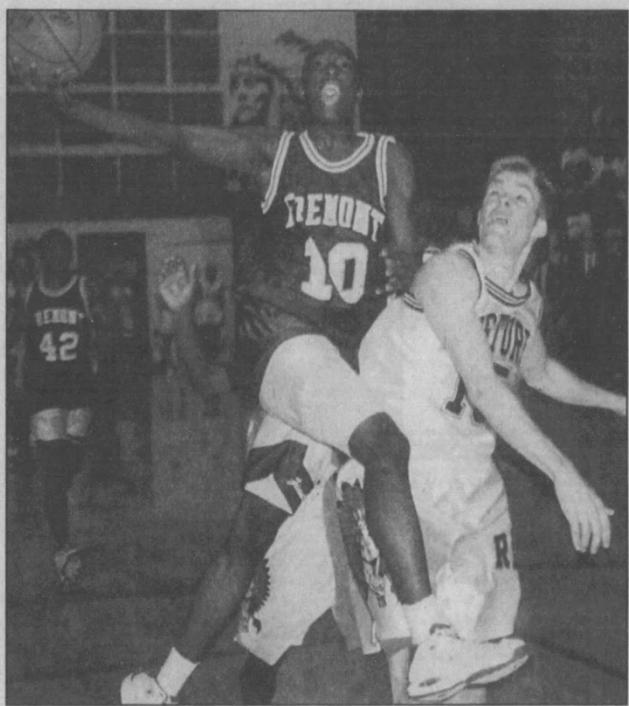


2001 Division I Sectional Tournament



News-Messenger/Doug Hise

MIKE PRICE of Fremont Ross glides toward the basket during Friday's game at Fostoria. The Little Giants open Division I sectional action tonight at Willard.

TOURNEY TIME: Boys tip today

Giants refuse to look ahead

Fliers, Bears open with rematches

News-Messenger reports

Several indicators speak against a Fremont Ross boys letdown in the Division I sectional opener against Mansfield Madison tonight at Willard.

Granted, the Little Giants (14-6) might be expected to look past the Rams (4-16) toward a sectional final matchup against third-ranked Mansfield Senior, the team that has ousted Ross from the tournament in each of the past two campaigns.

But Ross is hardly in a position to be overconfident after dropping back-to-back games against Lorain Admiral King and Fostoria to close the season.

Plus, several Little Giants are rarin' to play after suffering through bouts with bronchitis last week. Sophomore guard Terrence Jones will be back on the court after sitting out Friday's loss at Fostoria, and senior starters T.J. Hammer and Bryan Root will be close to fully healthy.

Tonight's games

Ross vs. Madison
Clyde vs. Bellevue
Gibsonburg vs. Tol. Chr.
Lakota vs. Elmwood
Old Fort vs. New Riegel
Bettsville vs. Buck. Cen.
Margareta vs. Crestview
■ See sectional capsules, pairings, B2.

Ross meets Madison at 6:30 p.m. in the first game of a doubleheader at Willard High School. Sandusky (6-14) faces Tiffin Columbian (5-15) in the nightcap.

Eight area teams open boys sectional play today:

■ In Division II, Clyde (2-18) meets archrival Bellevue (14-6) at 6:30 p.m. today at Sandusky High School.

■ In Division III, Lakota (2-18) faces Elmwood (13-7) at 7:30 p.m. at Old Fort High School. Margareta (9-11) goes against Ashland Crestview (5-15) at 6:30 p.m. at Norwalk High School.

■ In Division IV, Old Fort and New Riegel square off in a battle of 10-10 squads at 6:30 p.m. at Hopewell-Loudon High School. Bettsville (5-15) meets Buckeye Central (11-9) in the nightcap at Bascom. At Owens Community College, Gibsonburg (5-15) meets Toledo Christian (4-16) at 8:30 p.m.

"We just want to keep playing as long as we can play."

