Findlay has not been set. The Little Giants' only no makeups will be played against Perryburg or Maumee.