

2020 Season Review...



Ross coach Chad Long DOUG HISE/CORRESPONDENT

Six games and postseason for Ohio football

Matthew Horn

Fremont News-Messenger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Fremont Ross football coach Chad Long saw athletic director Chad Berndt on caller ID early Friday evening. Berndt told Long he had news.

"My heart dropped," Long said. "I thought they were calling everything in. He told us they had a plan for six games and the playoffs. That's awesome. It gives us more hope."

Long figures the announcement bodes well for a season being played this fall. Football has yet to be approved by the governor.

"It seems like no matter what, we'll have a season," he said. "We're just waiting for them to say we're not COVID testing. Then, everybody is out. It won't be feasible."

Athletic directors for schools in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference and each of three divisions in the Sandusky Bay Conference were to meet separate-

ly Monday to try to create schedules.

"It's not as simple as just getting in the same room," SBC commissioner Gregg Hedden said. "There have to be protocols and checks and balances. Things change every two or three days. We're trying to work through it to play sports."

"That's true for every board in the state. It isn't simple."

The Ohio High School Athletic Association recommended the season be shortened because of a potential spike in coronavirus cases later this year. Protocols continue to be modified for football, as well as soccer, to have games.

The first game is still scheduled for Aug. 24.

All teams make the playoffs after six weeks, beginning Oct. 9. The state championship games will be no later than Nov. 21.

"If we can go forward with an opportunity for student-athletes to play sports, it's awesome," Hedden said. "We're excited. Does it throw a wrench

into things? Every conference is in the same situation.

"It is what it is. That's what we've all said for five months. Any way to find an opportunity for the kids to play."

Schools eliminated from the OHSAA playoffs or that choose not to enter have the option to schedule additional regular season contests through Nov. 14. A maximum of 10 regular season contests is permitted.

It won't matter how many games each team has played leading up to the playoffs. Instead of the computer ratings system determining which teams qualify for the playoffs, the coaches in each region will conduct a tournament seed meeting the week of Sept. 28 to form the regional bracket, similar to the process in other OHSAA team sports.

The number of playoff rounds depends on the number of schools entering the playoffs in each division.

Schools may keep their first six pre-

See FOOTBALL, Page 2B

Football

Continued from Page 1B

viously scheduled games, but all regular-season football contracts are now voidable by either school, especially in the event that conferences redo their league schedules to fit into the first six weeks. In addition, the OHSAA will determine new playoff regions in September.

The SBC divisions could conceivably move conference slates to the beginning of the season and add a game.

The situation is more problematic for Ross with Lucas County's plans for no fall sports. Clay won an appeal to play, but several other schools remain in limbo.

Plus, the Little Giants want to maintain their matchup with Sandusky, the second longest consecutive game streak in Ohio. That game was to be the third week.

Ross replaced Toledo Start with Bryan for Week 2. It might not stay that way.

Schools that are eliminated from the playoffs may continue to schedule regular-season games up until Nov. 14. Schools that have currently paused sports could still begin their season in September or early October and com-

pete in the playoffs.

Schools are not required to enter the playoffs if they would rather play regular-season games up until Nov. 14.

A decision on spectators at contact sports has not yet been made. The OHSAA believes that at a minimum parents should be permitted to attend.

Long said the announcement bodes well for a season to be played.

"We anticipate playing," he said. "It would be a weird situation without fans in the stands. I'd be excited for these seniors to play their senior year. I hated it with wrestling and no baseball. I want these kids to be kids again and play."

"This is awesome news. There's concrete hope what to expect. It reaffirms they've been talking to the Governor. It's too late to switch to spring. I just want to play. If it's five games. I just want the kids to play."

He isn't dreading the next call from Berndt. He looks at it as a puzzle being solved.

"I know that you know that everybody knows there are still some unknowns," Long said.

That actually sounds promising amid the pandemic, albeit difficult to contact trace.

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Fremont Ross plays schools in the TRAC in Lucas County, which are appealing to reinstate fall sports. Clay won an appeal in Oregon.

After athletic directors agree, there are other administrators that must do the same. None of it matters without the governor's blessing.

All parties are working as fast as they can to coordinate definitive schedules, possibly this week.

"Board approval," Hedden said. "Contracts. We're working on a daily basis to figure how to let student-athletes play in the best way we can."

Unofficially, Ross would play Clay, Findlay, Lima Senior, Toledo Whitmer, Toledo St. John's and Toledo St. Francis the first six weeks. All teams have the option to compete in the postseason or schedule regular season games instead.

"I'm thankful our ADs are working their tails off," Little Giants coach Chad Long said. "They want to play football, like we are as players and coaches. There's anxiety for them. A lot of emotions. There's a lot. The kids are worried because the Big Ten is cancelling the season.

"Coaches, same thing, it takes a toll mentally. There's heartbreak. We shortened practice (Monday). This is the biggest toll I've had as a coach to keep kids' minds positive."

Teams also can schedule games within the final four weeks after they're eliminated from the postseason. Maintaining the second-longest consecutive game streak in the state with Sandusky would be a priority for the Little Giants if possible.

Ross could play the Blue Streaks in the postseason, depending on how regions are configured.^N

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Barnett, Szymanowski in Fremont Ross backfield

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Many high school football players wait their turn before starting as seniors.

Fremont Ross coach Chad Long had no patience with sophomore Kaden Holmes last season.

