

2005 Division I Sectional Tournament

PREVIEW CAPSULES

DIVISION I

Fremont Ross (8-12) vs. Mansfield Madison (9-11)

Where: Willard

When: 6:15 p.m.

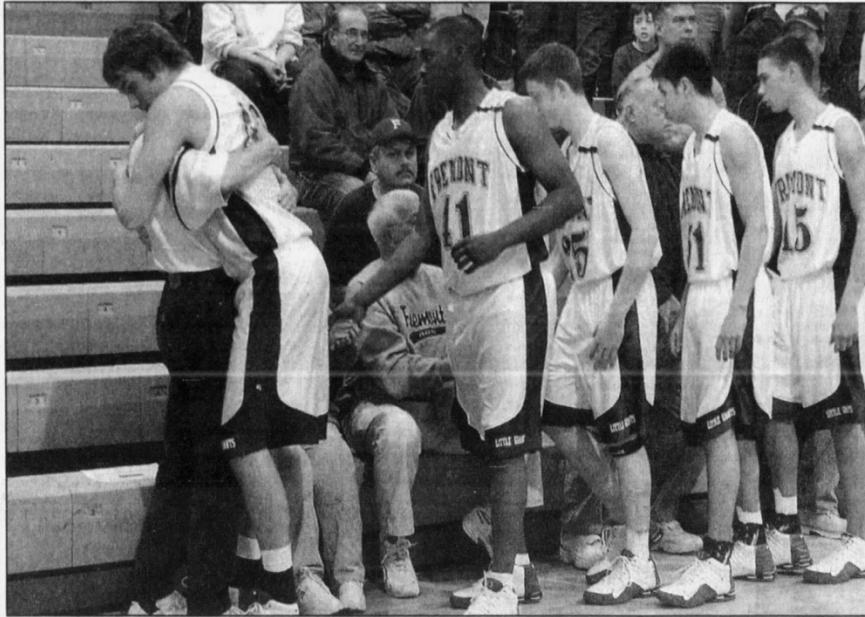
Previous result: Not applicable

Next: Vs. the winner of today's Tiffin Columbian-Sandusky matchup at 8 p.m. Friday at Willard.

Outlook: Ross could have very easily finished the regular season on a five-game winning streak after losing to Lima Senior, but the Little Giants allowed Toledo Rogers and Sandusky to mount second-half rallies. Ross already has two more wins than it did last season. Aaron Opelt has recently rejoined the starting lineup after recovering from a shoulder injury and has shown flashes of brilliance. Ross coach Mark Gedeon runs his offense through post stars Fred Shearon and Adam Gries. Shearon leads the team in scoring and rebounding. Joe Diller is a blue-collar coach's dream with the size to post up and a deft shooting touch from outside. Eight of the Giants' losses this year have come by seven points or fewer.

FREMONT ROSS 65, MANSFIELD MADISON 49

'About Billy'



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

FREMONT ROSS SENIOR Fred Shearon hugs Bill Stierwalt during introductions in the Little Giants' Division I sectional opener against Mansfield Madison. Stierwalt's son, Billy, was the team manager for Ross the last three years. Billy died Tuesday after a long battle with Muscular Dystrophy.

Emotional victory follows the loss of a good friend

By NICK MATHEWS
Sports Editor

WILLARD — Before every home game for the last three years, the Fremont Ross boys basketball players sprinted to a corner of the gym where Billy Stierwalt, watched from his wheelchair.

During pregame introductions, the Little Giants always hugged the 18-year-old Stierwalt, showing their love and appreciation for their team manager.

On Tuesday, Stierwalt died after a long battle with muscular dystrophy.

On Wednesday, the heavy-hearted Little Giants traveled to face Mansfield Madison in a Division I sectional opener.

On the bus ride to Willard, Ross coach Mark Gedeon received a call on his cell phone from Stierwalt's dad.

"I'm coming to the game," Bill Stierwalt said. "Can you save me a corner spot? Let's take care of Billy."

They did.

The Little Giants used a 15-0 second-half run to cruise to a memorable 65-49 victory over Madison.

"The way Billy conducted his life and how he did everything with all of his power — to be the best that he could be — was an example for all of us."

— Ross coach
Mark Gedeon

Joe Diller matched a career-high with 21 points and Fred Shearon tallied 17 points, 16 rebounds and 11 blocks — the first triple-double in Gedeon's 10 years at the helm — as the Little Giants notched their first tournament victory since 2001.