See SECTIONAL, B2

Sectional play starts tonight for area boys

Continued From B1

St. Joe, Oak Harbor and Woodmore received byes and will play in sectional finals Friday.

Meanwhile, Madison is looking at today's game as a resurrection, a chance to leave the season with some good memories. The Rams beat Mansfield St. Peter's 67-60 in the season finale.

"They have to think of it that way," Madison coach Chad Allen said. "That's the great thing about basketball. If this were football, our season would be over. Thank goodness we have this to look forward to."

Madison relies on senior guard Ryan Pore, who averages 18 points per game. Allen benched Pore for disciplinary reasons for the entire second half of a Jan. 7 meeting with Ross in Mansfield. The Little Giants held on for a 64-61 victory.

"He's definitely one of the people we're concentrating on," Gedeon said of Pore. "He's very active, and he's very good at drawing fouls. He's also got good range on his jumper. The whole offense goes through him."

Gedeon said the Little Giants will make sure to give post players Root and Alfonzo Vann plenty of offensive opportunities. Also a point of emphasis is post defense and rebounding. Admiral King and Fostoria owned the paint in beating Ross.

Elsewhere, Bellevue routed Clyde 83-66 on Feb. 17, thanks in large part to 14 3-pointers.

"They're awfully good," Clyde coach Marc Marshall said. "They offer a little bit of everything. They have a few weapons outside, some nice players inside. It's going to be a challenge."

Clyde, which eliminated Bellevue from last year's sectional tournament, snapped an 18-game losing streak with a win Friday over Margaretta.

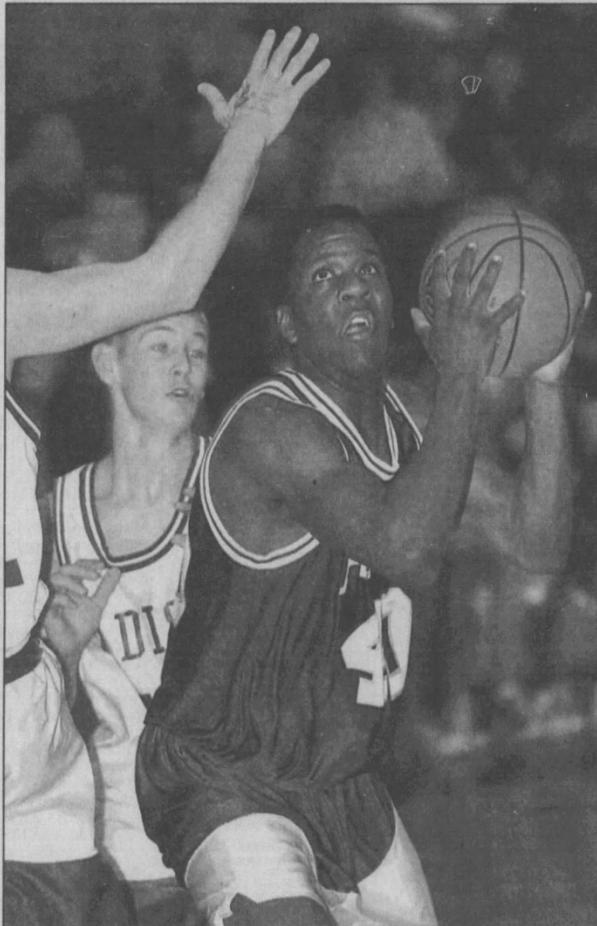
"That definitely helps," Marshall said. "It was frustrating lately because we were playing well enough to win, but we weren't getting over the hump. It was nice to finally have some of those breaks go our way."

For Gibsonburg, tonight's game will also be a rematch. The Golden Bears beat Toledo Christian 57-50 in November.

In that game, Gibsonburg sophomore guard Ryan Wasserman scored 13 points, junior guard Aaron Kaseman 12 for Gibsonburg. Senior center Dustin Arndt added eight points and 12 rebounds, despite missing most of the third quarter with foul trouble. Toledo Christian got 25 points from senior Jason Schaff.