"Playing as a freshman on varsity is tough," Long said. "The game moves fast. We knew doing that, this year would be better. The game has slowed down. He's going to be dynamic and we've got him for three years."

"He has knowledge of what the defense is doing. Last year, it was instinct he didn't actually see it. The future is bright there. He's special and we knew it. He has the intangibles. He has the arm strength. He's fast and sly.

"It's going to lead to scores. He's a big league player."

He had a 40-yard carry Friday.

"He can run and throw," Long said. "I know how it is as a defensive coach trying to stop a dual threat."

The Little Giants return four offensive linemen with starting experience, including junior left tackle Ethan Green. Left guard Josh Wagner and right tackle London Johnson are juniors, and center Ethan Druckenmiller is a senior.

Junior Labronze Barnett and senior Jon Szymanowski step in at running back. Szymanowski's appearance belies his experience.

"Ivan Drago," Long said. "He's chiseled, blonde and huge. His body frame. He plays high intensity, 100% full-go the entire time. He's going to be tough. Kids gravitate to him playing so hard. He hasn't played football since junior high."

Senior Spencer Price and sophomores Anthony Vann and Bryson Hammer are back at receiver.



Ross' Kaden Holmes carries the ball. DOUG HISE

"He's our utility guy," Long said of Price. "He's unbelievably talented. He can play multiple positions on defense and offense. You could see him at quarterback, receiver, running back. Vann might start to explode (Bryce) McKinstry style."

Eddie Baptista shifts to offensive coordinator again.

"I'm excited because we had a lot of kids get experience who are back," Long

said. "We were young and being young, we were slower. We're not deep. We're older and way faster. We should put up points."

Mason Villarreal and Kelijah Pickens were also starters as freshmen.

Szymanowski rushed for a score as Ross worked in a scrimmage Friday against Toledo Central Catholic. The Little Giants' six-game schedule of conference opponents doesn't include the

Fighting Irish.

Ross' starters scored two touchdowns and allowed two. Szymanowski intercepted a pass.

"We're better than we thought we were," Long said. "Kaden had some big runs and threw a nice deep pass to Spencer."

Green, who is 6-foot-7, 250 pounds,

See FREEMONT ROSS, Page 2B

Freemont Ross

Continued from Page 1B

also will start on defense this season. He already has an offer from Akron.

“Huge frame,” Long said. “Athletic frame. He was rated No. 1 in the state at heavyweight. He gives us so much dimension at end opposite Marcus (Peters). Dontrez (Brown) and (Jason) Burling were studs.

“He’ll hold his ground and make them go east/west, holding space. He stretches the field. Marcus can chase.”

Peters had 10 sacks last season.

“The kids voted him a captain,” Long said. “His work ethic is off the chain. He’s the fastest defensive lineman in

the (Three Rivers Athletic Conference). He’s fast of the edge.”

Barnett returns at outside linebacker, senior Carson Clark inside and classmate Kalijah Alejandro at corner. Price starts at corner, Hammer at strong safety and senior Dion Bradley at free safety.

Many Little Giants were concerned when the Big Ten pushed football to spring at the soonest.

They thought Ohio high schools would follow.

“I’m just happy the kids are able to play,” Long said. “For the kids, this is everything to get out there and play for their school and their family and their friends.”

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Ross' Spencer Price carries the ball. DOUG HISE/CORRESPONDENT

Little Giants want half dozen weeks of doughnuts

Celebratory snack helps keep revitalized Ross hungry, focused

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Football coaches wore 'Fremont against the world' T-shirts on the sidelines Friday as Ross won 35-21 at Oregon Clay.

"We were 1-9," Little Giants coach Chad Long said. "If you think about Fremont sports, nobody believes in us. We're the small public school that gets beat up on. (The shirts are) awesome. That's the statement. Coach (Bill) Schell showed the team the five picks in the Blade for Clay to smoke us.

"Nobody believes. The way society is

with COVID and racial issues, it can be a statement about many things. As a football team, we want to make a difference. We might be underdogs, but that's why we're Little Giants.

"We'll fight and make a statement to defeat the odds. If we believe in ourselves, we can defeat any odds."

Ross didn't beat a Three Rivers Athletic Conference opponent last season.

"They were there ready to watch film (Saturday)," Long said. "We have doughnuts after a win. They told us we'll have six weeks of doughnuts."

More than a win, Long hopes he has a platform for the big picture. The Little Giants' schedule includes five more

TRAC opponents.

"I'm excited the hard work in the off-season paid off to come away with the first victory of the year as underdogs," Long said. "(Clay's) a good team. The kids can believe in the coaches and the system."

"They can trust what we're doing and have faith."

The coronavirus kept kids away from coaches and each other in the off-season. There might have actually been benefits for Ross, as coaches used the time to brainstorm and tinker with ideas off any film they could get

See ROSS, Page 2B

ROSS

Continued from Page 1B

their eyes on.

"Eddie's system is great, but COVID helped us revamp some things we overlooked," Long said. "The coaches wanted to make things easier for the offense. It's simplified and easy to understand and everybody knows it."

"We have a lot of built in RPOs (run/pass options) and Kaden can pull and pop (on a run play). Eddie and the staff made it easy to read signals and run plays without thinking. You read a book from left to right. That's really what we do with the offense."

Eddie Baptista shifts back to offensive coordinator this season.

