

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

SANDUSKY — Fremont Ross's Dan Fought takes pride in being a baseball coach who plays the percentages, worships fundamentals and puts safety first.

But this is tournament time, folks. Enough said.

Fought threw the book of conventional wisdom 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 risk resulted in a runner being thrown out by a country mile at home plate, Fought had Michael Hickey steal second, third and home in the bottom of the fifth to give the Little Giants a 3-2 lead.

"We got risky, and risks pay off. Hicks did an excellent job on the bases. Coach scared me a little bit, but it paid off," said Ross's 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 Yeha (23) kept the game close as he escaped several Ross rallies unscathed. The Little Giants had the bases loaded in the second, but on Roy Nino's short fly to left field, Wesley Esquivel tagged up but was an easy out at home on James Diehl's throw.

"The reason you challenge is because in that lining (Diehl) overthrew third base by 25 feet, and in (pregame warnings) he hadn't thrown a good ball to anyone," Fought said. "Then he throws that lob to the plate 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 common ailment as the team lost 30-4 before Tuesday's game.

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

The Tigers (14-7) got their second unearned run in the fifth inning. Jake Solisley singled, stole second and moved to third

when catcher Julian Domiray's throw sailed untouched into center field as no one covered second. Two batters later, Solisley scored on Tim Clark's groundout.

In the bottom of the fifth, Hickey reached on a two-out error. He swiped second as Esquivel swung and missed on a hit-and-run.

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

With the count 3-and-1, Fought



ABOVE:

Fremont

Ross second

baseball

Roy Nino

left, bobbles

the ball as

Mansfield

Senior's Zac

Blitz slides

safely into

second base

in the sec-

ond inning of

the Division I

Sectional

semifinal

Tuesday at

Jaycee Park

in Sandusky.

LEFT: Brett

Hufford is

congratulated

by his Lit-

tle Giants

teammates

after hitting

his third

home run of

the season.

The blow

came in the

bottom of the

first inning

and gave

Ross a 2-1

lead. Ross

defeated

Mansfield

Senior 5-4 to

advance to

Friday's

sectional

final against

Mansfield

Madison.

Game time

is 5 p.m. at

Jaycee Park.

News-Messenger

Andrew Morrison

if I could get there I could try it."

The swipe of home was a first

in Hickey's career.

"That doesn'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 in the game

for us."

Winning pitcher Billy Sheets

(4-3) gave up a leadoff double in

the top of the sixth but retired

See ROSS WINS, B3

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."

Aaron Coorner led off the bottom of the sixth with a single, and back-to-back doubles by Terry Cleco and Roy Nino gave Ross a 5-2 lead. But Sheets had to survive

Clark's two-run home run in 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.

"At that time (the double play) is big because you need outs," 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 them."

The game ended when Jeff Solisley was thrown out at home on a

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

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