Vann's the man for Giants

Division I: Ross goes inside to beat Rams, set up rematch with Tygers



News-Messenger photos/Ben French

ALFONZO VANN prepares to shoot against Madison defenders Tuesday during the Little Giants' 65-58 victory at the Division I sectional tournament at Willard High School.

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM
Sports editor

WILLARD — Fremont Ross coach Mark Gedeon picked up Alfonzo Vann for practice Saturday morning and used the car ride to remind the senior forward how vital his presence is to the team.

Just hours earlier, Vann had spent much of the regular season finale in foul trouble, allowing Fostoria to ring up points close to the basket and hand the Little Giants their second straight defeat.

Fortunately for Ross, Vann and his teammates got Gedeon's message.

The Little Giants fed Vann for a career-high 24 points Tuesday as Ross came from behind to eliminate Mansfield Madison 65-58 in Division I sectional tournament action at Willard High School.

"Alfonzo was a true warrior for us. ... This game, I thought he worked incredibly hard on getting the ball in the paint," Gedeon said. "He worked hard for position. He's very, very active, and he finished when he got those opportunities to finish."

Said Vann, "Coach talked to us about how Madison would give us a challenge. We came today prepared to take that challenge."

Ross (15-6) advances to face third-ranked Mansfield Senior (19-1) in the sectional final at 6:30 p.m. Friday at Willard. The Little Giants have been bounced out of the tournament by the Tygers in thrilling games each of the past two seasons.

In the other sectional semifinal Tuesday, Sandusky defeated Tiffin Columbian 68-58. The Blue



MIKE PRICE of Ross sticks to John Mambour of Mansfield Madison during Tuesday's Division I sectional game at Willard.

Streaks (7-14) will meet second-seeded Ashland (16-4) in the second game Friday.

Terrence Jones scored 14 points, T.J. Hammer 11 for the Little Giants on Tuesday. Vann and Jones shared rebounding honors with eight apiece.

Madison (4-17), led by junior guard Ryan Pore's 29 points, held an advantage for much of the game. The Rams led by as many as nine points in the first half and still held a 45-39 margin midway through the third quarter.

But the Little Giants' size advantage wore down Madison. Ross went on an 8-0 run to end the third quarter. Two of the buckets came from close range by Vann, another was a Jones layup that resulted from a Bryan Root offensive rebound.

"They're so much bigger and stronger than us that eventually ... We were trying to change defenses, and really nothing worked. You've got to give them credit for being patient on offense and getting it to guys that could score," Madison coach Chad Allen said.

A Jones 3-pointer broke a 47-all tie and gave the Little Giants the lead for good with six minutes, 55 seconds to play in the game.

After that, Root made sure the ball found its way to Vann, who hit 11 of his 14 field-goal attempts. Root, a senior center who scored only five points, recorded four assists, three of them to Vann, as the Little Giants built a 61-53 advantage with 2:32 to play. The Rams got no closer than five points thereafter.

"I was just really working hard in the middle," Root said. "I was trying to score, but I didn't have the opportunities that Alfonzo did."

The Rams came charging out of the gate Tuesday. Pore scored 13 points, and Madison led 21-12 late in the first quarter.

See ROSS, B3

NEXT: Ross (15-6) vs. Mansfield Sr. (19-1) 6:30 p.m. Friday

Ross, Tygers tangle Friday

Continued From B1

"They came out and hit everything in sight," Gedeon said. "They got some quality looks and drained them and got some energy. We took a time-out and told our kids that we've had five league wins on the road where we were down eight points and came back to win. We were tested before."

