

## 1999 District Tournament

# Little Giants trio district-bound

## Melchiori, Wolfe, Watkins have different types of early matches

By SCOTT TAPPA  
Sports editor

Fremont Ross junior Gina Melchiori has been to the district tennis tournament before, two years ago as a doubles partner of Courtney LaBenne, and so has senior singles player Ainsley Watkins. They'll head to the Division I district competition at Bowling Green State University on Friday with a rookie, freshman Erica Wolfe, and they'll make sure she's ready to handle the hoopla.

"I already warned her that it's going to be a little bit tough," said Melchiori. "It's really confusing, there are so many teams. We're just going to stay together, the three of us, we can stick together and help each other through it."

Melchiori and Wolfe advanced as the fourth seed from the Sandusky sectional, not a bad accomplishment considering the two players, normally Ross's second and third singles players, were playing doubles together for the first time on a varsity level.

"We're pretty strong together, we work really well together," said Wolfe.

The players' contrasting styles may have something to do with their success.

"She's the more consistent player, I like the hard shot," Melchiori said. "I look for a lot of corners, she keeps me intact. We're a perfect match."

Melchiori and Wolfe will have a tough time with their first round match, in which they play Jenni Nixon and

### Tennis

Angie Bhat, the first and second players from perennial power Toledo St. Ursula. But Ross coach Lisa Wolfe said that strange things can happen when singles players team up as a doubles pair, and she hopes that works in her team's favor.

"I think it's a great thing that they're there, if they get through the first round — which, you never know, two singles players playing doubles, sometimes they don't get the way they think — the way they've practiced, they'll give it a fair share on Friday," Wolfe said. "I think it's a great thing, they'll both be back next year, they'll know what it's all about."

Unlike her teammates,

Watkins received a favorable draw. The district's consensus top two players, Melissa Schaub of Lexington and Anna Volberg of St. Ursula, are on the side of the bracket opposite Watkins.

"Ainsley's draw is beautiful, she has an easy shot for Saturday," Wolfe said.

First things first, though. Watkins must beat a girl from Sylvania Northview in the first round, and would possibly meet Findlay's Miriam Stehling in the second round. Watkins beat Stehling 6-1, 6-4 to win the Great Lakes League singles title two weeks ago.

"She's an all-around good player, she's got awesome strokes, I've just got to keep it in," said Watkins, the second seed from the Sandusky sectional.

# Watkins one win from state

## Area doubles teams fall

By SCOTT TAPPA  
Sports editor

### Tennis

BOWLING GREEN — It wasn't a thing of beauty, but Fremont Ross senior Ainsley Watkins advanced to the semifinals of the Division I district tennis tournament at Bowling Green State University with a pair of wins on Friday.

In a second round matchup filled with enough baseline lobs to fill three matches, Watkins outlasted Findlay's Miriam Stehling 6-2, 4-6, 6-4. She needs to win one of two matches today to advance to next weekend's state tournament, as the top three finishers from the district advance.

A clearly relieved Watkins said after the match that the lob-heavy style of play she favored was necessary against Stehling, a foreign exchange student from Germany.

"That was so boring," Watkins said. "She's really good, she has really good ground strokes, and I got some advice to keep the ball high."

For Watkins, who normally chases balls down along the baseline, smacking low-trajectory rockets, the strategy move meant trading high-arching shots that made the match something of a war of attrition.

"It looked like a third court singles match, but Ainsley had to keep the ball up," said Ross coach Lisa Wolfe. "You saw the few times it was low, (Stehling) did nice things with it."

Watkins will face Mansfield Senior's Rachael Stein in the semifinal this morning. Watkins beat Stein 6-2, 6-0 last Saturday in the sectional semifinal at Sandusky High School, and also won a matchup earlier this season.

"I just have to get in her head," Watkins said. "Last time we played, she kept saying, 'Did I beat her last time? No.'"

The Ross doubles team of Gina Melchiori and Erica Wolfe was beaten in the first round by the Toledo St. Ursula team of Jenni Nixon and Angie Bhat 6-2, 6-1.

"We played tough, but they were just better," Wolfe said.

"We played them tough, a lot of the games in the first set went to deuce," Melchiori said.

The Clyde doubles team of Cassie Newsome and Amanda Showman fell short in their bid for a return to the state tournament, losing 3-6, 6-1, 6-3 to Tiffany Harmon and Gretchen Bachman of Napoleon. Newsome and Showman won their first round match 6-1, 6-4 over Tara Smith and Sarah Wheeler of St. Mary Memorial.

The other Clyde team of Danielle Shetzer and Andrea Wilson lost its opener in three tough sets, falling 7-6 (7-4), 3-6, 3-6 to Rebekah and Christine Bicksler of Mansfield Christian.

Tennis

# Watkins headed to state

News-Messenger reports

BOWLING GREEN — It took her two tries and two three-set matches, but Fremont Ross senior Ainsley Watkins has advanced to the state tennis tournament.

Watkins moved on by virtue of her 4-6, 6-1, 6-1 victory over Mansfield Senior's Rachael Stein in Saturday's Division I district semifinal at Bowling Green State University.

"There were lots of tears," said Ross coach Lisa Wolfe.

"She was so excited. She wanted this from the beginning."

Wolfe, in her fourth year as Ross coach, said she believes



WATKINS Watkins is the first girl from the school to advance to the state tournament as a singles player.

Watkins dropped the first set of the semifinal when Stein slowed down the pace of play.

"Rachael's method of play is slow and deliberate. It seemed like it took her a long time between games, between points even," Wolfe said. "It was making Ainsley impatient."

Watkins rebounded to crush Stein, whom she had beaten twice already this season, dropping just two games over the final two sets.

"In the second set, she calmed down a bit," Wolfe said. "Ainsley played her normal game as far as hard-hitting ground strokes."

Last year, Watkins made it to the same point in the tournament before losing her two Saturday matches. This year, the senior was determined to earn one of the top three spots at district, her coach said.

"Ainsley wanted state so bad," Wolfe said. "She knew if she didn't win in the first round, it didn't matter."

In the final, Watkins lost 6-0, 6-1 to Lexington's Melissa Schaub.

"At that point, I told her, 'You made it to state, use this as a practice session,'" Wolfe said. "They actually had a lot of deuce games, a lot of long points. Nothing can top that Schaub, though."