

Ross

Coach: Mike Gilbert (115-40)

Last year: 22-7, 7-3 tied for second

Last tournament: Lost to Findlay in district final

Key returners: Paige Kingsborough, ss, sr; Megan Wasserman, 1b, jr; Jessica White, c, jr; Stephanie Nagle, 2b, sr.; Rachael Daugherty, lf, sr.

Outlook: Kingsborough will return and play shortstop after missing last season because of a knee injury. She will be counted on to produce in the middle of the order. The GBC should be tough this season. Findlay will probably be the favorite and Napoleon is always strong. Marion Harding has eight seniors coming back. And Sandusky and Lima Senior can't be discounted. The Little Giants are very young — even the returning players are at new positions — and need to find a pitcher. Gilbert believes the collective attitude of the team will be a major benefit. The group lost eight seniors but still has solid leadership in Kingsborough, Nagle and Daugherty. Gilbert and Ross should not be underestimated.

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**— Fremont Ross
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Gilbert**

Little Giants build confidence

By **MATTHEW HORN**
Sports Writer

It did not take Beth Shaffer long to instill confidence in Fremont Ross coach Mike Gilbert Monday.

And, potentially more importantly, it took her almost no time to reinforce confidence in herself as the sophomore defeated Bowling Green 5-3 in the season opener in her first varsity start.

Shaffer allowed seven hits, three runs and three walks in a complete-game effort. Only two of the runs were earned and she added three strikeouts.

Gilbert said he has no concerns with his young hurler.

"Beth will age me 10 years — she makes sophomore mistakes — but she makes the big play," Gilbert said. "She knows how to pitch. She knows the game well."

David Shaffer, Beth's father, has functioned as a personal pitching coach of sorts since she was in the third grade. Shaffer and fellow sophomore Erin Hiestand are the Little Giants' candidates to replace Miranda Steinberger and Sara Hoffman on the mound this year.

"I was nervous and excited,"

Shaffer said. "Being a sophomore on varsity is a bit scary but I knew I could do it. It's just mind over matter."

Shaffer said she is appreciative of the opportunity Gilbert has granted her and enthused that she will quite possibly have three seasons in the role.

"If I didn't work hard and show coach what I can do I wouldn't have that spot," she said. "I showed it in the first inning — from the start."

Shaffer said she has the utmost faith in her team's defense — al-

though her own is the first thing she'd like to refine.

"I'm confident I have a good defense behind me," she said. "No matter what they'll support me. My throws to the bases need a little work. I'll work as hard as I can to make myself and my team better."

Rachael Daugherty doubled, tripled, scored once and drove in a run, Stephanie Nagle went 2-for-3 with a run and Paige Kingsborough added a double and RBI for Ross.

See **KINGSBOROUGH, B2**

Late rally lifts Ross to victory

By RYAN AUTULLO

News-Messenger correspondent

PORT CLINTON — Like the criticism she once received from her coach, Rachael Daugherty also suggested that her Fremont Ross teammates were capable of doing more.

After getting stranded on third base in the fifth inning of the Little Giants' non-league victory over Port Clinton Tuesday, Daugherty expressed her disapproval of the lack of production by firmly stating, "We can't do that, guys."

Two innings later, Daugherty was again positioned on third.

This time, however, she was brought home on a double by Mindy Meggitt for the game-tying run in a thrilling 9-8 victory over the host Redskins.

"It's frustrating sometimes when you get a hit and get stranded," Daugherty said. "It wasn't a yell. It was more for us to pump it up."

Meggitt scored the game-winning run when Cassie Steinberger reached base on an error.

Both Meggitt and Steinberger flied out on the first pitches they saw in the fifth, prompting the lecture from Daugherty and Ross coach Mike Gilbert.

"She's been struggling at the plate," Gilbert said of Meggitt. "Basically, I told her to put it in play."

It was the Little Giants' second win to open the new season. They defeated Bowling Green 5-3 Monday.

Daugherty was 3-for-4 at the plate against Port Clinton, including a leadoff triple in the second inning. She also advanced directly to third on both of her singles because of two Redskin fielding errors.

