

FUTURE BUCKEYE MUSCLES GIANTS

Freemont Ross struggles for hits against Curlis

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FINDLAY — For the last month or so, the Fremont Ross baseball team had gotten so much offense, its biggest concern had been making the defensive plays necessary to win games.

Thursday evening, the Little Giants made all the plays in the field they needed to in order to keep themselves in their Division I sectional tournament championship at Findlay.

It was the offense, however, that was lacking. And for good reason, too. Findlay started its ace pitcher, Connor Curlis, a senior committed to continue his career at Ohio State University. Curlis lived up to his billing, as he allowed six hits and one walk while striking out 12 as the Trojans defeated the Little Giants 8-4.

"You're talking about an Ohio State recruit, a D-I kid," Ross coach Mark King said. "The kid is, if not the, one of the top pitchers in the TRAC and all of Northwest Ohio, if not Ohio. The kid can throw the baseball."

While the loss eliminated the Little Giants (10-14-1 overall) from the sectional tournament, their season isn't over just yet. Ross plays in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference tournament opening round game Monday at St. John's at 5 p.m.

"It's not time to pack it in," King said.

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RICH MCGOWAN/NEWS-MESSENGER
Fremont Ross catcher Pete Contreras throws to first base in the Little Giants' 8-4 sectional tournament loss to Findlay on Thursday.

Baseball

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"We've been in the Final Four every year that the TRAC has been in existence."

"Right now we're that team most people don't want to play," he added. "They might have 16 or 17 wins but we can play baseball. We've changed it around the last three weeks and we can compete and beat somebody on any given night."

Through four innings Thursday, Ross starting pitcher Jalen Slick kept up with Curlis in a pitchers' duel, as both teams remained scoreless through four innings. Ross got on the scoreboard first when Curlis was called for a balk, which allowed Grant McConnell to score from third for a 1-0 lead in the fifth inning.

Ross' lead was short-lived. Findlay loaded the bases in the bottom half of the inning and took a 4-1 lead.

The Little Giants, however, aided by four Findley errors, gained new life in the sixth. A 2-RBI base hit by Nick Michael trimmed the deficit to one. Michael later scored on a Trojan error at first base to tie the game at four.

Once again, Findley answered. The Trojans loaded the bases and a 2-RBI line drive up the middle by Chandler Stillings helped Findley score another four runs in the frame and put the game away.

"It's nice to see us come back in the sixth inning, down three runs and come right back and put the pressure on them and come up with a couple big base hits," King said. "Unfortunately we come right back and a close pitch leads to a base hit and a couple walks and, the next thing you know, the floodgates open."

Curlis then slammed the door shut in the seventh by striking out the top of the Little Giants' order in succession. Curlis dominated the top half of Ross' lineup. The Little Giants' first five hitters combined to go 1-for-17 with 10 strikeouts. The bottom four batters accounted for five of Ross' six hits on the day and struck out just twice.

"You look at our top three guys and one of them is hitting .408 coming into today and another is .348," King said. "It's not a (lack of) production on a nightly basis, it's just one of those nights for those kids."

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