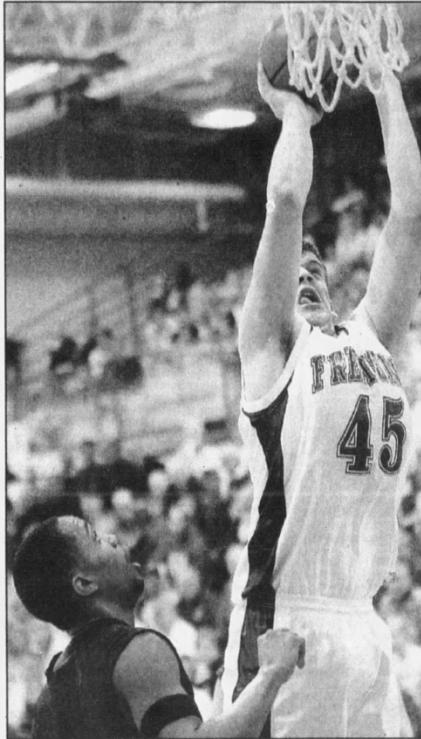
Diller scored eight consecutive points to start the key run that gave Ross a 52-34 lead with 6 minutes, 6 seconds remaining in the game, and the Little Giants improved to 9-12 and advanced to face Tiffin Columbian in Friday's sectional final.

"I think they just totally outplayed us," Madison coach Rob Peterson said. "I haven't seen them play like that before. I think they really came out and played with intensity and maturity."

"We didn't play poorly," he continued. "They just played so well. They deserved to win."

Peterson knew about the difficult week the Little Giants endured. He knew that his Rams (9-12) were simply in the way of incredibly motivated opponents.

See SHEARON, DILLER, B3



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

FREMONT ROSS senior Joe Diller takes a shot during the Little Giants' 65-49 victory over Mansfield Madison in a Division I sectional opener Wednesday. Diller scored a team-high 21 points.



News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

FREMONT ROSS coach Mark Gedeon gives instructions to his players during the Little Giants' 65-49 victory over Mansfield Madison in a Division I sectional opener Wednesday. Gedeon's squad endured a difficult week. Team manager Billy Stierwalt died on Tuesday.

Shearon, Diller lead Little Giants to emotional victory

Continued From B1

"They shoved us out of the way pretty easily, too," he said.

With 45 seconds left, Gedeon substituted for Shearon. The Ross senior received a rousing applause from the Little Giant fans.

"That was an all-Ohio performance," Peterson said.

Added Shearon: "Any time you lose someone that close to you, it's tough. It's something that you have to use to stay focused. That's something we did tonight."

Shearon tallied six points, four rebounds and four blocks in the first quarter as the Little Giants built a 14-8 lead. They never trailed.

Madison got within 33-32 midway through the third quarter. The Rams trailed 37-34 before Diller took control and started the huge

run.

"Diller really hurt us offensively," Peterson said. "We just couldn't get a key stop when we needed it to get us over the hump. Diller was a big part of that."

Soon after Shearon was pulled, Diller was substituted for and received a huge applause.

A pregame substitution was the most touching moment of the evening.

During introductions, the Little Giants ran to Bill Stierwalt, sitting in the corner.

They gave him a hug.

"An incredible family," Gedeon said of the Stierwalt family. "Incredible people."

Billy Stierwalt was Gedeon's manager for the last three seasons. He ran the clock during practices, keeping them organized.

"Billy always wanted to be a part of a team, and there is no question that he was part of this team for three years."

Added Diller: "He was a blast at practice.

We would tease each other in practice. He likes Michigan, and I like Ohio State. I always gave him a hard time. It was fun having him around. He was great for us.

"He was a good guy," Diller added. "It's sad to see him go."

The Little Giants wore black tape on their jerseys in honor of Stierwalt.

Gedeon, though, said he steered away from a "Win-one-for-the-Gipper speech."

"We weren't trying to win this game for Billy," Gedeon said. "We were trying to win the game about Billy. I think there's a difference."

"The way Billy conducted his life and how he did everything with all of his power — to be the best that he could be — was an example for all of us," he continued. "We as people and basketball players have to have that same attitude. When you get that opportunity to do the best you can with the best attitude possible ... that's what Billy was about."