The senior left fielder began her sizzling start to the year with a pair of hits Monday.

"Doc's been hitting the ball," Gilbert said. "She's a key reason we've won two games."

After enduring what she called a "season-long slump" last year, Daugherty was urged by Gilbert to make a conscious effort to improve her play in the off-season.

During the summer, after basketball open gym was finished each day, Daugherty made her way to the Ross weight room.

"I told her she could (improve) if she got herself in shape this summer," Gilbert said. "She worked hard this summer, and that's why she's having this success."

Reegan Koppelman added three RBIs for the Little Giants.

Ross softball wins second straight

Continued From B1

Erin Hiestand pitched three solid innings, surrendering just three hits to earn the win in relief of Beth Shaffer.

After allowing the first two Redskin batters to reach base in the bottom of the seventh, Hiestand got three straight outs to escape the jam — and the game.

"She toughed it out," Gilbert said. "We talk about mental toughness, and I think that's what she had."

Last year, Gilbert had the luxury of two veteran senior pitchers on his roster in Miranda Steinberger and Sara Hoffman.

Hiestand and Joseph are merely sophomores — pitching at the varsity level for the first time.

"For us to be successful, they're going to have to get better," Gilbert said. "I couldn't be happier with how we're playing, but we have to get better."

Sara Savu pitched a complete game for Port Clinton, which was without three starters — all on vacation — for its season opener. First baseman Paula

Wargo led the way for Port Clinton with a 3-for-4 performance at the plate. Her fourth-inning triple produced three runs and gave the Redskins their first lead of the game 6-5.

"I'm very proud of what we did," Port Clinton coach Vicky Gresh-Ullman said. "I'll take it as a learning experience."

And she hopes the majority of her team's learning will come in the field.

The Redskins were plagued by five errors — the costliest coming on Daugherty's single to right to lead off the seventh.

"Tomorrow, we'll work on what we need to work on," Gresh-Ullman said. "We'll be all right. We're learning part of the game."

As are the Little Giants.

Only Daugherty and second baseman Stephanie Nagle are returning to starting roles from last year's Ross team which finished 22-7 and advanced to the district final.

"When you're overlooked, you can only gain," Daugherty said of those teams that underestimate Ross.

SOFTBALL

Elmwood tops Ross

Elmwood used a nine-run third inning to seal a 13-1 victory over Fremont Ross.

Megan Wasserman went 1-for-2 with an RBI for the Little Giants. Rachel Daugherty added a double for Ross.

SOFTBALL

Shaffer shines for Ross

Beth Shaffer allowed only two runs and three hits and Stephanie Nagle had three hits and three RBIs as Fremont Ross defeated Toledo Waite 8-2.

Shaffer (2-1) walked none and struck out seven. Shaffer also doubles, scored and drove in a run.

Nagle was 3-for-4 with two runs and a stolen base. She drove in two runs in the second and one in the fourth.

Paige Kingsborough was 2-for-2 with two RBIs for the Little Giants (3-2). Megan Wasserman tripled and scored, Rachael Daugherty drove in a run and Ashley Long scored twice for Ross.

Rockets roar in fourth

Big inning lifts Oak Harbor to softball victory

By MATTHEW HORN
Sports Writer

OAK HARBOR — Junior hurler Brooke Sprouse didn't receive much run support in her first two appearances.

Thursday, however, the Oak Harbor bats emerged from their collective slumber with a break-out fourth inning and Sprouse went the distance in the circle as the Rockets defeated Fremont Ross 10-4.

All 10 Oak Harbor runs came in the fourth as eight batters reached and scored after one out and the team batted around.

Brittany Taylor scored Ashley Brugnone with a double for the first Rocket run.

Charlene Baker drove in three runs and scored twice in the inning.

Sprouse (1-2) allowed four hits and walked five while striking out five.

One day prior, Sprouse took the hard-luck setback, giving up an unearned run in Bellevue's 1-0 victory. Elmwood shut out the Rockets 6-0 in her other start.