But Ross would have to make its comeback without Hammer, a senior leader who picked up his third foul

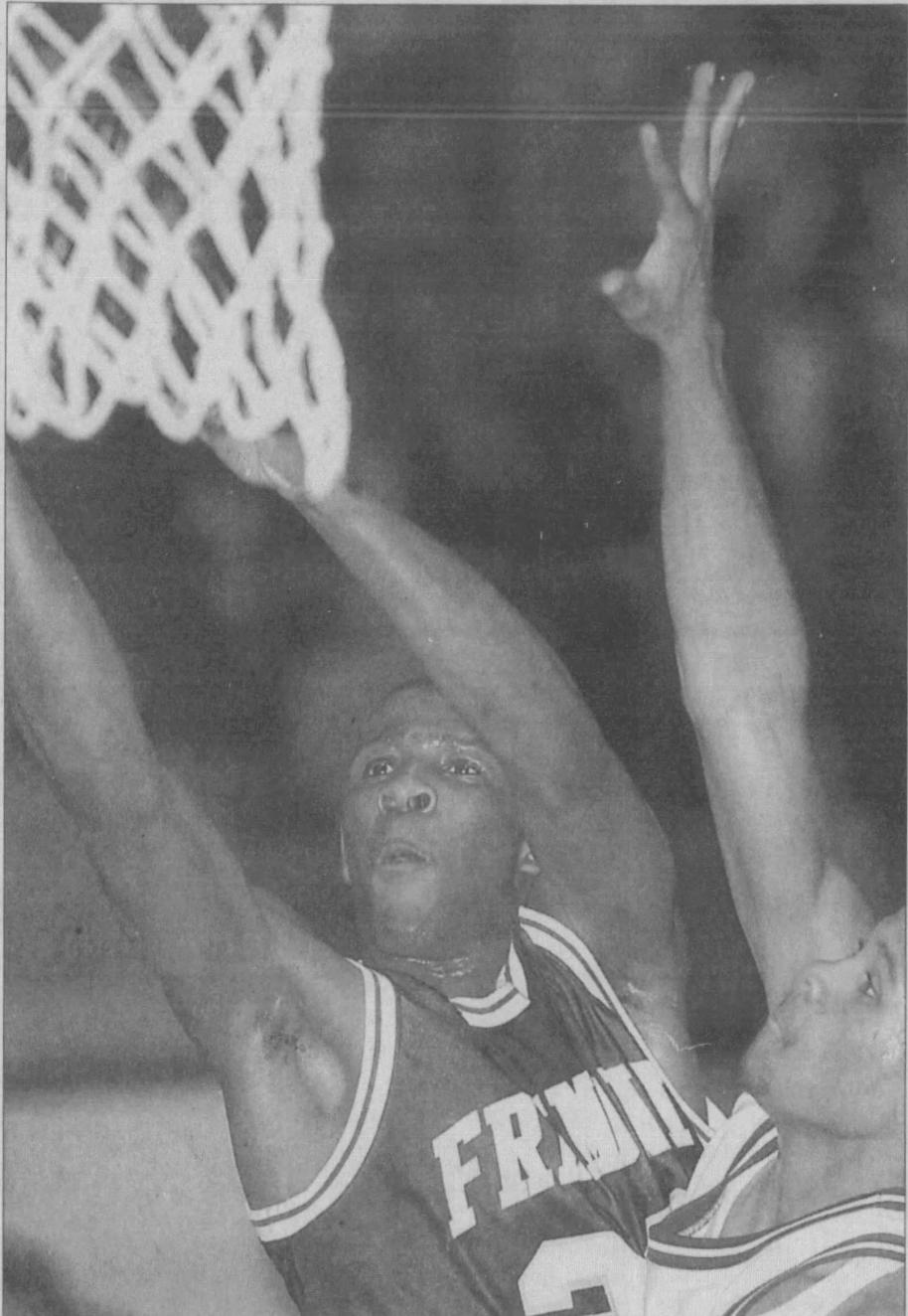


midway through the second quarter and sat the rest of the half. Hammer, who had four assists and three rebounds, started the second half but picked up his fourth foul at the 6:28 mark and sat for the next eight minutes.

