

2002 Division I Sectional Tournament

Ross earns date with Tygers

TOURNEYTALE



DIV. I SECTIONAL AT WILLARD

Tuesday: Ross 70,
Columbian 62.

Next: Ross (14-7)
vs. Mansfield Senior
(17-3), 6:30 p.m. Fri-
day.

At stake: Sectional
title.

Columbian puts up fight, but Giants hold on, advance

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM
Sports editor

WILLARD — It's almost as if the Fremont Ross boys are battling two opponents in the postseason.

The Little Giants defeated the most important foe, Tiffin Columbian, by scoring the first eight points of the fourth quarter and holding on for a tougher-than-expected 70-62 triumph Tuesday in the Division I sectional opener.

But against the other opponent — their own potential — the Little Giants came up well short.

Ross couldn't come close to matching the performance it gave in the regular season finale Friday when it blasted Fostoria, 107-65,

for the Great Lakes League crown.

"We obviously didn't come out and play the same way we did against Fostoria," Ross head coach Mark Gedeon said Tuesday night.

"Against Fostoria, our kids played hard; I thought they played intelligent and with passion. ... Let's be honest, we definitely went down a couple rungs in this game. We've got to make sure we get ourselves refocused and re-energized to go with a big challenge that awaits us on Friday."

Center Chad Clark scored 20 points, point guard Luke Lyle 17 Tuesday as the Little Giants earned the right to play for their sixth straight sectional championship. Mike Price and Matt Zilles each poured in 10 points.

Ross (14-7) earned a date with top-seeded Mansfield Senior (17-3). The Little Giants and Tygers will meet for the fifth time in six seasons at 6:30 p.m. Friday at Willard. The past four meetings have gone into overtime; Ross has won a pair.

In the other sectional game at Willard, Sandusky held off Mansfield Madison, 80-75. The Blue Streaks (12-9) will face Ashland (15-5) at 8:30 p.m. Friday.

Tuesday's tournament opener was a struggle throughout for Ross, due in part to a well-executed game plan and hard work from the Tornadoes,

See GIANTS, B5

Giants survive tough game with Columbian, live to fight in final

Continued From B1

who entered the game having lost seven straight contests.

Gedeon complimented Columbian head coach Tim Murray for his team's effort during the postgame handshake.

"I'm sure there were some things we probably could have done better. But as far as effort and the way they came in, we're proud of our kids," Murray said. "It's a tough way to end the season; we would have liked to play on Friday night. But we have to give credit to our kids. They really did a nice job."

Said Gedeon, "I thought his

(Murray's) kids played hard and with energy. I thought they executed the game plan better than we did. He's got a lot to be proud of in terms of where he's building these kids. It just so happened we had a couple better athletes."

The game began in scary fashion for a Ross team concerned about a letdown.

The Tornadoes (6-15), using their superior size and a potent high-low post offense, hit 9 of their 11 shots in the first quarter and led by 16-9 and 21-16 margins. Wes Bogard scored seven points in the quarter for Columbian.

"They were moving the ball good inside," Clark said. "They had some good looks and made them. We just

wanted to get around the posts and get backside, and we did that."

Ross responded with a 13-0 run that began late in the first quarter and stretched midway through the second period. Zilles scored six consecutive points during the stretch. All of a sudden, the Little Giants led 29-21.

Right before the half, Ross led 41-27 before a Sean Rochester trey at the horn made it 41-30 at half-time.

CJay Kisabeth and Jason Gottfried combined to bring Columbian back in the third quarter. Kisabeth scored six straight points, then Gottfried followed with his

teams next nine points to get the Tornadoes to within 50-45 with with

three minutes, six seconds left in the quarter.

Gottfried led the Tornadoes with 14 points. Kisabeth added 12 points and 10 rebounds.

Andy Zirger's only bucket of the game got Columbian to within two points at 51-49 with 1:25 left in the quarter.

But, with their tournament lives on the line, the Little Giants forced turnovers on the next five Columbian possessions. Price and Clark combined for the first eight points of the fourth quarter, and Ross was back up 59-49.

"There were two keys for us," Murray said. "It was 21-16 with about a minute and 20 seconds to go in the first quarter. We had two

turnovers where we weren't really sure what we wanted to do, and we should have known that. And then it was 51-49 and we had three possessions and we didn't get a look. Those were the two things that put us in a bind."

Said Clark of the opening minutes of the fourth quarter, "We knew we didn't want to get beat. We wanted to come out and get some baskets and get up by a little margin. I think that's what pushed us. We weren't playing good, but we played good enough to win."