The Little Giants scored first with a run in the second inning but didn't score again until plating three in the seventh. Beth Shaffer doubled and took the loss (2-2), Paige Kingsborough had two hits and two RBIs, and Megan Wasserman reached base three times, scored once and drove in a run for Ross (3-3).

Sprouse said that the Rockets' start to the season suggests Oak Harbor made the right decision in hiring youthful Amanda DeVaul and Tiffany Turnow as co-coaches.

"It's been a great first couple of games," she said. "And it will only get better. They're teaching us so much and our hitting finally came alive. They're probably two of the greatest coaches (the juniors) will have the chance to play under. We all trust them."

And the coaches certainly have faith in their hurlers — which include Erica Winke.

"They've both gone in and done their jobs," DeVaul said. "We have confidence in both of them. They worked hard in the offseason and it shows."

Sprouse and Winke, who beat



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

FREMONT ROSS first baseman Reegan Koppleman beats Oak Harbor's Brittany Taylor to the bag during Thursday's non-league softball contest at Oak Harbor. The Rockets topped the Little Giants 10-4.

Lake 4-3 this year and pitched the first five innings against the Lady Red, have slid seamlessly into the spot vacated by last year's ace Michelle Druckenmiller.

"I came in for her a little last year," Sprouse said of moving to the pitcher's circle from her spot at third base last season. "I understood that she was a senior and that was her role."

But that doesn't mean Sprouse wasn't chomping at the bit for her chance at more innings. And she will actually get to do so a year earlier than the resilient Druckenmiller, who didn't move into the No. 1 spot until she was a senior.

"I looked forward to it," Sprouse said. "I worked hard this winter to show I could take that place and that role. I'm very proud to do that."

Sprouse works with personal pitching coach Nicole Long, who also tutors Ali Warren of Gibsonburg, for two hours once each month and Louie Damschroder on Tuesdays and



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

TIFFANY ESQUIVEL of Fremont Ross goes to bat against Oak Harbor during Thursday's contest at Oak Harbor.

Thursdays. Damschroder's daughter Stephanie is a former Rocket pitcher.

Sprouse said her drop curve has been especially effective thus far. She said her location and off-speed stuff have also been solid.

"I'm very comfortable out

there," Sprouse said. "I'm not rushed. I'm not nervous. I feel good."

Especially when her teammates give her a little support.

"Hitting is contagious," DeVaul said. "They realized that tonight. The girls see they can hit."

SOFTBALL

Shaffer strong in circle

Beth Shaffer struck out eight in seven innings and Paige Kingsborough tripled and drove in two runs as Fremont Ross defeated Lima Senior 5-2 in the Greater Buckeye Conference.

The Little Giants (4-3) scored three runs in the first inning.

Shaffer (3-2) allowed four hits and walked three.

Stephanie Nagle singled and drove in a run, and Rachael Daugherty and Ashley Long each had two hits and an RBI for Ross. Jessica White had two hits and scored twice.

Kingsborough returns for Ross

Continued From B1

Suzanne Chudzinski singled, scored once and drove in a run, Megan Wasserman doubled and scored, and Mindy Meggitt drove in one run for Ross.

"(Daugherty's bat is) tremendous," Kingsborough said. "She's a great athlete. When she puts her mind to it she can do anything. She's a great hitter and we'll need that."

Nagle replaced graduated Jaymelee Glaspy at the top of the order Monday.

Also new for Ross Monday — sort of — was the return of Kingsborough. Kingsborough missed the entire softball season last year after injuring her knee with the basketball team.

She played in the first few basketball games for Ross during the just completed campaign but the pounding on her knee was too strenuous. She has moved to shortstop from behind the plate and said the knee feels relatively close to 100 percent.

Kingsborough, who couldn't remember getting nervous on a softball field, was thrilled to be back with her teammates. Despite the forced hiatus, Kings-

borough will certainly be one of the team's leaders — on and off the field.

