

Season of hope for Ross

Little Giants making smart decisions early on softball diamond

BY JEFF ARENZ
Sports writer

FREMONT — Varsity softball coach Mike Gilbert has been impressed with the decision-making ability of his 2009 Fremont Ross Little Giants.

"It has been nice to know that we're making plays that I didn't have to tell them to make," said Gilbert, who guided Ross to records of 9-16 overall and 4-6 in the Greater Buckeye Conference in 2008. "In the past, if I had to tell them to make a play, that play was already over."



GALLAGHER



SAIONZ



NOVITSKI

The Little Giants have gone through some lean times (35-64) since 2005. Entering his 11th season with a 150-104 mark, Gilbert believes Ross has improved, but is cautious to gage how much.

"On paper, I think this is the best team that we've had in five years," Gilbert said. "This team has a good blend of experienced and young kids, who have played a lot of softball."

"There is no drama with these girls," he continued. "I want them to perform better, and we'll see if that translates into more victories."

The Ross foundation begins with junior pitcher Jordyn Gallagher and sophomore catcher Casey Clark, who spent the entire 2008 season working together on the varsity level.

"It's really nice to have the two people, who touch the ball on every play, work as hard as they do," Gilbert said of Gallagher and



News-Messenger file photo

Fremont Ross catcher Casey Clark prepares to throw during a non-conference doubleheader against Ashland last season at Alumni Fields.

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Clark. "They all get along well and they want to win."

Gallagher, who hit .295 in 2008 and Clark, who added a .370 batting average to the Little Giants last season, are penciled into the third and fourth slots in the Ross batting order.

"For a power hitter, Casey makes contact all the time," Gilbert said. "Very rarely does she strike out."

Switch-hitting freshman McKenzie Schneider brings speed to the lead-off spot and to her position in center field.

"It's been a long since I've had what I consider to be the prototype lead-off hitter," Gilbert said. "McKenzie can bat from either side of the plate and she's extremely fast."

Schneider takes over for multiple All-GBC selection Britta Barron, who graduated in 2008.

Senior Katelyn Ruiz, who hit .330 one year ago, has the ability to make good contact in the No. 2 spot and can play in a variety of places, including designated player.

Junior Tayler Redinger (shortstop) and sophomore Christy Meggitt (second base) respectively supplant Ross graduates Suzanne Chudzinski and Stephanie Stout at the middle infield positions. Chudzinski and Stout left with seven seasons of combined varsity experience.

Redinger and Meggitt can add support in the Little Giants' lineup by hitting in the Nos. 5 and 6 slots.

Senior Ashley Saionz is back at her third base position and penciled into the No. 7 spot in the Ross batting order. Junior Alexis Schneider, the older sister of McKenzie, is expected to hit in the No. 8 slot and to spend time in right field. Senior Tashia Novitski adds another year of experience at first base and can hit in the No. 9 spot.

Junior Courtney Gabel is expected to patrol left field for the Little Giants, who have utility players in senior Missy Lewis and freshman Sarah Gowitzka.

"I want to be more aggressive, and I think we have the kids with experience who can be more aggressive," Gilbert said. "I also want them to realize that they can be aggressive without making stupid mistakes. I want them to be aggressive and not be afraid to make mistakes."

During Ross's scrimmage against St. Joseph Central Catholic on Tuesday, the Little Giants got defensive.

"I was pleasantly surprised to see the defense on the infield," Gilbert said. "I'm hoping that continues as we get closer the the season."

After going 30-0 in the league since 2006, Napoleon (26-4, 10-0) is the the GBC favorite in 2009. Marion Harding (19-9, 7-2) ended up in second place, followed by Sandusky (10-12, 4-5). Ross and Findlay (11-14, 4-6) tied for fourth, while Lima Senior (1-21, 0-10) finished last.

The Little Giants host non-conference rival Bowling Green in their season opener at 4:45 p.m. Monday.

E-mail Jeff Arenz at jarenz@gannett.com.