Sophomore guard Luke Lyle filled in admirably, though. His driving layup during the 8-0 run late in the third quarter tied the score at 45, and his feed to Vann gave the Little Giants the lead on the next possession.

Meanwhile, Ross had to find a way to stop Pore, who scored 20 points in the first half. In the second half, the Little Giants went to a diamond-and-one defense with the 6-foot-2 Bo Martin shadowing the 5-11 Pore. Pore managed just nine points in the second half.

"Ryan had just an outstanding ballgame. I totally tip my



News-Messenger/Ben French

TERRENCE JONES of Ross takes aim at the basket against the defense of Madison's Brandon Gilmore during Tuesday's game at Willard. Jones scored 14 points.

hat to him," Gedeon said. "He came out like a true competitor and gave his team an opportunity."

The pace of the second half was considerably slower than the first half, and that favored

Ross. The Rams managed only seven points in the third quarter.

"I didn't sub very much, and we were tired," Allen said. "That cost us at the end. There's only so much we can do when

we get down there and our guys are tired."

Ross hit 26 of 52 field-goal attempts (50 percent) and outrebounded Madison 35-33. The Rams connected on 22 of 57 field-goal attempts (38.6 percent).

Basketball

High School Boys

Ross 65, Madison 58

ROSS — Terrence Jones 5-2-14, T.J. Hammer 4-3-11, Alfonzo Vann 11-2-24, Bo Martin 0-0-0, Bryan Root 2-1-5, Mike Price 2-2-6, Lee Root 1-0-3, Luke Lyle 1-0-2, Jarred Stull 0-0-0. Totals 26-10-65.

MADISON — Rory Meister 1-0-3, Ryan Pore 12-3-29, Brandon Gilmore 1-2-4, John Mambourg 2-0-6, Jordan Ward 2-0-4, Kyle Swigert 1-2-4, Jacinte Gordon 0-0-0, Jimmy Williams 3-2-8. Totals 22-9-58.

Ross	15	22	10	18	—	65
Madison	21	17	7	13	—	58

3-point goals: Ross 3-12 (Jones 2-8, Hammer 0-1, Price 0-1, L. Root 1, Lyle 0-1), Madison 5-18 (Meister 1-2, Pore 2-10, Mambourg 2-3, Swigert 0-2, Williams 0-1).

Turnovers: Ross 13, Madison 10. Rebounds: Ross 35 (Jones 8, Vann 8), Madison 33 (Williams 7).

Records: Ross 15-6, Madison 4-17.

Ross leaps Tyger roadblock

Giants even score, upset No. 3 Mansfield in another OT thriller

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM
Sports editor

WILLARD — Fremont Ross's Lee Root sauntered down the Willard High School court Friday screaming "I love this."

Root, a junior guard who hadn't attempted a shot all game, made sure everyone in the capacity crowd knew he was accepting the pressure of erasing two years of the Little Giants' pent-up frustration.

With 11.4 seconds left in overtime and Ross up 50-49, Root swished both free throws, winking confidently to teammates all the way, to put the Little Giants up by three points.

And, this time, the big one did not get away.

Mansfield guard Aunre Shaw's pressured 3-point attempt at the buzzer bounced high off the back rim as time expired, sending Ross players, coaches and fans spilling onto the court to celebrate a 52-49 victory and a Division I sectional championship.

Root had asked coach Mark Gedeon for the opportunity, even though he remembered how the Little Giants missed seven free throws to blow a 10-point lead in the final 43 seconds on the way to a



LEE ROOT

double-overtime defeat last season. "I walked up to him and said, 'Coach, I'm money.' I knew I was going to make them," Root said. "I've been visualizing it all week. I've been hoping that I'd get that opportunity. It came, and I just knocked them down."