"It's a different story," Long said. "We have confidence in the offense to move the ball. We were in horrible field position every game. We haven't seen this in a long time. We have confidence we can score any time."

"I haven't seen that. It's not about having faced adversity. They're confident in what they're doing that they'll score no matter what. It's not an issue."

Lineman Ethan Green stands out for Ross, but the Little Giants aren't star-oriented this season. There is no Don'tez Brown or Jason Burling to command the spotlight on the field.

Opposing coaches should have trouble determining who to key on. Meanwhile, Long should have less trouble identifying who he can count on.



Ross Kaden Holmes tries to escape pass rushers. DOUG HISE

"Positive vibes," Long said. "Confidence. It's a close-knit and competitive group. The biggest difference is that everybody is willing to do their 1/1th and sacrifice to make the team better. It's been a while since we had a team that just played together."

"We have confidence in the offense. We played well in all phases (Friday). Special teams killed us a lot last year."

Ross was inconsistent. When the defensive picked up the offense, it failed to capitalize.

The defense allowed teams to respond when the Little Giants' offense was productive.

"We couldn't put everything together," Long said. "Even the win, we allowed (Toledo) Start to stay in the game. These kids are finding ways to do what winning teams do and carrying themselves that way."

The Little Giants' secondary in particular had its share of struggles last season, but it gained valuable experience. Dion Bradley, Spencer Price, Bryson Hammer and Kaliyah Alejandro return as starters.

Alejandro returned an interception 35 yards Friday for a touchdown. The group avoided big plays and broken coverage that plagued them.

"We want to score on defense," Long said. "We probably missed four more interceptions. Nobody is faster than (defensive end) Marcus (Peters) ... and Jon (Szymanski) on the other side."

"They're crazy. Our kids play and communicate well."

Long saw positive signs on defense overall as well. He wasn't pleased with the tackling, although most teams might struggle in that area because of restricted time together and a reluctance to engage at practice because of coronavirus protocols or concerns.

"Kids weren't bringing their arms to the party," he said. "We've had limited contact."

Clay had 166 yards on 31 carries and 165 yards passing.

"They went empty a lot and that quarterback would get out and scramble," Long said.

Ross did evoke memories of last season in the first quarter Friday.

"We blocked a punt for a short field," Long said. "The snap (the ensuing series) went over Kaden's head. We didn't score on that one and then we went down again (with no points)."

"We settled down and wore them out in the second half."

The Little Giants certainly didn't do a lot of that last season. They also didn't regroup to largely dominate in the second half after trailing after two quarters.

Clay led 14-13 entering the third quarter.

"They experienced the hate of losing," Long said. "It's one game. We'll go through adversity. We're confident. Here's what we'll do. This is why we play fast. It's not confidence in handling adversity, it's trust in the system."

The coronavirus pandemic likely factors into the "us against the world" dynamic for many programs trying to rally together. It's almost like the season is a second chance.

"The kids didn't think they'd play," Long said. "By the grace of God, we're able to play. They're fearless. We don't look at last year. We played with young kids to set (this) up. It's nice to get a win, but us coaches expect to win."

"We have as good of athletes as anybody we see. Last year, we couldn't do it with five freshmen. We can compete."

The only thing the underdog Little Giants are afraid of right now is not getting the chance to convert any doubters into believers.

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Sophomore Vann among Ross weapons on offense

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Ross sophomore Anthony Vann had only two catches Friday in a 31-18 setback to visiting Findlay.

The Little Giants wouldn't have scored their first touchdown without them.

Vann went high for an eight-yard reception to the Trojans' 41-on third-and-6 late in the first quarter. He held on as his torso crashed to the turf before his legs.

Sophomore Kaden Holmes barely slipped a pass by a defender as Vann caught a slant for 18 yards to the 7 on fourth-and-5 in the second quarter. Holmes ran in from six yards out on third down for a 7-6 deficit.

"He's a kid that can make plays," Ross coach Chad Long said of Vann. "He's a special kid, but he can also drop balls. It's consistency. Continue to work on the good things and the things to get better at."

"He needs to be confident every time. They respected him. Look how they played off him. We need it every single play."

Vann checked in with offensive coordinator Eddie Baptista on his tablet on the sideline after the scoring drive. Bap-



Ross offensive coordinator Eddie Baptista shows Anthony Vann what he has in mind. MATTHEW HORN

tista can immediately reinforce good habits or identify ways Vann isn't taking advantage of his tools to break or cut, eliminating himself from plays with poor angles or lacks concentration.

What to do again next time and what not to do again.

Holmes completed 7 of 9 passes to

five different receivers during the drive. Sophomore Bryson Hammer had two of his team-high eight catches for 12 of his team-high 83 yards.

Hammer had seven catches and Vann added six in a victory over Oregon Clay in the first game.

"He's been my quarterback since

fence, but his role is concentrated on offense. For good reason.

"He's a strong kid," Long said. "He's only a sophomore. He has great size (6-foot-1, 180 pounds). He looks the part. We need him to compete and run hard routes every play. When he gets the ball in his hands, he's electrifying."

"He can be a beast. We have to find opportunities to isolate him. He's dangerous 1-on-1. Just like Price. Just like

middle school," Vann said. "We grew up together. We know our strengths. He sees me when I don't think I'm open myself."