Ross baffled by freshman



Jennifer Young-Bower | News-Messenger correspondent

Fremont Ross hitter Tayler Redinger waits for a pitch from Bowling Green hurler Casey Akenberger during a non-conference softball game Monday at Alumni Field.

Gilbert-Schneider renew father-daughter rivalry

BY JEFF ARENZ
Sports writer

FREMONT — Freshman pitcher Casey Akenberger took a giant step forward against the Fremont Ross Little Giants on Wednesday at Alumni Field.

Akenberger, who made her first varsity start a memorable one for Bowling Green, tossed a four-hit shutout with 10 strikeouts as the Bobcats blanked Ross 6-0 in the softball season opener for both teams.

"She saw some playing time in scrimmages, but looking at what Casey did today, you would never know if she was nervous or not," said Bowling Green coach Erin Schneider. "She performed inside the circle and she performed at the plate, laying down a bunt when she was having problems making contact. Casey did everything we asked."

Schneider, now in her fourth year at Bowling Green, is a 1998 graduate of Ross who played first base for Little Giants. On Wednesday, she faced her alma mater and matched wits against



Jennifer Young-Bower | News-Messenger correspondent

Fremont Ross catcher Casey Clark fields the ball as a Bowling Green baserunner attempts to score at Alumni Field on Monday.

her father, Ross coach Mike Gilbert.

"It wasn't much fun at all because her team played better," Gilbert said of coaching against

his daughter. "But I am proud of her because she is building a pretty good program over there."

Schneider improved to 3-1 in games against Gilbert.

Five of the six runs scored by the Bobcats came after two outs had been recorded.

Hayley Williford, Bowling Green's No. 9 hitter, broke a scoreless tie in the second inning with a two-out single that bloomed in between Ross second baseman Christy Meggitt and first baseman Tashia Novitski.

The hit came after a defensive play from Meggitt kept the game scoreless. After Ross third baseman Ashley Saionz scooped up the ball on Brittany Stalter's sacrifice bunt, Meggitt ran to cover first base, leapt high above the bag to grab the throw from Saionz and landed on the base to retire Stalter.

The play kept Brittany Davis at third base, after she led off the inning with a walk and moved to second on a sacrifice bunt from Becca Ruehl.

In the first inning, Meggitt's relay throw to Little Giants' catcher Casey Clark was in time to cut down Megan LeGalley,

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who was attempting to score on Kara Bihn's two-out double over Ross right fielder Sarah Gowitzka.

The initial inning ended when Little Giants' pitcher Jordan Gallagher struck out Akenberger on three pitches. But in the second inning, Williford followed with an RBI-single off Gallagher that produced the only run Bowling Green needed.

At the plate, Ross hitters were baffled by Akenberger, who sent down the side in order four different times. After Clark gave the Little Giants a lead-off double in the second inning, Meggitt was called out for stepping on home plate during a sacrifice attempt before Akenberger retired Novitski and Saionz on strikes.

Ross's only other scoring threat came in the fifth inning, when singles by Novitski and Tayler Redinger put Little Giants on first and second with two outs. Davis, the Bowling Green catcher, allowed the Ross runners to move up a base after a passed ball went back to the screen.

But Akenberger made the pitch the Bobcats needed. When she struck out Saionz for the second time, the Little Giants' scoring threat ended in the fifth.

"The beat us in every phase of the game," Gilbert said. "They played a lot better than we did."

Schneider praised Davis for calling the right pitches.

"Our catcher calls her own game and together (with Akenberger) they got the W," Schneider said. "Casey throws seven different pitches — curveball, screwball, fastball, riseball, dropball, changeup and off-speed. Sometimes Brittany needs to use two hands to call pitches."

Meggitt's single in the seventh inning was Ross's final hit.

Bowling Green (1-0 overall) broke the game open by scoring five times in the fourth. The Bobcats generated six hits in the frame off Gallagher, who lasted five innings and allowed six earned runs on 13 hits. She added two walks and five strikeouts.

