

Girls tournament begins tonight

News-Messenger reports

Girls tournament action kicks off tonight, as four area teams take the court in sectional semifinals.

In Shelby, Fremont Ross plays Ashland in the second game of a Division I sectional, with an approximate starting time of 8:30 p.m. Neither team is seeded.

The game follows the Mansfield Madison-Sandusky game, which starts at 6:30 p.m. The Ross-Ashland winner will meet state-ranked Mansfield Senior, the sectional's top seed on Sunday.

Tiffin Columbian is the second seed.

The Little Giants finished the

Girls basketball

regular season 14-6 overall, and took second place in the Great Lakes League with a 7-3 record. Ross has lost its last two games by slim margins, 50-43 in double overtime to Clyde, and 37-36 to Whitmer.

Sashay Price leads Ross in scoring with 13.8 points per game, and Alison Decker chips in 10.4 ppg. Ross outscores its opponents 49.0-41.8 on average.

At Sandusky, Margaretta plays Crestview at Sandusky in a Division III sectional. The winner of

that game, the first of the night, plays top-seeded, Sandusky Bay Conference champion Huron in the sectional title game Saturday.

Lakota and Western Reserve meet Saturday on the other side of the bracket.

At Old Fort, Bettsville faces New Riegel in the first game of a Division IV sectional. The winner of that game faces second-seeded St. Joseph Central Catholic on Saturday.

At Norwalk, Old Fort faces top-seeded Norwalk St. Paul in the first game of a Division IV sectional. The winner of that game faces Plymouth on Saturday.

Strong second half sparks Ross

Little Giants oust Ashland

By SCOTT TAPPA
Sports editor

SHELBY — It's not always easy to see the positive side of foul trouble in a basketball game. It's kind of like reasoning that a sunburn is good, because it eventually fades into a tan.

But in Fremont Ross's 44-36 win over Ashland on Tuesday, foul trouble was no trouble at all for the Little Giants.

With Ross starters Alison Decker, Sashay Price and

Sammantha Schneider sitting next to coach Sue Wolf in the second quarter, each with two fouls, Ashland overcame a nine-point deficit to knot the score at 23-23 heading into halftime.

The Little Giants (15-6) used the down time to rest up, and burned the Arrows badly in the second half, forcing 19 turnovers and allowing just 13 points, propelling Ross to a Division I sectional semifinal win.



DECKER

Girls basketball

"It hurt us, and it helped us," Wolf said, "because those people that were sitting on the bench were well-rested in the second half, and it showed up in the second half."

So did the Little Giants' realization that simply walking into the Shelby High School gymnasium wasn't enough to beat Ashland, which entered the game 4-16.

"It was kind of scary going into halftime tied, because I honestly think we underrated them," said Decker, who led all scorers with 19 points. "I

Tuesday

Ross44
Ashland36

Saturday

Ross vs. Mansfield Senior, sectional final at Shelby, 8:15 p.m.

think we kind of came out like, 'Oh, it's going to be an easy game.' We did that against other teams and came out with a loss, and we weren't going to lose this one, because if we did, then we're done."

Instead, Ross advances to meet state-ranked Mansfield Senior in the sectional final on Saturday. The game, which will follow the 6:30 p.m. Mansfield Madison-Tif-

fin Columbian matchup, is a rematch of Senior's 50-41 win at the Purple Pit on Jan. 14.

If Ross is to knock off the Tygers — who are now playing with Dionne Goodwin, the District 6 player of the year who sat out the teams' first meeting — Wolf is going to have to get more of what drove Ross on Tuesday: scoring from Decker, and an opportunistic defense.

Decker entered the game on a hot streak, averaging 14.5 points per game in the final two games of the regular season. She picked up quickly, scoring the game's first four points on offensive putbacks, and finishing the

first quarter with nine points.

"Every time we had a fast break my teammates found me every time," said Decker, who also grabbed a game-high 12 rebounds. "I got in the right places, and they just saw me."

Decker also scored a pair of early buckets in both the third and fourth quarter, giving Ross breathing room.

"She's had three in a row now," Wolf said. "It's real important for her to do that, because Sashay's not shooting the ball real well right now. It's nice to have Alison back playing like that."

See ROSS, B3

Ross advances to sectional final

Continued from B1

"Alison's gathering her body, she's not flying around as much, and she's at a better angle, she's not under the basket. Even on defense, she's starting to read things a lot better."

The same could be said for the entire Ross defense Tuesday. After forcing just one turnover in the second quarter, Ross forced eight in the third quarter and 11 in the fourth, as Ashland struggled to get the ball into the front-court.

"I think when we didn't score a little bit, we started to press with the basketball ourselves," said Ashland coach Barry Fortune. "We may have been rushing it a bit much. We didn't get into a good rhythm in the third quarter offensively, and that

rolled into our press break, sometimes we attacked it too slowly, sometimes we attacked it too quickly.

"They didn't win 15 ballgames this year for nothing, they're a good defensive basketball team, and they turned the pressure up a notch."

Ross racked up 16 steals, led by Taneshia McKinstry's six. Schneider had three steals, Price, Decker and Laura Wilson had two apiece and Fallon Bailey had one.