Ross had to endure a few more anxious moments in the final seconds after Lyle, the team's best free-throw shooter, missed three consecutive

one-and-ones. Two free throws by Allen Hoke got Columbian to within 63-58 with 1:11 to play.

But Clark got an easy hoop, and Lyle came through with a pair of free throws to put Ross comfortably ahead. Clark scored nine of his points in the final period.

Columbian outrebounded the Little Giants 33-23. But Ross committed only 11 turnovers to the Tornadoes' 26.

After its torrid first quarter, Columbian finished 27-of-53 (50.9 percent) from the field. Ross connected on 26 of 50 (52 percent) field-goal attempts. The Little Giants outscored the Tornadoes 16-4 at the free-throw line, hitting 64 percent of their attempts.

High School Boys

Ross 70, Columbian 62

ROSS — Mike Price 3-3-10, Lee Root 3-0-7, Luke Lyle 7-3-17, Bo Martin 2-0-4, Chad Clark 7-6-20, Kyle Tucker 0-2-2, Dan Thompson 0-0-0, Matt Zilles 4-2-10. Totals 26-16-70.

COLUMBIAN — Allen Hoke 4-2-10, Weston Reinbolt 3-1-8, CJay Kisabeth 6-0-12, Jason Gottfried 6-1-14, Wade Bogard 3-0-7, Jeff Nisius 0-0-0, Andy Zirger 1-0-2, Sean Rochester 4-0-9. Totals 27-4-62.

Ross	20	21	10	19	—	70
Columbian	21	9	19	13	—	62

3-point goals: Ross 2-8 (Price 1-4, Root 1-2, Lyle 0-1, Tucker 0-1), Columbian 4-15 (Hoke 0-1, Reinbolt 1-1, Gottfried 1-7, Rochester 1-1, Bogard 1-3, Zirger 0-2).

Rebounds: Ross 23 (Martin 6), Columbian 33 (Kisabeth 10). Turnovers: Ross 11, Columbian 26.

Records: Ross 14-7, Columbian 6-15.

Ross-Mansfield V: The saga lives

Giants, Tygers have split four OT games in past five seasons

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM
Sports editor

If not for the high drama it's sure to generate, Friday's Ross-Mansfield Senior boys sectional game could skip regulation play and head right into overtime.

But the journey has been just as

riveting as the OT outcomes of the memorable meetings between the two rivals in four of the past five tournaments.

"There has been drama, there has been excitement, there have been outstanding players on the floor," Ross head coach Mark Gedeon

said Tuesday night after his team beat Tiffin Columbian.

"There have been stories that I know people are going to be telling for years and years and years. Our kids are looking forward to it."

Ross (14-7) faces top-seeded Mansfield (17-3) at 6:30 p.m. Friday in a Division I sectional final at Willard High School. At stake is a trip to the district semifinal and a meeting with either Ashland or

Friday

Div. I Sectional

Ross vs.
Mansfield

6:30 p.m., Willard

See **LITTLE GIANTS, B4**

Ross-Mansfield: A history primer 1996-97

Final score: Ross 73-68 (OT) in district final.

The plot: The Little Giants won their first district crown in 67 years in the only game of this series not played at Willard. Joell Heidelberg nailed a trey with 1:55 left in overtime to hand Ross the win at Anderson Arena in Bowling Green.

1998-99

Final score: Mansfield 81-77 (OT) in district semifinal.

The plot: Marquis Sykes scored 27 points and led the Tygers back from a five-point deficit in the final two minutes of regulation. Mansfield went on to make the state tournament.

1999-00

Final score: Mansfield 72-69 (2 OTs) in district semifinal.

The plot: John Brooks hit a 40-foot bomb as the Tygers erased a 10-point deficit in the final 43 seconds of regulation. Ross missed seven free throws in the final minute.

2000-01

Final score: Ross 52-49 (OT) in sectional final.

The plot: The Little Giants didn't trail in the second half, but Mansfield had a chance to win the game at the buzzer of regulation. Mike Price and Lee Root led Ross in overtime as the Little Giants upset the No. 3 Tygers.

— Timothy R. Wolfrum

Little Giants, Tygers renew rivalry

Continued From B1

Sandusky, the two teams that square off in Friday's second game.

"It probably should just start in overtime," Mansfield head coach Gregg Collins said. "It's been a tremendous rivalry. Both teams have played hard when they play against each other. I just wish it could be in the district finals instead of the sectional finals. But here it is, and it's going to be a great game."

The Little Giants and Tygers have played epic tournament games in each of the past three seasons. Mansfield won the first two of those contests, 81-77, in March 1999 and advanced to the state tournament.