Davis and Tayler Worthington hit RBI-singles in the Bowling Green fifth while Bihn drove in two on a single to center field. Akenberger gave herself more insurance by hitting an RBI-triple to the left-center field gap.

Gallagher was replaced inside the pitcher's circle by Novitski, who pitched two scoreless innings with two strikeouts.

Ross (0-1 overall) hosts non-conference opponent Port Clinton at 4:30 p.m. today.

HIGH SCHOOL ROUNDUP

Giants beat 'Skins

 News-Messenger reports

Jordyn Gallagher allowed only one hit and struck out seven in five innings as Fremont Ross's softball team shut out Port Clinton 10-0 on Tuesday.

Casey Clark doubled, singled and drove in two runs while Tashia Novitski singled three times and drove in a run for the Little Giants (1-1).

FREMONT ROSS 3, TOLEDO WAITE 0

TOLEDO — Jordyn Gallagher pitched a four-hit shut out while two Fremont Ross hitters were 5-for-5 during a non-conference win against Toledo Waite on Wednesday.

Gallagher (2-1) struck out seven and walked none for the complete game victory.

The Little Giants took a 2-0 lead after one-half inning and added an insurance run in the seventh.

Lead-off hitter McKenzie Schneider was 2-for-2 while Katelyn Ruiz went 3-for-3 with an RBI for Ross (2-1).

In the first, Schneider hit a single, stole second base and scored on Missy Lewis' sacrifice bunt. Lewis advanced to second on an overthrow, went to third on a passed ball and scored on another passed ball.

In the seventh, Tashia Novitski singled and was replaced by pitch-runner, Sara Gowitzka. An RBI-single off the bat of Katelyn Ruiz scored Gowitzka with the Little Giants' final run.

GIANTS SUFFER SETBACK

Casey Clark doubled to drive in Jordyn Gallagher but Fremont Ross's softball team lost to Perkins 2-1 in a non-conference matchup.

The Pirates scored their runs in the top of the seventh.

SOFTBALL

ROSS SPLITS PAIR

Jordyn Gallagher allowed two hits and one run while striking out 11 and walking one in seven innings as Fremont Ross's softball team defeated Toledo Central Catholic 2-1.

Gallagher tripled, singled, scored once and drove in three at the plate. Katelynn Ruiz singled and scored a run and Casey Clark added two singles for the Little Giants (3-4).

Christy Meggitt and Ashley Saionz each scored a run as Ross also lost a game to Central Catholic 6-2.

Ross tops Sandusky in GBC

News-Messenger reports

SANDUSKY — Casey Clark drove in Courtney Gabel with the only run of the game as Fremont Ross defeated Sandusky 1-0 in eight innings on Friday.

Jordyn Gallagher (4-3) threw a complete-game, three-hit shutout with 11 strikeouts for the Little Giants, who improved to 4-4 overall and 1-0 in the Greater Buckeye Conference.



CLARK

Gabel put herself in scoring position after stealing a base.

Softball

High School

Game 1

Ross 3

Tiffin Columbian 0 11innings

Tiffin 100 000 000 01 — 2 11 2

Ross 000 200 000 01 — 3 9 1

WP: Jordyn Gallagher 11H, 12SO.

Ross — Katelynn Ruiz 2-for-4, 1R;
Jordyn Gallagher 1-for-6; Casey Clark 3-for-6, 2D, RBI, 1R; Taylor Redinger 2-for-5, 1R; McKenzie Schneider 1-for-3, RBI.

Game 2

Tiffin Columbian 2, Ross 0

Tiffin 000 002 0 — 2 7 0

Ross 000 000 0 — 0 3 4

LP: Tashia Novitski 2R, 1ER, 7H, 2SO.

Ross — Christy Meggitt 1-for-3; Casey Clark 1-for-3; Ashley Saionz 1-for-2.

Record — Ross 5-5.