"We took better angles, we weren't behind the ball as much," Wolf said. "When we went in (the locker room at halftime), we stressed to get in the passing lanes and take better angles, and they did a nice job of doing it."

"In the first half, we looked like individuals playing defense,

we weren't playing team defense. At halftime, I told them, 'We've got to play team defense, and we've got to play team offense. If we do it, we'll take control of the game,' and they did a nice job of doing that."

As a team, Ross had a pretty good shooting game, making 20-of-45 field goal attempts (44.4 percent), while limiting Ashland to 14-of-36 shooting (38.9 percent).

Behind Decker's 19, Wilson scored eight points for Ross, Schneider had six, Price had five, Bailey had four and McKinstry had two.

Nichole Marquette scored 14 points to lead Ashland. Kelly Witchen and Candace Kaylor had eight points apiece, and Christy Lohmers added six points.

Ross set for Tygers — with Goodwin

By **SCOTT TAPPA**
Sports editor

When Fremont Ross plays No. 8 Mansfield Senior in a Division I sectional final Saturday at Shelby High School, it will be the second time the Little Giants and Tygers have met this season.

But Ross can go ahead

and throw out the tapes of the first game, a 50-41 Mansfield win on Jan. 14. The Tygers are a brand-new team.

Mansfield coach Andrea Thompson did not have Dionne Goodwin at her disposal in the first game. Goodwin, the District 6 player of the year, sat out

that game with a knee injury, but she has since come back to strengthen her team.

"She's not playing a lot of minutes right now, they're still limiting her minutes," said Ross coach Sue Wolf. "But she's an All-Ohio player, those kids look to her for confidence,

and she's a good player. I really respect her as a player."

Goodwin, a 6-foot senior who averaged 13.8 points per game this season, can play inside or outside, but she is not 100 percent after her comeback.

See **ROSS**, B3

Ross ready for Mansfield rematch

Continued from B1

"They're a little more patient in their halfcourt game with Goodwin back, because she's a little bit slower now with the knee brace," said Ashland coach Barry Fortune, whose team plays in Mansfield's Ohio Heartland Conference. "But when she gets the ball inside seven feet, she's almost unstoppable when she's on."

As if Ross didn't have enough problems already. Tyanda Hammock slashed her way to 20 points in the teams' first meeting, and freshman post Ashley Gamble was unstoppable in the fourth quarter, scoring 10 points. And that's not even taking into consideration Thompson's deep bench.

"We match up well against each other, but they have a lot more size than us, quickness-wise," Wolf said. "I think we'll be pretty even. It'll come down to who's playing better defense, and the bench is going to make a big difference."

Fortune, whose team lost to Ross 44-36 in Tuesday's sectional final, said Goodwin's absence improved Mansfield's backcourt.

"I think it's going to be an up-tempo game, both teams like to get up and down the court," he said. "Senior's got a very strong perimeter game, made even stronger when Dionne Goodwin got hurt. When she got hurt earlier in the season, their guards really had to pick up the slack."

If the Little Giants are to come away with the win, they will likely have to force nearly as many turnovers as they forced in the first meeting, 32. Key to the Ross press, as well as the offense, is Alison Decker, who is averaging 16 ppg. over her last three games.

Decker said the Mansfield representatives in attendance Tuesday night didn't see the best Ross had to offer.

"I think they thought that they can beat us, because we didn't play our best," Decker said. "We can hustle a lot more, we didn't hustle."

The Ross-Mansfield game will be the second half of a double-header, with Tiffin Columbian facing Mansfield Madison in the 6:30 p.m. game.

In all, 10 area girls teams will be in action Saturday.

In other games, Bellevue faces Vermilion in a Division II final at Huron, and Oak Harbor plays Napoleon in a Division II final at Delta.

In Division III, Margaretta plays Huron and Lakota plays Western Reserve at Sandusky, and Woodmore plays Northwood at Maumee.

In Division IV, Old Fort plays Plymouth at Norwalk.

School menus

All menus include milk.

Bettsville	H
Clyde H.S.	C b
middle, elementary	C b
Clyde St. Mary's	F p
Fremont Ross	E h
Middle School	E h
Elementaries	E p
Breakfast where served	C
Gibsonburg	C t
Lakota H.S.	C f
Junior high	C f
Central	C f
East	C f
West	C f
Margaretta H.S.	C F
Bogart	C
Townsend	C
Old Fort	C
Sacred Heart	I
St. Ann	I
St. Joseph/SJCC	I
School of Hope	I

Ross drills No. 8 Tygers

Saturday

Ross64
Mansfield Sr.42

Thursday

Ross vs. Defiance, 8:30 p.m., district
semifinal at Hopewell-Loudon

By **MICHAEL MOHR**
Staff writer

SHELBY — Saturday night's girls Division I sectional championship game between Fremont Ross and Mansfield Senior could be looked at on paper in one of two ways.

On one hand, the Tygers were ranked No. 8 in the state, had an 18-2 record coming in, and had the coach's choice for district 6 player of the year, Dionne Goodwin, back in the lineup.

