

Giants Advance in Sectional Tournament

The News-Messenger, Fremont, Ohio

Sports Editor, Timothy R. Wolfrum, 334-1042

Monday

Hammer slams Mansfield

Ross senior drives in 6, leads sectional pasting of Tygers

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM
Sports editor

MANSFIELD — T.J. Hammer got a low, inside fastball and, with one fell swing, did away with his own slump and opened the floodgates for Fremont Ross.

Hammer belted the 2-0 pitch well over the left-field fence for a fourth-inning grand slam, breaking a 1-all tie and sending the Little Giants to a 12-1 victory over Mansfield in a Division I sectional opener Saturday at Arlin Field.

"I think that was my first one," Hammer said of his slam. "We were talking about it on the way here, that I've never hit a grand slam. It was weird."

Tourney trail

Saturday: Ross whipped Mansfield 12-1 in six innings, advances to sectional final.

What's next: The Little Giants (9-6) meet No. 2 seed Ashland (7-6) at 5 p.m. Thursday in a Division I sectional final at Arlin Field in Mansfield.

"I just had a feeling I was going to hit it hard, and it happened."

Hammer, a senior leftfielder, began the season as the Little Giants' No. 3 hitter. But he had been batting further down in the order recently until Ross coach Chuck Lindsey elevated him to the No. 2 spot Saturday.

Hammer went 2-for-4 and drove in six runs.

"T.J.'s been struggling a little bit



HAMMER

at the plate," Lindsey said. "We've worked on the little things, about getting a good pitch to hit. I thought he did that today. ... He's a senior, he's a captain, he's a leader. I think he took it upon himself to come out and do a good job for us."

"I needed somebody that could handle the bat in the second spot. Sometimes you look like a genius doing things like that; sometimes you don't. I think it gave him a little more confidence that I had confidence in him."

First baseman Jared Kingsborough contributed to the 12-hit Ross attack by going 3-for-5, scoring three runs and knocking in two more. Aaron Hines had two hits, and Dash Yost doubled and scored three runs.

Ross (9-6) advances to meet second-seeded Ashland at 5 p.m. Thursday in Mansfield. The Arrows, who were 7-6 at the time of the tournament draw, got the second seed over Ross by virtue of a coin flip. Sectional coaches split their votes 3-3 between Ross and Ashland on the second seed. Mansfield Madison got the top seed.

Mansfield coach Jack Soliday

See GIANTS, B3

Giants upend Mansfield Senior, turn attention to Ashland in final

Continued From B1

said he voted for Ashland because the Arrows had run-ruled his team twice the week before the draw. After getting a look at Ross, Soliday said the Arrows and Little Giants are evenly matched.

"It'll be a real good game between them and Ashland," Soliday said. "Both teams seem to be peaking at the right time. Thursday, I'll be here watching."

The Little Giants will try to prove they deserved the seed.

"They got it, so we've got to take it from them," Hammer said. "They're the 2 seed, and we're not. So we must be the underdogs."

Junior pitcher Adam Garcia is slated to start Thursday for Ross after holding Mansfield to four hits and an earned run over six innings Saturday. He struck out three and walked two.

"I thought Adam, for the third time in a row, did an outstanding job," Lindsey said. "He kept the ball down. We played good de-

fense at times, not great defense."

Said Soliday of Garcia, "He threw strikes and that's the name of the game. He was ahead in the count, keeping the batters off balance. Our pitcher seemed to be behind in the count all the time."

Mansfield starter Jameson Bond worked out of trouble for the most part in the first three innings. The Little Giants manufactured a run in the first when Yost, the leadoff man, walked, stole second and was balked to

third. Hammer got him in when he tapped a grounder to the pitcher.

The Tygers tied the game when cleanup hitter Brian White drove in Darren Heuss in the bottom of the first.

Although Ross put runners in scoring position in each of the next two innings, all was quiet until the fourth. Kingsborough led off with a single down the left-field line, Garcia reached on the third of Mansfield's six errors and Yost was hit by a pitch.

That set up Hammer, who left no doubt about the direction of the remainder of the game.

"When you're averaging six errors a ballgame, there's no way you can win," Soliday said. "But you give all the credit to Fremont. They hit the ball hard, and they've got a nice baseball club."

The Little Giants were far from finished. In the fifth, Ross got an RBI double from Yost, and Hammer brought home two runs when his dribbler down the first-base line was misplayed. In

the sixth, the Little Giants opened the inning with four straight hits. Shortstop Kyle Hintze had a run-scoring single, and Kingsborough ripped a two-run double. Gabe Sanchez brought home the final run on a fielder's choice.

Mansfield, which has dropped

six consecutive games, is 6-13.

In the opener Saturday at Mansfield, Sandusky overcame Tiffin Columbian, 3-2 in nine innings. The Blue Streaks will meet No. 1 seed Mansfield Madison at 5 p.m. Tuesday.