High school boys

Division I sectional
At Willard

Ross 65, Mansfield Madison 49

Madison — Swigart 3-7 0-0 8, Maxey 5-18 2-4 12, Brown 5-12 0-0 12, Jones 4-18 3-3 12, Haverdick 0-3 1-2 1, Steele 1-2 2-2 4, Megger 0-5 0-0 0. Totals 18-65 8-11 49

Ross — Fred Shearon 8-14 1-1 17, Adam Gries 4-6 1-2 9, Joe Diller 8-13 2-3 21, Aaron Opelt 1-7 0-0 2, Cory Clayton 2-5 5-6 10, Robbie Hall 1-1 0-0 2, Scott King 0-2 0-0 0, Travis Miller 0-0 2-2 2, Traveyon Wolverton 1-2 0-0 2. Totals 25-50 11-14 65

Madison 8 16 10 15 — 49

Ross 14 15 16 20 — 65

3-point goals — Ross 4-15 (Diller 3-6, Opelt 0-2, Clayton 1-4, King 0-2, Wolverton 0-1), Madison 5-18 (Swigart 2-5, Maxey 0-2, Brown 2-5, Jones 1-3, Megger 0-3)

Turnovers — Ross 16, Madison 9

Rebounds — Shearon 16

Blocks — Shearon 11

Records — Ross 9-12, Madison 9-12

TIFFIN COLUMBIAN 54, ROSS 37

Slow start dooms Little Giants

By MATTHEW HORN

Sports Writer

WILLARD — Adam Gries undoubtedly took heed with his coach's message Friday.

The Fremont Ross junior responded to Mark Gedeon's halftime challenge with 15 of his game-high 17 points, but Tiffin Columbian scored the first 10 points of the game and never allowed the Little Giants within four thereafter in a 54-37 Division I sectional championship victory.

"Adam was the player by far that most accepted the challenge at the half," Gedeon said of Gries, who grabbed 10 rebounds. "He attacked the rim and got af-

ter rebounds. He was really assertive on the boards. We need Adam in that aggressive mindset at all times.

"We were very tentative and slow in transition," Gedeon continued. "We gave up too many offensive rebounds. We want our kids to be aggressive."

The Little Giants finished the season 9-13, and Tiffin Columbian advanced to face Mansfield Senior in a district semifinal.

Gries scored 10 of the Little Giants' 11 fourth-quarter points demonstrating an ability to crash the rim and a soft touch.

"He's pretty fluid and natural with his moves," Ross senior Fred Shearon said.

"You saw what he did tonight. If he can average more than eight shots and be determined to get to the hole, who knows what he's capable of."

Gedeon said Ross spent the first half finding the space on the floor where Columbian wasn't rather than fighting with it for the prime real estate.

"They earned what they got," he said. "They were the more physical, more aggressive team. They ran their gameplan better than we did. There's no question we came out flat. N

See GEDEON'S, B2

High School Boys

Division I
at Willard

Tiffin Columbian 54, Ross 37

For Columbian — Tyler Scott 3-4 4-4
10, John Ducsay 1-3 0-1 2, Ben Porter 4-
9 4-5 13, Derek Rinehart 3-7 1-2 7,
Robert Kisabeth 5-7 1-3 11, Jason Flo-
rence 0-1 0-0 0, Brady Decker 0-2 1-2 1,
Josh Moore 3-4 3-3 10. Totals 19-38 14-
20 54.

For Ross — Aaron Opelt 2-4 0-0 5,
Cory Clayton 0-4 0-0 0, Adam Gries 8-13
1-1 17, Joe Diller 2-9 0-0 5, Fred Shearon
3-8 3-4 9, Travayon Wolverton 0-4 1-2 1,
Scott King 0-1 0-0 0, Travis Miller 0-1 0-0
0. Totals 15-45 5-7 37.

Columbian 15 7 17 15 — 54

Ross 7 8 11 11 — 37

3-point goals — Ross 2 (Opelt 1-2,
Clayton 0-2, Diller 1-5, Wolverton 0-4,
King 0-1, Miller 0-1), Columbian 2 (Duc-
say 0-1, Porter 1-3, Moore 1-1).

Rebounds — Ross 19 (Gries 10,
Shearon 5). Columbian 31 (Kisabeth 10,
Porter 6, Rinehart 5). Steals — Ross
(Diller 4). Blocks — Ross (Shearon 4,
Gries 2).

Turnovers — Ross 16, Columbian 15.

Record — Ross 9-13.