On the other hand, the Little Giants have been playing really well lately, while Mansfield had lost two of its last three games. In addition, Ross only lost to Mansfield by nine points (50-41) the first time the teams met.

As they say, that's why they play the games.

And oh how the Little Giants played the game. Ross started the game with a 10-2 run, finished the first quarter leading 17-4, and never let the Tygers any closer than eight points posting a convincing 64-42 win over Mansfield at Shelby.

The win improved Ross's record to 17-5 overall. The Little Giants advance to the district semifinal where they will take on Defiance in the second game Thursday at Hopewell-Loudon High School.

The Bulldogs, coached by Rod Hersha, are 20-2 after defeating Wapakoneta 77-41 and Bowling Green 60-22, in the sectional tournament.

Ross wing Alison Decker, who had a game-high 19 points and 11 rebounds, said she knew if the Little Giants could get out of the gate quickly, they could win the game.

"We knew we had to shut them down right away," Decker said.

See ROSS, B3

Ross rolls to sectional final win over No. 8 Mansfield in Shelby

Continued from B1

"If they get ahead, then we knew we would have to play a catch-up game and instead, we got ahead and they had to try to catch up with us. They only had 13 points at the half and that's pretty good playing the No. 8 team in the state, I thought."

Mansfield coach Andrea Thompson attributed the Tygers first half play to nervousness.

"We didn't show up," said Thompson, who's team fell to 18-3.

"I think that we had the jitters, being our first game of the tournament. We had already beaten this team before, but it wasn't that we underestimated them. Our girls didn't come to play, the shooters that

should have shot didn't shoot tonight, out man-to-man wasn't great, and we didn't execute.

"It wasn't that we didn't have the heart or that they didn't want to be there, but we didn't execute Tiger basketball, it's as simple as that."

The Tygers' lack of execution could also be blamed on Ross's full-court pressure and half-court defense, as the Little Giants forced Mansfield into 16 first half turnovers.

"Their pressure affected us," Thompson said. "We needed to adjust, we wanted people to go to the middle, but it seemed like the communication thing wasn't there tonight. It's like Murphy's Law, what could possibly go wrong, went wrong. We played the best we could, but tonight, our best wasn't good enough."

Ross Coach Sue Wolf said, "I think we played pretty good defense tonight. I told them they had to stay in front of their player and not have to have somebody else come over and take their player,

which leaves another player open. I told them 'Keep them in front of you because I know how much they want to penetrate to the basket.' We worked on finding your player, getting a body on them, and then going to get the ball. Usually we go to the rim before the ball even hits and we don't make contact."

Ross guard Sashay Price played a big role in the first half on both offense and defense, as she scored seven of her 16 points and forced several Tiger turnovers with good ball pressure.

"I thought Sashay did a nice job of getting to the ball tonight," Wolf said. "That's what her job is, to get the ball. I'm counting on her to get to the ball and she did it."

With the score at 33-13 early in the third quarter, the Tygers broke out on a 10-2 run of their own to cut the score to 35-23, but Ross, without calling a timeout, got a layup from Laura Wilson, a Decker jumper, and three free throws to stretch the lead back to 17.

"They are a young team," Wolf said. "We're a young team, but they are a young team also. We kept our act together, they tried hard, they made some runs at us, but we kept it together. We started to give a few points up, but then somebody would step up and say no, we're not going to let that happen."

You could see it on the faces of the Ross players when they came out of the locker room to start the game.

"We knew what we had to come out with to win," Price said. "And that's what we did. We came out with the attitude that they may be ranked No. 8, but we had something to prove, and I think we did that."

The attitude Ross conveyed on the court and after the game was that Mansfield may have gotten

them the first time, but they learned from it and they were ready to play them this time.

"We played them earlier this season," Wilson said. "We knew we could beat them. If we could just take charge in the beginning, then we knew we could beat them."

Jumping out to the huge lead was even a shock to the Ross players.

"I was really surprised," Decker said. "I thought it was going to be a really close game through the whole game, but we just got out on a good run. We're playing against guys this whole week, and they were pushing so hard, and tonight we just came out and it was just like a completely different ballgame. Everyone played to the best they could tonight and it really showed."

It did show, as the Little Giants used a balance scoring attack — with four of Ross's six scorers in double figures — and made some key free throws when they needed them, to score 20 points in the fourth quarter, and ice the win.

"I'll tell you what," Wolf said, "We worked hard all week, we had some guys come in to play against us, and they did a great job of making the kids work harder and they knew they were prepared for the game. We went through everything, I told them before the game started 'You know exactly what you have to do, we've worked on it, if you go out and you try your hardest and we get beat, then there's nothing we can be ashamed of, because you know you were ready to play this game.'"

For Ross, Price had 16 to go with Decker's 10, Sam Schneider had 12, and Wilson scored 11. Schneider also pulled down seven boards and Wilson six.

Tyanda Hammock led the Tygers with 14 points and seven rebounds. Goodwin's minutes were limited due to the knee injury she suffered early in the year, but she did make the most of her time on the floor, scoring seven points and pulling down eight rebounds.



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