Ross (16-6) upset the third-ranked Tygers (19-2) in the fourth consecutive overtime game between the two teams. Although the Little Giants won the first of those meetings in 1996-97, Mansfield won the past two seasons, scuttling the campaigns of talented Ross teams.

"We got over a big hurdle right there," said Ross senior forward Alfonzo Vann, who led all scorers with 15 points. "We can go all the way."

The Little Giants advance to meet Ashland (17-4) at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in a district semifinal at Willard. Second-seeded Ashland survived a scare from Sandusky, 51-49, in the second game Friday.

"Our kids believed they were going to come out on top," Gedeon said. "Not too many people around did. A lot of people were questioning some of the decisions we made around tournament time. Thank goodness, our kids stayed tight. They had a lot of reasons to back down."

Said Mansfield coach Gregg Collins, "It's another game that goes into overtime. I guess people expected that, huh?"

See GIANTS, B3

Friday's sectional final scores

Division I
Ross 52, Mansfield 49
Division II
Napoleon 57, Oak Harbor 45
Bellevue 83, Norwalk 43
Division III
Lib.-Benton 62, Woodmore 43
Eastwood 93, Lakota 37
Huron 61, Margaretta 52
Division IV
Old Fort 62, St. Joe 52

■ Ohio tourney scores, B2
■ Area roundups, B3

Giants survive, best Mansfield Senior in OT

Continued From B1

Mike Price came off the bench to add 14 points, and Bryan Root poured in 10 points for the Little Giants. Shaw scored 13 points to lead the Tygers. Wayne Merriweather and Lance Hood had 12, and Terrence Davison pitched in with 10.

The Little Giants never trailed in the second half and led by as many as nine points, when senior guard T.J. Hammer nailed a 3-pointer with 2:20 remaining in the third quarter.

But Ross had to survive a scare just to get to overtime. That was no surprise to anyone on the Ross side.

"We've been in too many situations against Mansfield where we had the lead and they were able to come back," Gedeon said. "Both teams compete very hard and have high energy levels."

Merriweather nailed a 3-pointer from the right wing with 54 seconds remaining in regulation to tie the score at 46. Then Hammer tried to push the ball downcourt, but his pass to Vann was too high and sailed out of bounds.

After the Tygers got the ball back, Merriweather stood at midcourt as the clock wound down. Finally, with about five seconds remaining, Davison dribbled into traffic and found Hood, Mansfield's 6-foot-7 senior center, for an open 12-footer on the left baseline.



HAMMER

Hood's line drive rattled out as the buzzer sounded.

In overtime, Ross won the tip, and Price hit a 3-pointer to open the scoring. A Terrence Jones free throw gave the Little Giants a 50-49 lead.

But, after a Hood free throw, Shaw drove for two points with 1:10 to play to get the Tygers to within 50-49.

Mansfield then forced a five-second call in Ross's backcourt with 28.2 seconds, giving the Tygers the chance to take the lead. But Hammer blocked a Shaw shot, and Ross got the ball with 13.4 seconds when Shaw stepped out of bounds trying to save the rebound.

Enter Lee Root. He grabbed the in-bounds pass from Hammer, drew a foul from Mansfield's Dwayne Chapman and started striding toward the free-throw line.

On the way, he was met by Shaw, who tried to put doubt into his mind.

"He was sitting there, trying to talk some jive to me, saying 'You haven't touched the ball all night. You can't make these.' I was like, 'All right. I'm going to make these both,'" Root said.

Said Gedeon of Root, "That's exactly what he's there for. He's one of our best foul shooters. In that situation, you go offense-defense. You want to get the ball in the hands of your best foul shooters. He got the basketball, squared up and knocked them down just the way you would hope."

Ross had to overcome adversity from the beginning of Friday's game. Hammer, the seasoned point guard who missed last year's Mansfield game with an injury, picked up three fouls in the first 2:47 and sat out the rest of the first half.