Holmes rushed for 23 of his team-high 85 yards on two carries to ignite Ross' second touchdown drive against Findlay. Adam Hrynciw had a 22-yard catch to the Little Giants' 43 on third down.

Leading returning receiver Spencer Price added a 35-yard reception, before Holmes connected with the senior from eight yards out for a 12-7 advantage in the second quarter.

Holmes rushed for 28 yards on two tries, before Hammer caught an 18-yard pass in the fourth quarter. Hammer capped the scoring with a 2-yard scoring reception in the back of the end zone.

Holmes completed 18 of 34 passes overall. He was 15 for 19 passing and rushed for three scores against Clay.

"We went 1-9 last year," Vann said. "We were young on the offensive side. We got reps in the offseason with Kaden to build and strengthen hand-eye coordination and develop our routes. We've definitely improved."

"We always come ready for a fight."

See ROSS, Page 2B

ROSS

Continued from Page 1B

We're happy just to play at all. It was possible we wouldn't. I'm playing the sport we love with my brothers."

Vann started Week 1 as a freshman, before missing one game with an injury. He can learn from the experience.

"Being more aware on the field," he said. "It's a faster and stronger game. You have to get in the weight room to play fast. Playing last year, I knew I'd have to fill a bigger role and be there to make plays."

"It doesn't matter what class you come in, if you're out here it's for a reason and you have to give everything you've got."

Vann occasionally plays safety on de-

fense, but his role is concentrated on offense. For good reason.

"He's a strong kid," Long said. "He's only a sophomore. He has great size (6-foot-1, 180 pounds). He looks the part. We need him to compete and run hard routes every play. When he gets the ball in his hands, he's electrifying."

"He can be a beast. We have to find opportunities to isolate him. He's dangerous 1-on-1. Just like Price. Just like

Hammer. It's hard to mix it around to everyone to not give away keys."

Vann has plenty of room to grow, partially because his ceiling is so high. Vann helping to steer scoring drives the next three years should be a common occurrence.

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Ross' Marcus Peters makes a stop. MATTHEW HORN

Ross coaches work to best adapt to TRAC

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Fremont Ross coach Chad Long was a safety at Bowling Green State University and set program records for interceptions at Clyde.

He obviously knows the importance of stops and turnovers. He's been the Little Giants coach on defense for all but the last three of his eight years on staff, including the last five at the helm.

Ross didn't allow any points on defense Friday in a 42-6 victory over Lima Senior in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference.

"This is by far the best I've seen the unit play," Long said. "All 11 kids played within the system of the philosophy playing gaps and doing what we asked. Some kids didn't stand out statistically, but they allowed others to (make plays).

"We played great team defense. If we can do this week in and week out, we'll be one of the better defenses in the conference. Granted, the meat of the schedule is coming up, but we're as good as the teams we'll see this year."

Ross beat Oregon Clay 35-21 in Week 1, before falling to visiting Findlay 31-18. Toledo Whitmer (1-2), which also beat Clay and lost to Findlay, visits Friday.

"We let that one slip out of our hands," Long said. "We're better than we showed and we missed some opportunities that would have changed the game. Let's be the team we were meant to be and get back to work."

"We had a good week of practice. The intensity was there, dialed in and focused. The coaches felt it would be a good game. It's a whole different culture. It's not the coaches. It's experi-

ence. The drive and work ethic is based on the kids."

Ross had seven sacks, including two for Ethan Green.

"We have a giant we can put on the interior or over the edge and do whatever we want with him," Long said. "He's Dontrez (Brown) dominant. It could have been more (sacks). Marcus Peters had one-and-a-half sacks."

"Pure speed and effort getting to the quarterback. Carson Clark is big in the middle. Another week of big hits and plays. We're starting to create turnovers and not give up big plays."

Ross didn't do much of either last season. It won one game, against Toledo Start out of conference.

Lima Senior had 52 yards of offense, most of which came with reserves on the field for a final drive in the fourth quarter.

"We're trying to be as assignment sharp as possible and play as a team," Green said.

Elijah Sims now starts at cornerback.

"The first play of the game they challenged the freshman and he picked it off," Long said.

Kalijah Alejandro added his second interception of the season. Marcus Peters, Bowen Schoch and Labronze Barnett each recovered a fumble.

Long and linebacker coach Troy Albright worked to revamp what can work in the TRAC, based on their time on the staff at Ross before Albright headed to Lakota and Heidelberg the last three years.

Co-defensive coordinator Bill Shell and Albright also worked together closely a few years ago. Defensive end coach Dustin Patten knows what's ex-

pected, having played for Long when he coached at Clyde.

Ross forced 30 turnovers, including 15 interceptions with the same coaches after Long took over. The Little Giants recovered five fumbles and picked off four passes this season, including a touchdown for Alejandro.

"We're exploiting bad ball-carrying tendencies and when we're gang tackling, we're trying to rip the ball out," Green said.

Ross blocked two punts and one field goal.

"Turnovers are about pride," Long said. "We've accepted the challenge. We're on the same page. It's our belief in the kids this year. We tell them to be fast, be under control and cause havoc. When you do that, turnovers will happen."

"We do two-whistle drills. Get to the ball and strip the ball. We emphasize strip drills and tackle drills and angle drills. Kids are buying in. Hustle and you'll be rewarded with turnovers. It's exciting."