The most memorable of the meetings has to be the 2000 game, during which Ross blew a 10-point lead in the final 43 seconds of regulation. The game went to overtime when Mansfield's John Brooks nailed a 40-footer at the buzzer. The Tygers won 72-69 in double overtime.

But Ross gained a measure of revenge by upsetting third-ranked Mansfield, 52-49, in a single overtime last season.

Two of the stars of that game for the Little Giants, senior guards Mike Price and Lee Root, are back to renew the rivalry. Price made several big plays, including a 3-

pointer that opened the overtime session, and Root swished two free throws with 11.4 seconds remaining to clinch the victory.

The Little Giants began the series with a 73-68 overtime victory on its way to the regional tournament in 1996-97.

This year's matchup appears to be as interesting as past games between the two squads.

Ross will enjoy a rare size advantage. Mansfield is a small team with no starter taller than 6-foot-3. The Tygers feature several quick guards who wreak havoc with an opponent's offense.

"You're looking at a lot of very quick, athletic players that can put the basketball on the floor, can take it all the way to the rim and shoot as well," Gedeon said. "Defensively, they can bring a lot of pressure at you. They can hurt you in a lot of different ways. They're so interchangeable. All of their players can play every single spot on the floor."

Terrence Davison, a 6-foot senior wing player, leads the Tygers at 15.1 points per game. He was a District 6 Coaches Association first-team selection. Antonio Graves, a 6-2 junior, averages 14.3 points per game. Point guard Wayne Merriweather, a 5-10 senior, scored 12 points in last year's game against Ross.

The Little Giants opened the sectional Tuesday with a lackluster

70-62 victory over a Columbian squad that had dropped seven straight games. Junior center Chad Clark scored 20 points, point guard Luke Lyle 17.

Unfortunately for Mansfield, it didn't learn much about how to beat Ross. Columbian hurt the Little Giants with their height and muscle.

"We look at that game and say, 'Did we get anything out of it?' Columbian can attack in ways we can't. ... We were laughing about it: High-low, we'd love to run that, but we don't have anyone who can do it," Collins said.

"They've got some big kids inside. They're much bigger than us. We have to decide if we want to go out and put pressure on the perimeter, or do we want to rely on defending on the inside. It's probably going to come down to taking one away and when they start hurting us with the other, we'll have to adjust."

For their part, the Little Giants hope they can duplicate the performance they gave against Fostoria, a team that is similar in quickness and philosophy to Mansfield. Ross ripped the Redmen, 107-65, in the regular-season finale.

"We still know we can play as well as we did against Fostoria," Clark said after the Columbian victory. "We just have to come out with that kind of energy. It's going to be a fast game. We're going to be more hyped up to play."

Tygers too strong

Davison dominance
dooms Little Giants
in Div. I sectional final

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM
Sports editor

WILLARD — A fifth consecutive trip to overtime against Mansfield Senior was still well within Fremont Ross's grasp Friday when Terrence Davison ripped it away.

Davison, a 5-foot-10 wing player who had owned the glass all night, scored a rebound bucket with 12 seconds remaining to end Ross's hopes for a comeback and secure a 77-73 victory for the Tygers in the Division I sectional final.



Friday

Mansfield77
Ross.....73

"He just played an aggressive style of basketball, on the offensive boards, dribble penetration, knocking down a big 3 for us," Mansfield head coach Gregg Collins said of Davison, his team's leading scorer.

The previous four tournament meetings between Ross and Mansfield had gone to overtime with each team winning two. Friday's game was in doubt until Mansfield's Wayne Merriweather rolled in a free throw with 2.7 seconds remaining to put the Tygers up by the final margin.