Softball

High School

Game 1

Ross 8, Lima Senior 0

Ross 002 040 2 — 8 8 0

Lima 000 000 0 — 0 0 2

WP: Jordyn Gallagher 7IP, 0R, 0H, 16K, 2BB.

Ross — Katelynn Ruiz 2R; Christy Meggitt 2B, 2RBI; Jordyn Gallagher 1R; Casey Clark double, 2R, RBI; Tayler Redinger 2R; McKenzie Schneider 3RBI; Courtney Gabel 1R.

Record — 6-5(2-0).

Game 2

Ross 13, Lima Senior 0, (5)

Lima 000 00 — 0 2 3

Ross 083 2x — 13 11 0

WP: Jordyn Gallagher 5IP, 0H, 2H, 1BB, 6K.

Ross — Katelynn Ruiz 2R; Christy Meggitt 2R, RBI; Jordyn Gallagher 2R, 2 RBI; Casey Clark double; Tayler Redinger 2R; McKenzie Schneider 2R; Tashia Novitski 2R, RBI; Ashley Saionz R.

Record — 7-5 (3-0).

SOFTBALL

Fremont Ross 2, Marion Harding 0

MARION — Fremont Ross plated two runs in the first inning and made them stand up during a Greater Buckeye Conference victory at Marion Harding on Tuesday.

Jordyn Gallagher threw a six-hit shutout for the Little Giants, allowing one walk and striking out eight.

Christy Meggitt and Casey Clark (1-for-3) scored runs for Ross, while Tayler Redinger went 1-for-3 with an RBI. McKenzie Schneider lifted the Little Giants' five-hit attack with a pair of singles and Tashia Novitsky chipped in a hit.

Ross improved to 8-5 overall and is tied with Findlay atop the GBC standings with a 4-0 mark.

Ross 6, Marion 5

Marion 004 000 100 — 5 11 1

Ross 203 000 001 — 6 13 1

WP — Jordyn Gallagher (9-3)9
innings, 5 R, 3 ER, 11 H, 5 K , 0 BB.

Ross hitting - Casey Clark 4-5, 2 2B, 3
RBI; Tayler Redinger run; Jordyn
Gallagher 3-5, 2B, 2 runs; Christy Meggitt
2 runs; McKenzie Schneider run; Tashia
Novitski 2-4, 2 RBI.

Records: Ross 9-5, (5-0 GBC).

SANDUSKY 3, FREMONT ROSS 1

Jordyn Gallagher gave up three runs on five hits, striking out 11 and walking none, but the Little Giants lost their first Greater Buckeye Conference game, falling to the Blue Streaks.

Ross (9-6, 5-1) scored its only run when Gallagher singled in the bottom of the sixth, and Casey Clark doubled her home. Clark finished 2-for-3 with a stolen base, and McKenzie Schneider swiped two more.

**HIGH SCHOOL
SOFTBALL ■ ROUNDUP**

Ross rallies to defeat Napoleon in seventh

News-Messenger reports

FREMONT — After Napoleon took a 2-0 lead after 1½ innings, Fremont Ross scored single tallies in the fourth, fifth and seventh to gain a come-from-behind a Greater Buckeye Conference win Monday at Alumni Fields.

Alexis Schneider broke a 2-all tie in the seventh inning with a single down the third base line to score Tashia Novitski, who drew a one-out walk and was bunted to second on a sacrifice from Missy Lewis.

Casey Clark's fourth-inning single drove in Jordyn Gallagher to cut the Little Giants' deficit to 2-1.

In the fifth inning, Novitski was hit by a pitch and reached second on a fielder's choice off the bat of Lewis. With courtesy runner Courtney Gabel running for Novitski, Schneider hit an infield grounder to advance Gabel to third.

But when a relay throw from first base went over the head of the Wildcats' third baseman, Gabel trotted home with the tying run.

Gallagher went the distance, giving up two runs on seven hits, striking out 11 and walking two as the Little Giants improved to 10-6 overall and 6-1 against the GBC.