Price makes plays for Giants

Lee Root wasn't the only unlikely hero for Fremont Ross during Friday's 52-49 overtime victory over No. 3 Mansfield Senior.

Another junior guard, Mike Price, made several big plays that sent the Little Giants past the Tygers for the first time in three years.

Among them:

■ The biggest, according to Price, was his 3-pointer to open the overtime period. It gave Ross a 49-48 lead, one it would never relinquish.

■ The play that may have saved the day, though, was Price's tip-in of a Bryan Root miss with 1 minute, 55 seconds to play in regulation. The tip gave the Little Giants a 46-43 lead and staved off a furious Mansfield rally.

■ Price's rebound bucket at the first-half horn gave Ross a 23-19 halftime lead and momentum entering the second half. The Little Giants eventually led by nine points in the third quarter.

The Tygers held their biggest lead of the game, 14-11, at the end of the first quarter.

"Obviously, they're not the same basketball team without him," Collins said of Hammer. "He's a quality point guard. ... He's such a heady basketball player and handles the show so well. We should have been able to take advantage of the situation when he was out, but we weren't."

The Little Giants hung around, thanks to some cold shooting by Mansfield. The Tygers hit only 2 of 12 shots (16.7 percent) in the second quarter and 8 of 29 (27.6 percent) in the first half.

Price's play surprised the Tygers.

"We knew he was pretty good, but out of so many players they have, he was one we didn't expect to step up like he did," Mansfield coach Gregg Collins said.

Price, who started several of the Little Giants' regular-season games, hasn't started either of Ross's tournament games. But his 14 points were huge on Friday.

"At first, I was a little upset," Price said of not starting. "But I think it made me play harder. I probably will tell coach not to start me."

Said Ross coach Mark Gedeon, "Mike came up huge for us. We went with a larger lineup hopefully to rebound and fill the gaps a little bit better. Mike came up with the offensive rebound putback there at the end of the first half. I thought he had some great dribble pull-ups there in the second half. Then the 3 to start off the overtime period was big."

— Timothy R. Wolfrum

"We've struggled with that a lot this season," Collins said. "We're not a juggernaut. They play very sound defense, and they don't give you second shots. We really thought the team that got the points in the paint area would win, and I thought they did that."

Said Gedeon, "Our defensive scheme was to try and keep them as far away from the basket as possible. They have great ability to get the ball to the basket. ... There weren't too many times they got to the rim, at least not as many as traditionally they have done. We wanted to force them to take that mid-range jumper as often as possible."

Basketball

High School Boys

Ross 52, Mansfield Sr. 49 (OT)

Division I sectional at Willard

MANSFIELD — Aunre Shaw 5-1-13, Terrence Davison 5-0-10, Wayne Merriweather 5-1-12, Adam Molyet 0-0-0, Lance Hood 4-4-12, Dwaine Chapman 1-0-2, Rafeal Clemons 0-0-0, Antonio Graves 0-0-0. Totals 20-6-49.

ROSS — Terrence Jones 1-2-4, T.J. Hammer 2-1-7, Alfonzo Vann 7-1-15, Bo Martin 0-0-0, Bryan Root 4-2-10, Mike Price 6-0-14, Lee Root 0-2-2, Gabe Sanchez 0-0-0, Luke Lyle 0-0-0. Totals 20-8-52.

Mansfield	14	5	14	13	3	— 49
Ross	11	12	16	7	6	— 52

3-point goals: Mansfield 3-10 (Shaw 2-5, Davison 0-1, Merriweather 1-3, Graves 0-1), Ross 4-11 (Jones 0-3, Hammer 2-4, Vann 0-1, Price 2-2, Sanchez 0-1).

Turnovers: Mansfield 12, Ross 17. Rebounds: Mansfield 30 (Hood 8), Ross 38 (Vann 7).

Records: Mansfield 19-2, Ross 16-6.