"(Being a leader) is very important to me," she said. "This is my fourth year. These girls are so fun to be around. It's fun being back. I've never been nervous for a game, but this game I was nervous. I was excited to be back and nervous at the same time."

Kingsborough said she still spends time each day working to strengthen the knee on her own. She said the knee feels 10 times stronger than it did when she began rehabilitation.

And Kingsborough is not unfamiliar with shortstop, having played there on travel teams.

"I'm comfortable," she said. "I like being in control."

And Gilbert likes having her in control as well. Especially when it's considered that only second baseman Nagle is playing the same position she played last season on the Little Giant varsity.

"We knew we had to come out and put the bats on the ball and field well," Kingsborough said. "We did both. Hopefully that continues. I think it will."

Ross shut out

Fremont Ross allowed nine unearned runs in a 12-0 setback to St. Ursula.

Beth Shaffer (3-3) took the loss. She allowed four hits and six runs, three earned, in 5¹/₃ innings.

Stephanie Nagle singled and stole a base, Paige Kingsborough tripled and Jessica White added a single for the Little Giants' (4-4) only hits.

SOFTBALL

Marion edges Ross

Paige Kingsborough had two hits, a double and an RBI for Fremont Ross, but the Little Giants fell 4-2 to Marion Harding in the Greater Buckeye Conference.

Megan Wasserman also drove in a run for Ross while teammates Reegan Koppelman and Suzanne Chudzinski added hits.

Beth Shaffer struck out three for the Little Giants (4-5).

Giants sweep Columbian

Erin Hiestand and Beth Shaffer each notched victories as Ross took a doubleheader from Tiffin Columbian 7-6 and 8-4, respectively.

The Little Giants (6-5) scored twice in the top of the seventh to win Game 1. Hiestand (2-1) allowed three earned runs and struck out six.

Shaffer (4-4) allowed two earned runs in Game 2.

Paige Kingsborough was 5-for-8 with two doubles, two runs and three RBIs in the two games.

Megan Wasserman doubled, Shaffer singled twice and scored once, and Jessica White and Rachael Daugherty each singled and scored one run for the Little Giants in Game 1. Ashley Long singled and score on run, and Daugherty and Brittney Miller each scored one run.

Stephanie Nagle doubled, scored once and drove in a run, Shaffer singled and drove in two runs, and Cassie Steinberger and Miller each singled and scored one run in Game 2.

News-Messenger reports

Findlay scored a pair of runs in the top of the seventh to earn a 5-3 victory over the Fremont Ross softball team Tuesday.

The Little Giants went up 2-1 after the second inning. Megan Wasserman scored after a triple by Rachael Daugherty, and a sacrifice fly by Cassie Steinberger plated Daugherty.

Ross added another run in the third after Stephanie Nagle was doubled home by Paige Kingsborough.

Nagle went 2-for-4 with one run scored and one stolen base.

Beth Shaffer took the loss for the Little Giants, giving up three earned

runs on four hits while striking out three.

SJCC dominates in win

Fremont St. Joseph Central Catholic used a 10-run outburst in the sixth inning to secure an 11-1 road victory over Edison.

Alyssa Dickman earned the win, throwing a one-hitter in six innings while striking out two. Dickman also went 2-for-4 at the plate with two RBIs.

Mandy Hensley went 3-for-4 for the Crimson Streaks while Jamie Bork, Katy Hasselbach, Alison Chudzinski, Ali Kusmer and Melissa Taylor all added two hits.

Sandusky edges Ross

Sandusky scored twice in the second and once in the third on the way to claiming a 3-2 victory over Fremont Ross.

Beth Shaffer struck out three while scattering five hits and allowing one earned run for the Little Giants.

Stephanie Nagle, Paige Kingsborough, Rachael Daugherty and Suzanne Chudzinski added hits for Ross (6-7, 1-3).

SOFTBALL

Hiestand pitches shutout

Paige Kingsborough singled, tripled and drove in a run as Fremont Ross topped Lima Senior 3-0 in the Greater Buckeye Conference.

Erin Hiestand (3-1) notched the win, allowing no runs, one walk and four hits in seven innings while striking out one.