Little Giants offense doing its share

Ross' defense isn't the only reason Long is delighted. Kaden Holmes gives coaches confidence each week.

He started as a freshman last season.

"We knew what we were getting into being a young kid," Long said. "We threw a lot at him. He understands the pressure of the moment and what our offense is trying to do. He knows what he's looking at on film."

See ROSS, Page 2B

ROSS

Continued from Page 1B

"(Quarterback coach) Jalen Slick and (offensive coordinator) Eddie (Baptista) have guided him."

Holmes completed 45 of 76 passes for 485 yards and seven touchdowns. He has 180 yard and five scores on the ground.

His only interception came at the end of the first half against Findlay.

"Kaden was phenomenal the first three games," Long said. "The kid's never lacked confidence, it's just experience. We saw this last year if we put him

in better situations. We know he's special."

He tossed five touchdown passes in the first half against Lima Senior.

"He was on fire," Long said. "The kid is the leader of our offense. He's smooth and collected and makes good decisions. We play fast on offense. He connected three times with (Bryson) Hammer for touchdowns.

"The defense got off the field. Kaden knows he can run and throw. To keep the sticks moving, he'll have to run some and he does a very good job with that. We ran a draw play, he makes it look effortless."

He added a rushing touchdown early in the third quarter against Lima Senior.

Of course, Holmes has a Division I recruit at left tackle in Green, who is 6-foot-7, 255 pounds. Green trusts his teammates to do their jobs and stick to the game plan, as well as coaches to make the right calls.

"Everybody will focus on Kaden, but Ethan stood out on both sides," Long said. "He dominated on both sides of the ball. He can be physical and mean."

Spencer Price caught a 47-yard touchdown pass down the sideline and Hammer split a safety and corner to get behind the secondary for a score from 36 yards.

"He got thrown in the fire as a freshman," Long said of Hammer. "Pound for pound, he's the toughest kid you'll meet.

He's a tough tackler and a playmaker on offense."

He has 228 yards and four touchdowns on 22 catches in three games.

"He does the dirty work," Long said. "He plays in the slot and catches it across the middle. He'll run the jet. He's only going to get better."

Holmes had only 167 passing yards because he didn't have much work to do.

"Our defense gave him a short field every time," Long said. "Turnovers. Good field position. They blocked a punt and scored and went up 6-0. That was a wake-up call. Then boom, boom, boom."

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Ross' Carson Clark, left, and Jon Szymanski combine on a tackle. MATTHEW HORN

Little Giants ring home bell

Vann catches 3 touchdown passes against Panthers

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Fremont Ross lost five straight games to Toledo Whitmer in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference.

The Little Giants beat the visiting Panthers 35-33 on Friday. They last won the matchup 41-40 in 2014, before qualifying for the postseason.

"Beating Whitmer any time, we didn't win one game at home last year," Ross sophomore Anthony Vann said Friday after catching three touchdowns. "It was good for the fans to hear the bell again. I know they missed that."

"We wanted to protect the home

field."

The only other time Ross (3-1) beat Whitmer (1-3) the last 10 years was before advancing to the postseason in 2010.

"This is a pinnacle point for our program," Ross coach Chad Long said. "It's Whitmer. They're always in the top two in the conference. It's a big win for the kids. It's a big win for the town."

Chad Long shifted from defensive coordinator to head coach at Ross in 2016.

Ken Winters slid from longtime assistant to head coach at Whitmer the same year. Winters graduated from Ross in 1991.

Winters joined the Panthers' staff under Dan Fought. Winters played for Fought for the Little Giants.

Long and Winters, who both graduated from Bowling Green State University, have become close. You might think Winters' success made that difficult.

Instead, they've gained a mutual respect for the other's program. It was easy to help Winters celebrate TRAC crowns or playoff runs.

Winters was there for Long for morale as the Little Giants struggled, with the Panthers and league in general. He encouraged Long to stay the course, he just needed the right tools on the field — mentally and physically.

"He's a good friend," Long said. "He's helped me over the years. When we went through tough times, he's a mental (boost). He's a mentor."

The Little Giants forced 13 turnovers this season, including interceptions

from Kalijah Alejandro, Labronze Barnett and Bryson Hammer against Whitmer.

"This is the philosophy on defense, and it's been my philosophy — be aggressive, play aggressive, create havoc, create turnovers," Long said.

Eddie Baptista is offensive coordinator again this season. With several sophomores in key spots, Baptista has his own mantra on that side of the ball.

"The game isn't about one person," Vann said. "It's 11. Coach Baptista always talks about 10 people can do their job and if one player doesn't, it can ruin the whole play."

Ross set the tone on both sides of the ball Friday. Vann capped the first pos-

See ROSS, Page 3B

ROSS

Continued from Page 1B

session with a 30-yard touchdown from Kadon Holmes.

Barnett had four carries for 18 yards, before Jon Szymanski recorded a tackle for loss. Carson Clark then tipped a pass intercepted by Barnett.

"Not just offense, the first (possession) on defense is most important," Vann said.

Vann sees perfectionist tendencies in fellow receivers like Hammer, who caught a touchdown and returned his interception for another against Whitmer.

Vann also admires their physicality working on defense.

"He works hard every day," Vann said. "We work on our routes and blocking. He runs a good route every time. They'll even come up and tackle."

Barnett didn't expect to add running back to his responsibilities at linebacker this season.

