

2000 Division I District Tournament

Boys basketball: district semifinals

New year, same foes

Bears, Wildcats meet in rematch

By MICHAEL PIDANICK

Staff writer

GIBSONBURG — Last March 10, Gibsonburg jumped out to an early 11-2 lead in a district semifinal game against Kalida.

But the Wildcats scored 32 of the game's next 43 points and went on to a 70-55 win at Napoleon High School.

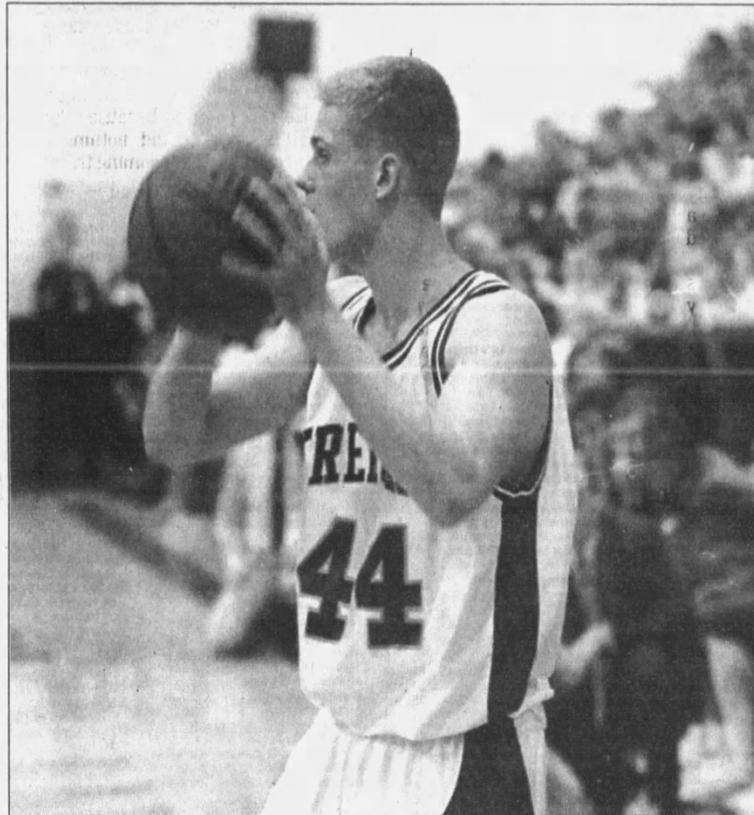
The two teams meet again at 6:30 p.m. today in a district semifinal at Liberty-Benton High School, and Golden Bears coach Keith Diebler is looking for more of that opening spurt, and less of the rest of the half.

"Last year we got off to a real good start, but we didn't finish the job," said Diebler. "If we can play the full 32 minutes we should be all right."

The Wildcats (17-4) went 7-0 and won the Putnam County League. They have won 12 of their last 13 games, including a 44-27 win over Continental in a sectional final on Friday.

Kalida is coached by the legendary Dick Kortokrax, Ohio's all-time winningest coach with a record of 664-223 in 40 seasons. The Wildcats have a deep bench, and some decent size, led by 6-foot-3 senior center John Schmersal, 6-0 senior forward Rod Bockrath, 6-2 junior forward Brian Duling and 5-9 sophomore guard B.J. Slusser.

"It's a typical Kalida team," Diebler said. "They're a fundamentally sound team, and they don't beat themselves. They aren't real big, but they're very active. I'd compare them somewhere in between Eastwood and Otsego."



News-Messenger file photo

BRYAN ROOT and Fremont Ross will meet Mansfield on Wednesday in a district semifinal.

Ross-Mansfield rivalry continues

By MICHAEL MOHR

Staff writer

For the third time in four years the Fremont Ross boys basketball team will meet Mansfield Senior for the right to advance in the state boys basketball tournament.

If past games are any indication, Wednesday's Division I district semifinal at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at Willard High School will be a thriller.

"We've had two great district games in the past three years, hopefully another one this year," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said.

2 Lakewood St. Ed.

■ In 1999, Mansfield got its revenge in overtime of a district semifinal game as Marquis Sykes hit a tough bank shot in the lane during overtime and Ross was plagued by turnovers against the Tygers pressure as Mansfield went on to an 81-77 win. The Tygers reached the state final four, and lost to state champion Cincinnati Moeller in the semifinals.

"We've had two great district games in the past three years, hopefully another one this year," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said.

Hammer out for Little Giants

Fremont Ross junior point guard T.J. Hammer will miss Wednesday's game.

Hammer suffered a torn ligament in his right ankle during play in the first quarter of Ross's 64-61 sectional final win over Ashland.