SCHNEIDER



LEWIS

Little Giants tag Trojans' ace in GBC win

BY KEVIN SHIELDS

News-Messenger correspondent

FINDLAY — Solid defense has been the backbone of the Fremont Ross softball team all season.

On Tuesday against Findlay in a key Greater Buckeye Conference match, the Little Giants' gloves once again proved to be the difference. Ross got a complete game two-hit shutout from Jordyn Gallagher and played error-free defense on way to a 4-0 victory over the home Trojans to keep pace in the GBC race.

Gallagher finished her evening with 10 strikeouts on the Ross mound and would allow just two Trojan base runners as she faced one batter over the minimum.

Supporting Gallagher was a

Ross offense that pounded out nine hits against Findlay ace Maggie Gilliland, a first-team All-GBC selection from a year ago and the conference Co-Pitcher of the Year. Most of that damage came from the bottom half of the Little Giants order.

Christy Meggitt led the Little Giants (11-6, 7-4) with three hits from the six-hole, while Tayler Redinger had two hits and a team-leading two RBI from the five-hole.

Ross had just three hits thru five innings, till it exploded for four runs on six hits in the final two innings. The Little Giants scored twice in the sixth inning and platted two more runs in the seventh.

"Maggie (Gilliland) is a great

pitcher," said Ross coach Mike Gilbert. "We had difficulty with her last year.

"For us to score four runs is unusual ... the kids really came through tonight."

Both hurlers sat down the opposition in order in the first inning, before Ross threatened to score the game's first runs in the second. A leadoff double by Casey Clark followed by back-to-back bunt singles from Redinger and Meggitt had the bases loaded for the Little Giants with no one out.



MEGGITT

Gilliland and the Trojans (9-8, 4-1) got out of the jam though, as she got Tashia Novitski, Missy Lewis and Alexis Schneider to all go down on strikes to end the inning.

Findlay wouldn't be able to capitalize on the momentum though as Gallagher held Trojans hitless thru three innings.

Finally in the fourth, the Trojans found the hit column as Gilliland tried to help herself on the mound with a two-out triple. However, Gallagher recovered quickly and got Jessica Girard to go down swinging for her third strikeout of the inning.

It would be the last serious threat put on by the Trojan offense.

"The biggest difference in Jordyn this year is she's showing more guts," said Gilbert of Gallagher's pitching. "When teams get a big hit against her she bears down and gets the next batter ... she's been great all year."

Findlay coach Tim Babcock would agree.

"Jordyn had a good plan and she executed it well," said Babcock. "She's a solid pitcher ... we got the upper-hand on her a few times last year and hopefully we'll do better against her on Thursday."

With the scoreless game open for the taking yet in the top of the sixth, the Little Giants bats once again woke up. Only this time, unlike in the second inning, they

SEE LITTLE GIANTS I B2

LITTLE GIANTS FROM B1

would finish the job.

MacKenzie Schneider led-off the Little Giant's sixth frame with a single to right field and then scored the winning run just two batters later. Clark singled to short to move Schneider to second prior to a steal of the third and a single by Redinger bringing her across the plate.

Sara Gowitzka, pinch-running for Clark, also scored for Ross in the frame as Novitski drew an RBI walk.

The Little Giants tacked on two unearned runs in the seventh, taking advantage of two Trojan errors to finish the scoring.

Gilliland ended her outing surrendering just two earned runs on nine hits with eight strikeouts and one walk. A total of nine Ross baserunners would be stranded.

"Fremont played a great game," said Babcock. "They got clutch hits, they slapped some balls and bunted some balls that we didn't react to and those were key hits."

The two teams will meet again on Thursday at Fremont's Alumni Fields.

"I can't say good enough things about this team's performance," said Gilbert. "We needed this win to have a chance at the league title yet - we played good defense, got great pitching and timely hitting."

"Defensively this is the strongest team we've had in a few years and it's really starting to show and pay off."

SOFTBALL

NAPOLEON 3, FREMONT ROSS 1

The Wildcats took a 3-0 lead after four innings before Fremont Ross broke up Napoleon's shutout bid with a run in the sixth during a Greater Buckeye Conference game Friday.