Depth necessitated a move into the rotation for carries, and Barnett is happy to oblige.

"You can't let things get to you," he said of fatigue. "My teammates need me. Every time I look at it, I push every time."

Vann waved Ross' 'Fremont against the World' flag before the game and retrieved it again afterward. He was close with his teammates last season.

The bonds are different.

"There's a brotherhood this year," he said. "We know what we want to do this year — win and play together as a team. You go 1-9 and come back in, people still doubt you. There's adversity every day and we grind."

"We've got something we want to prove. Our worth. We can work together and do what people say we can't. Win."

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Ross' Bryson Hammer catches a pass. MATTHEW HORN

Ross scores six TDs against No. 2 Titans

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Toledo St. John's knows what it looks like to get it done.

Fremont Ross is learning what it takes. There's a big difference.

It certainly looked like a narrow gap, however, in the Little Giants' 45-42 setback Saturday in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference. The game was pushed back one day because Titans defensive players quarantined as a coronavirus precaution.

The first game after quarantine was canceled for St. John's (3-1). It beat Findlay 25-24 before a player tested positive for the coronavirus for the Trojans.

That makes two wins by five points. St. John's lost by one score, 49-42, to Division II second-ranked Toledo Central Catholic.

St. John's earned a first down at Ross' 7-yard line Friday late in the fourth quarter. Titans quarterback Brady Lichtenberg rushed in to cap the scoring with 1:10 remaining.

Ross advanced to the other 45, but a fourth-down pass fell incomplete with 27 seconds left.

"When they scored, our confidence couldn't waver," Lichtenberg said. "The coaches have confidence in us. We had to calm down. Friday night lights or Saturday night lights."

See ROSS, Page 3B



Ross' Spencer Price keeps his balance eluding a defender. DOUG HISE

ROSS

Continued from Page 1B

urday night lights, you have to have fun.

"The offense stepped up at the end. We're a senior-heavy team. We've had close games. Three of our four games were within seven points. Stay calm and play football. Success in close games is instrumental.

"You have to battle through it."

Ross generated a mighty challenge. Lichtenberg rushed for a touchdown with 7:43 left for a 38-35 advantage, following a Ross fumble.

"They've got a lot of experience," Little Giants coach Chad Long said. "We gained their respect. We're no fluke. We're young and coming. We can swing it and play with the best of them. These guys are mad."

"We whole-heartedly thought we could win. This is one of the more high-powered offenses we'll see and we went punch for punch, back and forth."

Ross (3-2) beat Toledo Whitmer 35-33 in Week 4.

Little Giants quarterback Kaden Holmes capped the ensuing drive from eight yards out for a 42-38 lead with 5:22 left. Spencer Price caught a 40-yard pass and Bryson Hammer added a third-down reception to extend the drive.

Hammer intercepted a pass in the end zone with 1:37 to play in the first half. Ross' two-minute offense was flawless as Hammer caught a touchdown pass from six yards out.

Holmes rushed six times, mixed around two timeouts and a clock spike,



Ross' Bryson Hammer runs with the ball. DOUG HISE

including an 18-yard carry to convert on third down before Hammer's catch.

Price returned the third quarter kickoff to the 48. Holmes rushed to convert on third down, before Anthony Vann caught a 39-yard touchdown pass for a 35-16 advantage.

"We made good adjustments in the second half," Long said. "You've got to get better. In the second half, we'd built a lead. We tried to run the ball. We wanted to keep the ball out of their hands."

"The best defense is to have the of-

fense on the field with a high-powered (opposing) offense. We'll get better. We have an unbelievable staff. We attacked them."

St. John's scored the next three touchdowns, with help from its own interception in the end zone and two huge stiff arms on a 68-yard catch and run.

"St. John's is a veteran team," Long said. "They were able to establish the running game, which forced us to stay in the box. The interception and fumble were heartbreaking."

Holmes scored from five yards out for a 9-7 deficit late in the first quarter. Adam Hrynciw had two catches and Jon Szymanski added one for 30 yards.

Price caught a 62-yard touchdown pass for a 14-9 lead. He raced across the field and up the sideline.

Ross' Labrone Barnett caught a touchdown on fourth-and-3 from the 7 for a 21-16 advantage.

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Toledo St. Francis 49, Fremont Ross 46

Ross' games the last three weeks have been decided by a combined eight points.

Bryson Hammer, Spencer Price and Anthony Vann each caught a touch-down Friday as the Little Giants erased a deficit for a 46-35 advantage in the second half Friday.

Ross (3-3) trailed 28-6 in the first half.

The Little Giants beat Toledo Whitmer 35-33 in Week 4, before falling 45-42 to Toledo St. John's the next game.

follow became the norm with temperature checks and masks and social distancing," Schlea said. "We got used to it. I told the kids the last few weeks to be grateful we played as many games as we did.

"We played 10 games. So many teams didn't play 10 games or had to quarantine for two weeks or whatever."

Schlea was also an assistant coach at Gibsonburg before taking the helm at Woodmore.

"We're trying to turn around the program, going from zero wins the last two years to three wins," Schlea said. "It doesn't sound like a lot. It's a lot for this program. Winning in Week 10 had huge significance."

Fremont Ross 26, Anthony Wayne 20

Bryson Hammer caught the go-ahead touchdown pass from Kaden Holmes in the fourth quarter as Ross climbed back to .500.