Filling the void for the Little Giants will be a combination of freshman Terrence Jones, senior Juan Vela, senior Reggie Jones, and sophomore Mike Price. All saw action at the point in Friday's game.

See ROSS, B2

Ross to play Mansfield Wednesday

Continued from B1

"These are two programs going in the right direction and two schools striving to be the best basketball schools they can be."

The No. 4 state-ranked Tygers are 20-1, with the only loss coming to No. 1 Toledo Libbey. But Tygers coach Gregg Collins said he isn't overly concerned with rankings.

"We don't put much into it," said Collins. "We have six completely different guys in there this year. We have two starters who didn't dress for varsity last year. We are a very inexperienced basketball team."

Last Friday against Ashland, the Little Giants dealt with a combination of height and strength. This week's test will feature the same height problems, but instead of the bull-dozer attitude of the Ashland post players, Herman Davis (a 6-foot-6 senior post) and 6-7 Lance Hood are

players who look more to the air.

The Tygers most prolific offensive weapon, however, is 6-4 senior wing and District 6 player of the year Rick Minard.

He averages 22 points, 8.2 rebounds, 3 steals, and 3 assists per game.

Davis is the second option on offense, averaging 16 points, 5.4 rebounds, and is a very good shot blocker. Hood averages 5 points and 6 rebounds per contest.

"That's why teams call them one of the best rebounding teams in all of Ohio," Gedeon said. "Because they have three kids who can go get it at any given time. Our guards are going to need to help out with the rebounds as well, I thought our guards did a good job of getting rebounds against Ashland, but we're going to need a total team effort in order to rebound with them."

"It is going to take a huge

"Fremont can hurt you in a lot of ways, in the post or with the perimeter shot."

— Gregg Collins,
Mansfield coach

effort to keep them off the boards and that's something we've got to concentrate on. That probably will be our No. 1 objective."

Offensively, Ross is going to see the same type of pressure it has seen in the past two meetings with the Tygers.

"They are going to play man-to-man," said Gedeon. "They want to make sure they always have pressure on the basketball whether it's full or half court, they do not want the offense to relax at all."

It's going to be very important for us to make sure that we can go from getting the ball past half court to initiating our offense. We've

worked very hard on trying to get our timing between our post players, our wing players, and our point guard so that we can get in the offense and let our offensive structure dictate the game rather than Mansfield's pressure."

Offensively the Tygers will need to solve a Ross zone that has puzzled many teams this year.

"They have a great deal of success playing a lot of different defenses," Collins said.

"They play a very good zone and solid man-to-man. We have to execute, try to find openings, and then hit open shots."

"We are going to have to play excellent defensive game. Not too many of the teams we have played this year have both the inside and outside game. We play a lot of one-dimensional teams. Fremont can hurt you in a lot of ways in the post or with the perimeter shot."

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B1

Boys basketball: District semifinal

Tygers' rally stuns Little Giants

Mansfield wins in double OT

By MICHAEL PIDANICK
Staff writer

WILLARD — With 43 seconds left in the second half of Wednesday's Division I district semifinal, things were looking good for Fremont Ross. The Little Giants held a 10-point lead and Ross fans were raucously chanting, "It's all over."

Reggie Jones knew better. The Little Giants' senior had seen the Tygers pull out miracles against his team

before, and he was about to see it again.

Mansfield went on a 12-2 run in the final 43 seconds, tied the game on a 40-foot shot at the buzzer by John Brooks, and held off the Little Giants for a 72-69 win in double overtime in a battle for the ages at Willard High School.

"I think a couple guys thought it was over," said Jones. "But all I kept thinking about was the last two times against them, with them coming back in the last minute, and sending the game to overtime."

For the third time in four

Wednesday
Mansfield 72
Ross 69

years, the Little Giants met the Tygers in the district tournament, and for the third time it was an overtime classic.

Brooks, a 6-foot junior guard, carved his place in the Mansfield basketball history books with one of the most dramatic shots in school history. After Jones hit a pair of free throws with 3.2 seconds left, Brooks brought the ball just past half-court and let fly as the buzzer sounded.

His shot hit nothing but net,

sending the game into overtime and the Mansfield crowd into hysterics.

The Little Giants had the big play in the first overtime, as Jones scored off an offensive rebound with seven seconds to play to tie the game.

Ross almost had one miracle left, but Juan Vela's 3-pointer at the second overtime buzzer bounced off the front of the rim, and the fourth-ranked Tygers escaped.

"I'm definitely very proud of my team," said Ross coach Mark Gedeon. "They laid it all on the line. We wanted them to have to hit a prayer at the buzzer, and their prayers were answered."