Rachael Daugherty singled twice and drove in two runs, and Stephanie Nagle singled for the Little Giants (7-7, 2-3).

Megan Wasserman, Beth Shaffer and Jessica White each scored one run for Ross.

Beth Shaffer singled three times, scored once and drove in a run, and Paige Kingsborough singled twice and drove in one run for the Little Giants (9-7) in Game 1. Rachael Daugherty, Ashley Long, Brittney Miller and Mindy Meggitt each added one run.

Reegan Koppelman singled three times and scored once, and Long, Meggitt and Stephanie Nagle each added a single for Ross.

Ross scored in five of seven innings in Game 2.

Shaffer allowed four hits, walked two and struck out two in the shutout.

Kingsborough singled, doubled, scored once and drove in two runs, and Nagle scored twice and drove in a run for Ross in Game 2.

Giants fall in GBC

Stephanie Nagle scored two runs but Marion Harding defeated Ross 7-4 in the Greater Buckeye Conference.

Harding scored four runs in the top of the sixth.

Beth Shaffer (5-7) took the loss for the Little Giants (9-8, 2-4).

Paige Kingsborough singled twice, drove in two runs and scored once, and Rachael Daugherty and Megan Wasserman each singled for Ross. Mindy Meggitt added one run.

Kingsborough powers Ross

Paige Kingsborough hit a home run and drove in two runs and Reegan Koppelman added two RBIs as Ross defeated rival Sandusky 8-5 in the Greater Buckeye Conference.

The Little Giants (11-8, 4-4) scored three runs in the second inning and three in the fourth before holding off a late Sandusky rally.

Beth Shaffer notched the win allowing two runs and five hits while walking five and striking out five in six innings.

Stephanie Nagle doubled, singled, scored and drove in a run, Jessica White scored twice and Rachael Daugherty doubled and scored for Ross. Ashley Long and Mindy Meggitt each scored one run, and Suzanne Chudzinski drove in one run.

Giants win one

Ashley Long drove in a run in both games of a doubleheader as Ross split with Ashland, winning 11-10 and losing 15-2.

Ashland scored 15 runs on 10 hits in its victory. Erin Hiestand (5-2) allowed five earned runs to take the loss.

Paige Kingsborough singled twice and doubled, and Stephanie Nagle singled and drove in a run in Game 1 for the Little Giants (12-9).

Ross outhit Ashland 14-13 in its win and scored eight times in the fifth inning.

Beth Shaffer (7-7) notched the victory to even her record and added two singles, three runs and two RBIs in Game 2.

Little Giants battle Sandusky to the end

"They never quit. What the Lady Giants have shown all year is their character."

— Ross coach
Mike Gilbert

News-Messenger reports

There was absolutely no quit in this year's Fremont Ross softball team.

The Little Giants were eliminated from the Division I sectional tournament Monday when their season ended with a runner being thrown out at the plate.

But despite a 13-12 setback to Greater Buckeye Conference rival Sandusky, Ross coach Mike Gilbert was pleased with the remarkable resiliency of his team.

Ross (12-10) overcame two substantial deficits to defeat Ashland 11-10 in the second game of a dou-

bleheader after losing the first game 15-2 Saturday.

Monday they rebounded from a 12-2 deficit but could get no closer than one run.

"They never quit," Little Giant coach Mike Gilbert said. "What the Lady Giants have shown all year is their character. You had to like what you saw Monday. They never quit. They could have quit — they showed that pluckiness all year."

Ross outhit Sandusky, which defeated it in two of three meetings this year, 13-8 Monday.

Megan Wasserman and Paige Kingsborough each had three hits

and scored two runs. Kingsborough drove in four runs and Wasserman one.

Wasserman's bid for a second RBI was thwarted when the game ended with an out at the plate following her two-strike single. Each team had two runners gunned down at home.

"Sandusky made the play when it had to," Gilbert said. "But I can't tell you how many times the girls came through. Wasserman was huge. Paige has to be one of the best hitters in the area — if not the district."