"We learned how to finish as a football team," Little Giants coach Chad Long said. "We played well on defense and scored when we needed to. We stopped

the run in the second half. We ran the ball and threw it when we wanted."

Ross had 446 yards of offense, including 203 on the ground.

Little Giants offensive coordinator Eddie Baptista dug into the playbook for a Statue of Liberty play for a short touchdown for Labronze Barnett. There were more gadgets as a double-reverse and throwback to Holmes went for a long completion to Hammer.

"Kaden had it in his right hand like it was a bubble," Ross coach Chad Long said. "It was in his left hand and he put it behind him to Labronze."

Barnett added a second touchdown on the ground and Anthony Vann caught a scoring pass.

Holmes completed 17 of 23 passes for 243 yards and added 105 yards on 15 carries.

Anthony Wayne (5-4) led 14-7 at the half. It was tied 20-20 after three quarters.

"Knowing Anthony Wayne is a traditional powerhouse in the NLL and the playoffs and everything else," Long said. "It was a hard fought game, back and forth. We were banging. It's huge to us. It was a statement for us how we can play beating a great team."

"My whole career we haven't been better than .500. We're 5-5 going into Sandusky and we want it to be 6-5. We're set up to do something better."

The Little Giants are scheduled to visit Sandusky next week to extend the second-longest running rivalry in Ohio. Even during a pandemic.

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The image features the Ohio Basement logo, which includes a stylized 'O' made of stacked books and the text 'Ohio Basement'. To the right, a dark blue rectangular box contains the text: 'We provide the HIGHEST LEVEL OF EXPERTISE in foundation repair and'



Ross' Kaden Holmes breaks into the secondary. DOUG HISE

Ross falls behind early in road loss

Matthew Horn
Fremont News-Messenger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Sandusky sandwiched two touchdowns around an interception late in the first half Friday in a 36-30 victory over visiting Fremont Ross.

The Blue Streaks (3-8) ran in a score from 45 yards with 3:39 left in the second quarter, before an interception three plays later. Sandusky added a short touchdown run with 1:03 left.

A fourth-down conversion led to a Sandusky score on the ground in the first quarter. It returned an interception on the first play of the ensuing possession.

"They jumped on us so quick," Little Giants coach Chad Long said. "Their first drive they scored, then the pick-6. We played the worst I've seen in the first half on defense and we dug ourselves a huge hole. That's a hard deficit to fight back."

"We did a decent job in the second half. It's a life lesson. You can't overlook an opponent and think you're going to win just showing up."

Anthony Vann caught a touchdown from Kaden Holmes from eight yards as Ross trailed 16-7 midway through the

second quarter. He had 163 yards on seven catches.

"He made play after play," Long said. "Catching the ball. Running the ball. He had a 4-yard touchdown run that came back. He's an explosive and dynamic player."

Mason Villarreal had a 14-yard catch to Sandusky's 35 on fourth-and-2.

Holmes scored from 41 yards for a 30-15 deficit midway through the third quarter. Vann added a 77-yard touchdown reception less than three minutes later.

Holmes flicked a deep pass across his body on the run and Vann fought off a defender to jump for the ball at his own 40. The rest was easy.

Holmes avoided a sack and rolled to his right, before connecting with Bryson Hammer for a 34-yard touchdown to cap the scoring with 1:35 remaining in the game.

Hammer had six catches to establish a career record for Ross at 71. He had 65 catches to establish a single-season program record.

Holmes finished with a single-season program record 33 touchdown passes.

Sandusky's receiver pinned the ball to his shoulder pad, before running for a

touchdown early in the fourth quarter. Ross then muffed a punt with a 36-23 deficit, but got the ball back and drove to the 20.

A Blue Streaks defender bobbled the ball three times in the end zone, before securing an interception.

Spencer Price, Carson Clark, Ethan Druckemiller and Dion Bradley are seniors.

"I appreciate they gave us great leadership," Long said. "They set the foundation for the very bright future we could have, teaching the young kids how to practice and compete. Muscle memory. They preached it all year."

"Practice how you play."

Ross (5-6) exceeded last year's win total by four, including victories over Toledo Whitmer and Anthony. It lost consecutive games by a combined six points during the regular season.

Ross and Sandusky is the second oldest matchup in Ohio high school football. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the game was rescheduled from earlier in the season and teams were allowed to continue after they were eliminated from the playoffs.

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Ross coach Chad Long. MATTHEW HORN

Little Giants' Long coach of year in TRAC

Matthew Horn
Fremont News-Messenger
USA TODAY NETWORK

The caliber of defensive player in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference is such that someone on offense is going to have a challenging night.

The same can be said of the athletes on offense. That makes it more than twice as impressive for Fremont Ross junior Ethan Green to earn first-team all-conference status at left tackle and defensive end.

"Going in, we thought Ethan is the best left tackle in the league," Little Giants coach Chad Long said. "We nominated him on defense — we bounce him all over. From the interior to end. When we think that's where they're going to run things to, we put him there to eliminate it."

"The coaches respect him. It doesn't happen often, to get first-team on both sides. He's in shape. He works hard. He's a teamer. It takes a lot of energy. He makes huge sacrifices to make first-team on both sides."

Long was TRAC coach of the year. "It's an award to me that represents



Green



Hammer

the entire coaching staff and the hard work we put into the season and obviously the dedication of the kids to receive an honor like that."