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— Ross coach Mark Gedeon

prayer at the buzzer, and their prayers were answered. But both teams had opportunities and both teams made big plays, unfortunately we came out on the short end."

The Tygers (21-1) advanced to the district final at

11 a.m. Saturday against No. 7 Lima Senior at the University of Toledo's Savage Hall. The Spartans beat Celina 77-68 in a district semifinal Wednesday at Liberty Benton High School.

See ROSS, B3

Ross loses thriller to Mansfield

Continued from B1

The Little Giants (17-5) saw their season ended by the Tygers in a district semifinal for the second year in a row. Mansfield late in regulation and beat Ross 81-77 in overtime last year. In 1997, Ross overcame a 3-pointer at the buzzer by the Tygers' Marquis Sykes and posted a 73-68 district final win.

"It does add to the chapter," Gedeon said. "You're seeing two great teams and programs that really have kids lay it on the line. I can't think of a better place in Ohio to watch a basketball game than to watch a Fremont Ross-Mansfield Senior game."

For Ross, it spoiled a spectacular upset bid. The Tygers had won 20 of their first 21 games entering Wednesday's big clash, with their only loss coming to No. 1 Toledo Libbey.

"Numbers really don't mean anything right now," Ross wing Steve Dagg said. "It's just who plays hard, who executes better, that wins."

Vela led the Little Giants, as he scored 21 points and added five assists. But more importantly, he filled the void at point guard, left when starter T.J. Hammer suffered a season-ending ankle injury in the sectional tournament. Ross turned the ball over 24 times, but 14 came in the first half before Vela became the primary ballhandler.

"I was really concerned about their man pressure," Gedeon said. "With T.J. being out, who was going to step up? And I'll tell you Juan Vela was just incredible. In that fourth quarter, it was very hot in here, he had lost a lot of water, he was very tired, but he made some incredible shots off their pressure."

The Little Giants hit all seven of their field goal attempts in the fourth quarter to open up the big lead. A pair of free throws by Alfonzo Vann gave Ross a 53-43 lead with a little over a minute left.

Joe Allen hit one for the Tygers with 42.5 seconds left. Rick Minard followed a Ross turnover with a 3-point shot that bounded off the rim twice and fell in with 30 seconds to play.

Ross missed two free throws and Aurne Shaw hit a 3-pointer with 14.9 seconds left. After two more Ross misses from the free throw line, Herman Davis scored off an



VELA

offensive rebound to slice the gap to one with 10 seconds to play. Dagg was fouled, but missed both shots. Reggie Jones grabbed the rebound and was fouled. He made both, but Brooks followed with his miracle trey.

"Truthfully, I thought it was over," Brooks said of the 10-point deficit. "But I had it in the back of my mind that I was going to fight back myself if I had to."

Mansfield hit 3-of-4 from 3-point range and forced two turnovers in the season-saving run. In the end, poor free throw shooting doomed the Little Giants. Ross hit 16-of-31 from the line, including 2-of-8 in the final minute.

"The only thing we're thinking is, just give a great effort to the very end," Mansfield coach Gregg Collins said. "Do whatever you can."

Obviously when you're down by that much, that late, you're going to need to hit some 3s, and you need to make some stops defensively. Obviously, they're not going to force the issue, so we wanted to try to create some turnovers and foul. Fortunately, they missed some free throws and we hit some shots that we don't normally have. They aren't in our offense, I'll tell you that much."

The Little Giants had the miracle at the end of the first overtime. Down by four, Dagg hit a pair of free throws to slice the gap to two, and Mansfield's Mauricio Bradley traveled on the ensuing inbounds pass. Terrence Jones took a pass from Vann and launched a 3-pointer that missed long. But Reggie Jones grabbed the board and put it back in with seven seconds left. The Tygers didn't get a shot off and the game went to double overtime.

"It wasn't designed for Terrence," said Gedeon. "We weren't looking to win the game there, we were looking to go to a second overtime. We made sure we ran an out of bounds play that had several different options, with Reggie being the first option. Terrence inbounded the ball to Alfonzo, and was smart enough to go outside for the 3. He had a real good look to win it, and Reggie was thinking ahead and thinking man, which you have to do on an offensive rebounder, and he finished the basket."

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offensive rebound to slice the gap to one with 10 seconds to play. Dagg was fouled, but missed both shots. Reggie Jones grabbed the rebound and was fouled. He made both, but Brooks followed with his miracle trey.

"We had a huge opportunity to put the game away," said Collins. "We had the ball and a five-point lead late, and they did a great job. They come down here, Vela hits a huge shot on their third attempt. You can't give anybody that many shots, especially a team as good as Fremont with shooters as good as Vela."

After a Brooks free throw, the Little Giants had a last chance to tie, but Vela's 3-pointer came off the front of the rim as time expired.