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scored four runs, and Mindy Meggitt added two hits for Ross.

Gilbert will lose Kingsborough, Stephanie Nagle and Rachael Daugherty to graduation. And they will be missed by Gilbert for more than their contributions on the field.

Gilbert's father James, who was known as Mike, died on Thursday and the varsity team attended the burial service on Mothers' Day.

"I'm going to miss the caring nature of these kids," Gilbert said. "I can't tell you how much that meant to me."

See BELLEVUE, B2

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SOFTBALL

Ross drops one to Napoleon

Ross scored three times in the top of the seventh, but Napoleon was able to hold off the hard-charging Little Giants for a 6-4 GBC victory.

Brittany Miller went 3-for-4 and added an RBI for Ross (12-12, 4-6 GBC) while teammates Paige Kingsborough, Reagan Koppelman and Rachael Daugherty also each knocked in a run.

Ashley Long and Stephanie Nagle added hits for the Little Giants while Jessica White, Megan Wasserman and Mindy Meggitt all scored runs.

Beth Shaffer took the loss for Ross, throwing four innings with four hits and no earned runs.

GBC award belongs to Ross senior

Kingsborough earns outstanding honor

By MATTHEW HORN
Sports Writer

Paige Kingsborough of Fremont Ross missed last year's softball season because of a knee injury.

And while certainly not the type to comfortably fill a spectator's role, she wouldn't trade the experience.

Kingsborough rebounded from her unscheduled hiatus by being recognized as the Greater Buckeye Conference's outstanding player her senior year.

"I can't take the injury back and I don't think I would," Kingsborough said. "It's made me a stronger person and taught me a lot of lessons. Things happen for a reason."

"(The injury) makes (winning the award) phenomenal. I missed a lot last year. It's a great honor to receive the award."

Seniors Rachael Daugherty and Stephanie Nagle were named first team, and Ashley Long made second team for Ross.

Ross coach Mike Gilbert said the three seniors provided vital leadership for the young team despite not being a vocal lot after a very strong campaign for the Little Giants as juniors.

"That was very essential," Gilbert said of the seniors' guidance. "You can't only talk about Paige. Stephanie and Rachael were also very important. The three seniors did the little things. We could have folded tent at any point and they didn't do that. They just worked hard. You can't always measure a successful season by your record."

"Coming off the successful season the year prior had to be tough but you'd never know it from them out there. They gave their best all the time."

Ross was 12-12 this year.

Kingsborough and Daugherty were named honorable-mention all-district. Kingsborough said she appreciated the team's senior leaders when she was an underclassman.

"As a freshman I got help from my teammates with my confidence level and I hope I did that for my younger teammates," she said.

Kingsborough was the first freshman player Gilbert had called up to varsity. Kingsborough, formerly a catcher/third baseman, played short-stop this season.

"She's the first freshman I've ever pulled up," Gilbert said. "I'm never going to forget that. You can always count on Paige. She came through 50 percent of the time — how many times can you say that?"

"She struggled a lot at the beginning of the year," Gilbert continued on the transition to short. "She started making plays and feeling more confident. She did a great job."

Kingsborough led the Little Giants with a .513 average, 33 RBIs and a school-record 11 doubles.

"She couldn't have played any better than she did," Gilbert said of the just completed campaign. "(Her numbers were compiled) in much fewer games. She played 24 not 29 games. It's a tribute to her. She hits the ball so hard. (All the GBC coaches) discussed that. There's no doubt she's the best hitter in the league and I think one of the best in the area."

Kingsborough, who plans to play softball at Owens Community College, recorded a hit in every game but one and struck out only twice for Ross. She had 41 hits.

The single-season Little Giant record for hits is 48 and the RBI mark is 35.

Kingsborough's injury also afforded her the opportunity to grow closer to Gilbert.

"We became very close after I got hurt," she said. "I came to him more. We got along exceptionally well. He told me before the season, 'I have confidence in you. You're one of our best players and I'm looking at you to help carry the team.' I said, 'OK I'd like to do that.'"