Eddie Baptista returned to his role as offensive coordinator this season as Ross scored at least 26 points in every win and 88 points in consecutive losses Toledo St. John's and Toledo St. Francis by a combined six points in the TRAC.

The Little Giants (5-5) beat Oregon Clay, Lima Senior and Toledo Whiteman in the TRAC.

Findlay beat Ross 31-18.

Ross shut out Normandy 71-0 for the second postseason victory in program history.

"I don't think we won a conference game last year and to win three — it could have easily been six — the (TRAC) coaches believed we improved," Long said.

Ross beat only Toledo Start in a non-conference matchup last season. It scored seven points or fewer in eight losses.

Ross sophomore receiver Bryson Hammer was first-team. He has 59 receptions this season.

He was nearly first-team as a defensive back as well.

"He already broke the record for receptions in a single season and he's close to the career," Long said. "He almost has that now. That's impressive. He's a two-year starter on both sides.

He puts us in great positions on offense and defense with his commitment to team."

Hammer is two catches shy of tying the career mark of 67.

"He's scrappy and he flies around and gives us maximum effort," Long said of the 5-foot-9, 150 pounder who will take a hit over the middle.

Senior Carson Clark would stand out for his leadership at any position. The fact he's a linebacker is perfect for Long.

"He's the captain of the football team," Long said. "The captain of our defense. He's the glue that keeps the defense together. He had 19 tackles (in a win over) Anthony Wayne (last week) and he's played with a high-ankle sprain since St. Francis."

Clark missed one game and gutted through another.

"He's that nitty gritty, old school linebacker who loves to hit and sacrifices their body for the team," Long said.

Defensive back Kalijah Alejandro is another sophomore to earn first-team from a young roster.

"He's our man guy," Long said. "He's on the toughest assignment in man coverage. He led the conference in interceptions with five. His knowledge and understanding of the game makes him a first-teamer."

"He watches film and he knows

See LONG, Page 2B

Long

Continued from Page 1B

when they're trying to attack him. He was the best defensive back in the conference."

Toledo St. John's senior quarterback Brady Lichtenberg was player of the year in the TRAC. Long said it was based more on the past than the present that Little Giants sophomore quarterback Kaden Holmes was second team.

"He's the best quarterback in northwest Ohio," Long said of Holmes. "You can't take a kid with 30 touchdowns and more than 2,300 yards passing, and an additional 650 yards and eight touchdowns (on the ground), and not make him first team.

"Kaden jumped on the scene this year. 'Who is this kid?' Lichtenberg was player of the year last year. He's a three-time first-teamer. He's going to Cincinnati."

Holmes has a thorough grasp of much of the offense, with run-pass options perfectly suited to his ability to run or get the ball out. His decision making should only improve with two years remaining as starter.

"He's hungry," Long said. "He's consistent. He just wants to win. He's shattered the Ross records already as a sophomore. I can't imagine what he'll do next year and the year after. He's the kind of kid you don't get very often."

Ross sophomore running back LaBronze Barnett, sophomore receiver Anthony Vann, senior return specialist Spencer Price and junior offensive line-

man London Johnson were second team.

Receiver Price, senior offensive lineman Ethan Druckemiller and junior offensive lineman Josh Wagner were honorable mention for Ross. Senior defensive linemen Marcus Peters, junior defensive linemen Bowen Schoch, sophomore defensive back Elijah Simms and senior defensive back Dion Bradley were honorable mention.

Kicker Ayden Carter was honorable mention.

It's not a conference game Friday, but Ross visits traditional-rival Sandusky (2-8) to extend the second longest played matchup in Ohio. The coronavirus pandemic threatened to prevent the matchup, but teams were allowed to schedule regular season games in the final weeks after every team was eligible

for the postseason.

"Friday is Fremont's time to change the tide," Long said. "Sandusky's been on a streak of four games (in the series). It's Fremont's time. Two of the four games we didn't know how to win (and lost by a combined nine points).

"We're ready and eager and we want to put it all together in the final game of the year. We're against the world. We did so many things that were unpredictable. Nobody thought we could be 5-5, let alone could be 6-5.

"People said you're a year away from being good, but we're a great team. We're close. This is what the kids believed in and this win is for the town of Fremont."

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Ross junior Ethan Green is lineman of the year in Division II, as determined by the Northwest District Board.

Green didn't allow a sack as a two-way starter. The Little Giants scored at least 26 points in nine of 11 games.

Ross sophomore quarterback Kaden Holmes, and classmate receivers Bryson Hammer and Anthony Vann were first-team all-Northwest District selections.

Ross' Chad Long was coach of the year.

Holmes completed 192 of 329 passes for 2,575 yards and a program-record 33 touchdown passes. He added nine touchdowns on the ground and needs eight touchdown passes to tie the career mark at 45.

He added single-game records with 517 yards and six touchdowns passing.

Hammer established school records with 64 receptions and 775 yards, with 11 touchdowns.

Vann's 12 touchdowns are a single-season record. He had 714 yards on 46 catches.

Little Giants senior linebacker Carson Clark was first-team. Junior defensive back Kalijah Alejandro and junior offensive lineman London Johnson were second-team.

Clark had 103 tackles, including 13 for a loss. Alejandro led the Three Rivers Athletic Conference with five interceptions.