"When I released it, it felt good," said Vela. "But then I looked up and it looked a bit short. But that's the best I could do."

In the first half, Minard showed why he was named the District 6 Player of the Year. The 6-foot-3 senior easily drove to the basket en route to 16 first-half points. Meanwhile, Ross struggled offensively, hitting just 9-of-20 field goals in the first two quarters and committing 14 turnovers. The Tygers seemed to be a step quicker throughout the first half and held a 28-22 lead at the break.

But Minard picked up his third foul early in the quarter and sat for the next five minutes. Shortly after his return, he picked up No. 4 and returned to the bench. He finished the game with 25 points, before fouling out with 1:30 left in the first overtime.

"We figured out what they were doing," Vela said. "No. 24 (Minard) got the ball and went baseline. Once we cut down the baseline, we were able to stop them. They were quicker, but not that much quicker."

Without its leader, Mansfield missed its first five shots and committed eight turnovers in the first 5:33 of the third quarter, and Ross went on a 12-0 run to take a 34-28

lead.

The Little Giants controlled the boards in the second half. After being out-rebounded in the first two quarters, Ross grabbed 29 boards in the second half and overtimes, compared to 22 for the Tygers. Mansfield scored just two second chance points after halftime.

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— Gregg Collins
Mansfield coach



R. JONES

Brooks' miracle 3-point shot sinks Little Giants

40-foot prayer sends Tygers' fans into frenzy

By MICHAEL MOHR
Staff writer

WILLARD — What's the difference between a major upset and a broken heart? For the Fremont Ross boys basketball team, about 3.2 seconds.

That's how much time there was Wednesday night between Reggie Jones' free throws to give the Little Giants a 55-52 lead over No. 4 Mansfield Senior and the time to the buzzer to end regulation sounded with the game tied at 55-55 after Mansfield's John Brooks nailed a 40-foot prayer to send the game to overtime.

After the shot, the Tygers' fans poured onto the court, thinking the game was won. The officials also ran off the court as if the game were over.

"After the shot," said Mansfield coach Gregg Collins, "my math says it's a 3 and a tie game. I'm before the math proficiency, so maybe I don't know math that well and we've won. Unfortunately, we had to come back and keep playing."

As officials and security people moved the Tygers' fans off the court, the Little Giants took the opportunity to regroup.

"It takes the wind out of the sails," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "Obviously, while they are trying."

Mansfield struggled from the floor throughout most of the game. The Tygers hit 24-of-73 (32.9 percent) from the floor, including a 5-for-28 effort from behind the 3-point line.

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ing to get the fans off the floor, that gives our kids time to reflect, but it also gave us time to get focused again on what we needed to do."

After the game finally ended two overtimes later, the Tygers had a 72-69 win.

Brooks said he wanted to make a big play.

"I just wanted to hit a spectacular shot," Brooks said.

"Ricky (Minard) wanted the ball and I saw him behind me, but with only seconds left, I had to do something with it."

"I couldn't see the ball because they (the Ross players) were jumping in my face, all I could see was the net and everybody going crazy."

Brooks finished the game with 11 points, nine coming on 3-point shots. Minard led Mansfield with 25 points.

LAWN FERTILIZER SPECIALS	
24-04-06 Crabgrass Preventer	\$6.10
16#	
20-04-12 Lawn Food 18# bag, 5,000 sq. ft.	\$4.40 ea.
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18#	\$4.90
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WILD BIRD FEED PRICES	
• 25# bag Wild Bird Mix	\$4.75
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No corn	\$9.25
• Thistle Seed	.80 lb.
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Basketball

High School Boys

Mansfield 72, Ross 69 (2OT)

Division I District Semifinal

At Willard

ROSS — Terrence Jones 0-2-2, Juan Vela 9-1-21, Steve Dagg 8-4-20, Reggie Jones 4-6-14, Alfonso Vann 2-2-6, Bryan Root 3-0-6, totals 26-16-69

MANSFIELD — Aunre Shaw 6-0-13, John Brooks 3-2-11, Rick Minard 7-10-25, Maurice Bradley 1-2-4, Herman Davis 3-4-10, Carlos Smith 1-0-2, Lance Hood 3-0-6, Joe Allen 0-1-1, totals 24-19-72.

Ross	8	14	12	21	10	4	—	69
Mansfield	12	16	7	20	10	7	—	72

3-point goals: Ross 2 (Vela 2), Mansfield 5 (Brooks 3, Shaw, Minard). Rebounds: Ross 46 (R. Jones 10). Mansfield 40 (Davis 9). Turnovers: Ross 28, Mansfield 17.

Records: Mansfield 21-1, Ross 17-5