Christy Meggitt, McKenzie Schneider, Jordyn Gallagher and Missy Lewis all collected two hits for the Little Giants. Meggitt had a double among her two hits. Tashia Novitski and Alexis Schneider each added a single.

Ross outhit Napoleon 10-8.

Gallagher (11-5) threw seven innings and yielded three runs. She added six strikeouts as the Little Giants dropped to 11-7 overall and 7-2 against the GBC.

News-Messenger reports

The Fremont Ross softball team has clinched a tie for the Greater Buckeye Conference championship with a 5-2 league win over Findlay on Friday.

The Little Giants (13-7, 8-2) took an early lead in the second, when Tayler Redinger singled, stole second and scored on Christy Meggitt's RBI single. Meggitt stole second and third and scored on an error.

In the third, McKenzie Schneider singled, stole second and third and scored on a passed ball. In the fourth inning, Redinger reached first on an error, advanced to second on Meggitt's sacrifice bunt, and scored on Tashia Novitski double. In the fifth inning, Schneider reached



GALLAGHER

first on the catcher's error, advanced to second on Jordyn Gallagher's fielder's choice, stole third and scored on the catcher's throwing error.

Gallagher (13-5) went the distance, giving up 2 runs on 3 hits, striking out 10 and walking none.

The Trojans are now 6-2 in the league with two more conference games to play. Ross's GBC slate is finished.

BEARS' RALLY FALLS SHORT

Gibsonburg scored three runs in the seventh, but it wasn't enough as the Golden Bears fell to Lake 5-3 in a Suburban Lakes League game.

Merideth Morgan doubled and knocked in a run for Gibsonburg (13-8, 5-7 SLL).

Samantha Stainbrook took the loss in four innings of work, giving up 10 hits and striking out three while walking two.

RAIDERS FALL

Amber Bickford went 2-for-4

GBC champion Little Giants earn softball recognition

News-Messenger reports

FREMONT — Eight Fremont Ross softball players earned postseason awards in 2009, a year during which the Little Giants won the Greater Buckeye Conference championship.

Pitcher Jordyn Gallagher, who set two school records and tied a third mark, was the GBC Player of the Year and a second team all-district selection after posting a 13-6 record with a 1.35 ERA.

With 170 strikeouts this season, Gallagher broke a Ross record that was previously held by Miranda Steinberger. In 19 games, the Little Giants' junior hurler walked 11 hitters and established a new Ross single-season mark that was previously held by

Courtney Abbott. In a GBC game against Lima Senior this season, Gallagher struck out 15 hitters, which tied a record first set by Nikki Pelfrey.

Sophomore catcher Casey Clark, who led Ross in batting average (.414), in hits (29), in RBI (9) and in doubles (12), received first team recognition from the GBC and the district and was an honorable mention All-Ohio pick. The 12 doubles hit by Clark this season broke a Little Giants' record that was previously held by Paige Kingsborough.



GILBERT

"We scored three runs per game, gave up two runs per game and committed only 1.2 errors per game," Ross coach Mike Gilbert said. "The defense was extremely solid and it helped us out of a lot of tight situations and allowed us to win some games."

Freshman center fielder McKenzie Schneider garnered recognition on the GBC's first team and the district's list of honorable mention.

Sophomore second baseman Christy Meggitt, senior first baseman Tashia Novitski and junior shortstop Tayler Redinger were second team selections in the GBC.



GALLAGHER



CLARK



NOVITSKI



REDINGER



SCHNEIDER



MEGGITT



RUIZ



SAIONZ

SEE AWARDS | B2

AWARDS FROM B1

Senior designated player Katelynn Ruiz and senior third baseman Ashley Saionz gained honorable mention from the GBC.

After guiding Ross to records of 13-8 overall, 8-2 in the GBC and the Little Giants' first outright league title since 2000, Gilbert was named the conference's Coach of the Year.