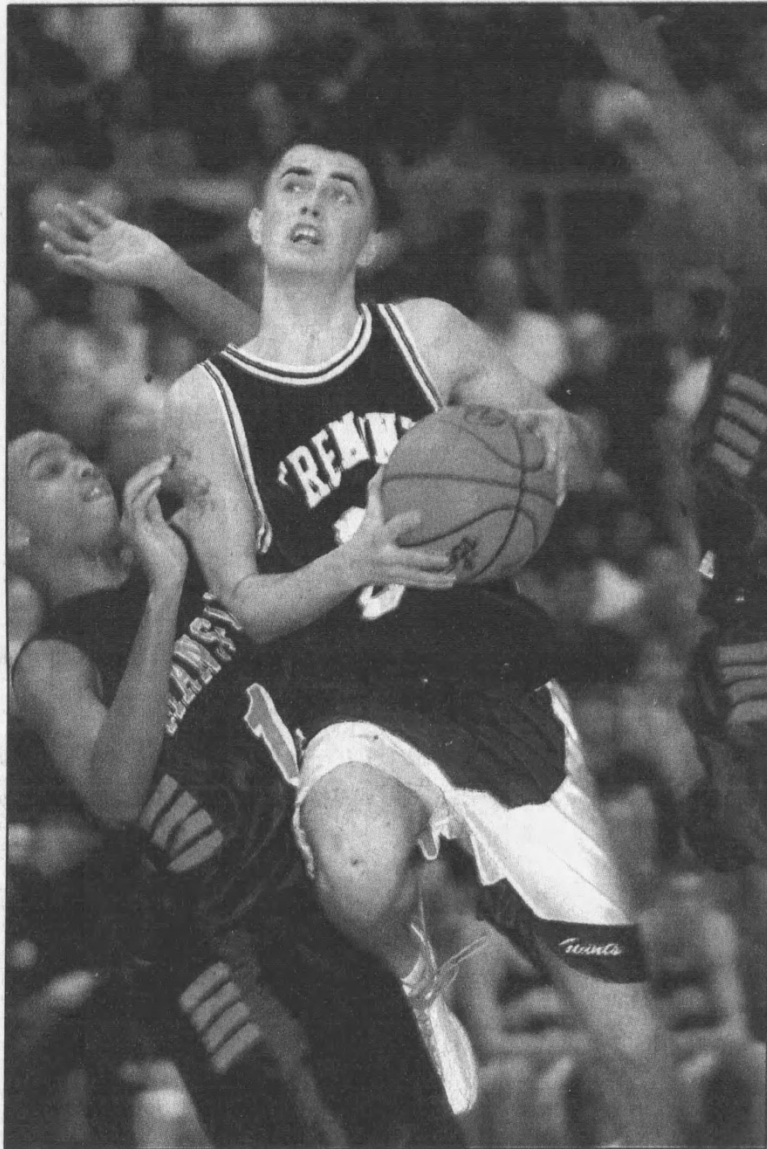
But Ross's best chance to tie the game came a few seconds earlier. The Little Giants, who led just once in the second half and trailed by as many as nine points, drew to within 74-71 on a Chad Clark rebound bucket with 27 seconds remaining.

Mansfield broke the Ross press, and Ron Williams broke free for a five-foot jumper. But the ball banged off the back of the rim, giving Ross a chance to tie the game with a 3-pointer.

Enter Davison.

Exit Ross.

"That's one of his strengths," Ross head coach Mark Gedeon said of Davison's rebounding. "He's such a great athlete and a physical player. He knows how to get to the basketball and to the rim.



News-Messenger/Ben French

LUKE LYLE, right, of Fremont Ross charges into the lane against Kris Mathews of Mansfield during Friday's game at Willard. Lyle led all scorers with 25 points and had 10 assists.

See ROSS, B3

Ross falls to Tygers, ends 14-8

Continued From B1

"We knew they were going to be very aggressive to the offensive glass. They have great instincts for the basketball. Obviously, we gave them too many second-chance points. We battled them; we competed. Unfortunately, we didn't do the job we needed to win this ballgame."

Mansfield outrebounded the Little Giants 39-24 and pulled down 18 offensive boards to Ross's 7. Davison led all rebounders with 12 to go along with his 18 points, 15 of which came in the second half.

The Tygers (18-3) advance to meet Sandusky (13-9) on Thursday in the district semifinal at Willard. The Blue Streaks overcame second-seeded Ashland, 58-57, in the other semifinal Friday.

Ross junior point guard Luke Lyle led all scorers with 25 points. He added 10 assists. Clark contributed 16 points and a team-high six rebounds, and Lee Root pitched in with 14 points.

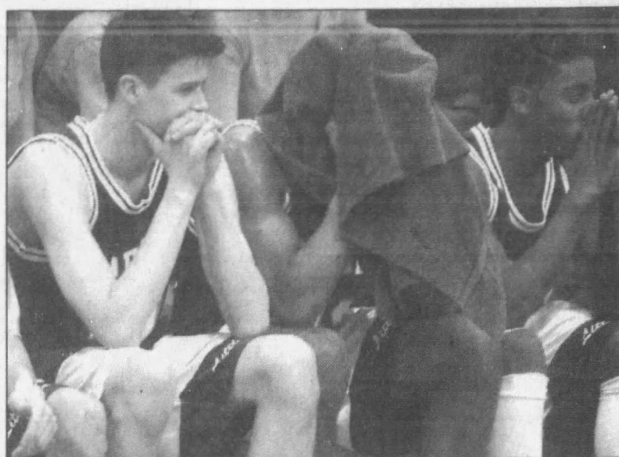
Lyle drove the Little Giants' offense Friday, continually dribbling through traffic and creating shots for himself and his teammates.

