



Fremont Ross baseball players gather on the mound Thursday as they try to rally in the fifth inning of their game against Anthony Wayne.

JONATHON BIRD/NEWS-MESSAGER

Wayne too much for Ross

Little Giants pitcher Harkness makes the Generals work for win

By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

BOWLING GREEN — Ross pitcher TJ Harkness had one of Division I's top teams in a situation it's rarely found itself in during this spring campaign.

Entering the bottom of the fifth inning, the Little Giants' ace hadn't yet allowed fourth-ranked Anthony Wayne a hit with his

team holding a one-run lead.

But a six-run fifth by the Generals brought an end to Harkness' night and Ross's run in the post-season as AW went on to a 7-1 victory in a sectional final game played at Bowling Green's Carter Park. The Generals (20-1) are the only team in Division I with fewer than two losses — will play Ashland (19-2) Thursday back at Carter Park in a 7 p.m. district semifinal contest.

"(TJ) gave us every opportunity to win a baseball game," Little Giants coach Mark King said of Harkness, who went 4 1/3 innings, giving up five unearned runs on

three hits with four strikeouts and a walk.

"When he was on, he was on. He threw a nice game when he was on. He flirted with some problems with his control off and on, but his stuff was nasty all night."

Harkness hit six total batters in the game. Three of those came in the first inning as AW loaded up the bases with two outs. However, Harkness got Josh Lindke to go down swinging to end the inning.

The Generals went down in order in the second inning, before Harkness got himself in trouble again in the third thanks to back-to-back beanings.

He balked, moving both runners to second and third, then struck out AW's three-hole hitter Reed Allen for the first out. AW tried the squeeze play to get a run in, but a failed bunt attempt by Hunter Lonslett left leadoff hitter Deion Tansel out to dry. The threat ended with Lonslett hitting into a pop-up.

"He was doing a nice job of keeping us off-balance, and we were struggling with him," Generals coach Mark Nell said of Harkness. "We haven't played a full game in over a week now and

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that was a concern coming in. But you got to give (Harkness) credit. He got out of some jams and they made some plays early."

Hits weren't much easier to come by for Ross (14-10). Generals' ace Jake Chipka, who came in with a 7.0 record and 0.42 earned run average, was tossing his typical game. As usual, he was nothing overpowering, just making the opposition put the ball in play and letting his defense make plays. He finished with four strikeouts, while giving up six hits and one walk.

"Jake always wants the ball," Nell said. "He just likes to pitch. He keeps hitters off-balance and he spots the ball on guys. His location is tremendous."

Little Giants' catcher Jordan Garcia drilled a hard liner down the line at third in the first inning. But a diving catch to his right by Generals' third baseman Justin

Curry took away what most likely would've been extra bases. Clay Barron singled in the second and Harkness had a leadoff single up the middle in the third.

"We had some loud outs tonight," King said. "The kids had great at-bats."

Ross couldn't advance a runner past first base until it finally strung some hits together in the fifth inning. Barron singled to second and advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt by Brandon Weiker. Spencer Conklin singled to put runners on the corners for Bryce McConnell, whose hit scored pinch runner Heaven Frey for a 1-0 lead.

"They put some pressure on us," Nell said. "Then we finally hit some groundballs and got into a little bit of our bunting game for some nice plays."

Bad innings have plagued the Little Giants all year and in the fifth, timely mistakes came back to bite them again. Two misplayed groundballs to the left side of the

infield gave AW runners at first and second to lead off the inning. Allen's fielder's choice a batter later with the bases loaded tied the game, before Matt Olsavsky's RBI single gave the Generals a 2-1 lead.

"When you get a chance to take away an out, you got to take away an out against a team of that caliber," King said. "That's what killed us tonight. We gave them a couple extra opportunities and before you know it (AW) put up a six-spot."

"That's been the story of our year."

Tyler Wolf relieved Harkness and surrendered a run on two hits. He struck out one and walked one in 1 1/2 innings of work. Barron and Conklin led the Little Giants at the plate, both singling twice.

"I'm extremely proud of the kids," King said. "We knew we were the underdog coming in, but we came off the bus with the right attitude and the right intensity and they came out playing."

Email Kevin Shields at kshields@gannett.com.