"I made the comment to our team that Lyle reminds me a lot of (Mansfield Madison's) Ryan Pore. ... The kid can shoot from the perimeter, he can dribble-penetrate, he plays hard. He just had his way tonight," Collins said.

Said Gedeon of Lyle, "We knew because they put some much pressure on the perimeter, that would open up driving lanes for him. He did give us a spark when we needed it. Obviously, he had a very good game for us.

"He's really started to make a name for himself, getting the accolades that he's deserving of. Hopefully, this trend continues."

Antonio Graves led the Tygers with 24 points, 16 of which came in the first half. Merriweather and Tony Jackson added 10 apiece.



LITTLE GIANTS Dan Thompson, Bo Martin and Kyle Tucker, seated left to right, agonize over Ross's 77-73 loss to Mansfield on Friday night.

Graves, a 6-foot-2 post player, hit 7 of 9 field-goal attempts in the first half and helped Mansfield to three leads of five points.

"Antonio was on fire early," Collins said. "He felt very, very confident. He was shooting the ball well from the perimeter and dribble-penetrated and knocked down the 10- to 15-footer well."

Mansfield led 32-27 with 2:10 remaining in the first half. But the Little Giants rattled off the final five points of the quarter on a trey by Root and a Bo Martin deuce to tie the game at halftime.

Ross took its only lead of the second half at 38-37 on a Lyle drive and bucket with 5:10 remaining in the third quarter.

But the Tygers responded by outscoring the Little Giants 16-6 over the next 3:40. Davison's long 3-pointer from the right corner handed Mansfield its largest lead at 53-44 with 1:30 to play in the period.

Ross got right back into the game, though, spurred by treys from Root and Lyle. Lyle's 3-pointer at the buzzer made it 56-52 Mansfield heading to the fourth.

"When we closed it to four going into the fourth quarter, you felt pretty good because we didn't play a very good third quarter, either offensively or defensively," Gedeon said. "We allowed too many easy opportunities for them to get into the paint."

The Little Giants got as close as 62-61 when Lyle came up with a traditional three-point play. But Davison responded with a three-point play of his own after an offensive rebound.

Ross never had the ball with a chance to tie or take the lead thereafter.

Despite the lack of the traditional overtime, Friday's game was marked by the high intensity and drama of the past games. The two coaches looked forward to future matchups as well.

"You get these two teams together, they each have strong reputations; they're both league champions. The teams are going to play hard, and they're going to play well," Collins said. "The only difference is I look at Fremont, and I see a lot of juniors out there. You look at Ashland, and you see a lot of juniors. Those are the two teams next year that a lot of teams are going to be shooting for."

Said Gedeon, "The tradition will continue. If the players want to put the time and effort into this, it's still going to be one of the top sectionals in the area, period."

Ross finishes its season with a second consecutive Great Lakes League championship, but it saw its string of five consecutive sectional championships come to an end.

Still, Gedeon said a 14-8 season is successful for a team that missed 25 total games to injury and played a schedule that included the likes of No. 1-ranked Toledo St. John's, Ottawa-Glandorf, Willard and Toledo Central Catholic.

"We told our people at the beginning of the year that they were going to see some great basketball. Our kids rose to many challenges," he said. "Knowing that we got beat twice at the buzzer as well, our kids were that close to maybe being one of the better teams in the area."

High School Boys

Mansfield 77, Ross 73

MANSFIELD — Terrence Davison 7-3-18, Kris Mathews 3-3-9, Antonio Graves 10-2-24, Wayne Merriweather 3-4-10, Tony Jackson 4-0-10, Ron Williams 2-2-6, Yima Chia-Kur 0-0-0. Totals 29-14-77.

ROSS — Mike Price 3-0-6, Lee Root 5-1-14, Luke Lyle 7-10-25, Bo Martin 4-0-8, Chad Clark 8-0-16, Kyle Tucker 0-2-2, Matt Zilles 1-0-2. Totals 28-13-73.

Mansfield	14	18	24	21	— 77
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Ross	12	20	20	21	— 73
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3-point goals: Mansfield 5-14 (Davison 1-2, Graves 2-5, Merriweather 0-1, Jackson 2-5, Williams 0-1), Ross 4-11 (Price 0-1, Root 3-5, Lyle 1-5).

Rebounds: Mansfield 39 (Davison 12), Ross 24 (Clark 6). Turnovers: Mansfield 15, Ross 12.

Records: Mansfield 18-3, Ross 14-8.