

1998 Season Review

Ross opens by topping Bears

Genoa survives Rockets in three sets

News-Messenger reports

CASTALIA — Fremont Ross opened its season on a good note, with a 15-7, 8-15, 15-12 win Tuesday over Margaretta.

"We are really excited," said coach Maggie Bliss. "It was a good way to start the season. Our play under pressure was excellent."

Jodi Fick had 16 kills, Heidi Haslinger added 11 points and five aces and Krissy Lotycz had 35 assists to kill.

Bliss noted the play of Kira Wojdyla, primarily a back row player, who came in and played well in the front row.

"Her form under pressure was excellent," the coach said.

The Little Giants will have two weeks off before facing Great Lakes League-rival Oregon Clay.

"We will use the two weeks to work on conditioning and weight lifting and basic fundamentals."

VOLLEYBALL

in and played pretty well.

"We still have a ways to go. It was a little sloppier than I'd like, but the girls played pretty hard and it was a good first match. We were a little lucky at times, but that's OK too."

Jodi Harbal and Stacy Honaker served for 15 and eight service points, respectively, while Sara Schimmoeller had five kills and Ashley Spangler added two kills for the Rockets, 0-2.

"We did well," Oak Harbor coach Melanie Thorbahn said. "They gave 110 percent and really worked well as a team. If this continues, hopefully we could be a little competition for other SBC teams."

Oak Harbor won the reserve match 4-15, 15-8, 15-4.

Oak Harbor travels to Margaretta and Genoa hosts Lakota on Thursday.

Oregon Clay 15-12-15, Ross 7-15-11

OREGON — Jodi Fick's 11 kills couldn't keep the Little Giants from falling in their conference opener at Clay, 7-15, 15-12, 11-15.

"I think our inexperience had a lot to do with it," said Ross coach Karrie Gardner. "We had two girls with varsity experience, Clay started six seniors."

Erin Barr served 11 points with an ace, Krissy Lotycz doled out 21 assists and Rachelle Domiray had four digs for Ross, which fell to 1-1.

"Rachelle Domiray came off the bench and had a great game," Gardner said. "She really gave us what we needed."

Domiray's play was indicative of a strong Little Giant defensive performance, but Gardner said the offense needs work going into Thursday's home match against Fostoria.

"We played great defensively, but we couldn't get it going offensively. Jodi couldn't do it all," she said. "Other teams know Jodi's our big gun, and they do what they can to shut her down, but Jodi made good decisions."

Ross blocks Fostoria

Daughter wins battle of the Lotycz family

By MICHAEL PIDANICK
Staff writer

For Krissy Lotycz, Fremont Ross's 15-1, 15-7 win Tuesday over visiting Fostoria was a little more special than the average win.

Not only did she and the Little Giants earn their first Great Lakes League win, they also beat her father, Steve, Fostoria's coach.

"I felt a little scared," the freshman said. "I knew he was watching me, and I knew if I made a good play, it would make him mad."

"But it was fun. He's been my coach all my life and I wanted to show him that we were better than his team."

Lotycz served for 16 points and added 11 assists, making her father proud.

"I've been teaching her since she was this tall," Steve Lotycz said, holding his hand waste high. "It was interesting."

Thursday was also Parent's Night, which added to the special evening for the Lotycz. Each player was introduced with her parents or guardians. But, being introduced with the opposing coach didn't bother Krissy Lotycz.

"I was proud to walk with him," she said. "I was happy they decided to have Parents Night when we played them."

The Little Giants improved to 2-0 overall with the win.

"I think we played really well," said senior Jodi Fick. "We were able to dictate the game. We didn't play down to our competition. We weren't over-cocky and we kept our heads on."

Fick led the Little Giants with six kills and freshman Allison Decker added four. Lotycz contributed 16 assists.

Ross was never threatened in the first game. With Lotycz serving, the Little Giants jumped out to a quick 11-0 lead and cruised to a 15-1 win. Erin Barr had three kills and Decker had two in the game.

Lotycz served Ross to a quick 4-0 lead in the second game, and the Little Giants opened up a 10-2 lead.

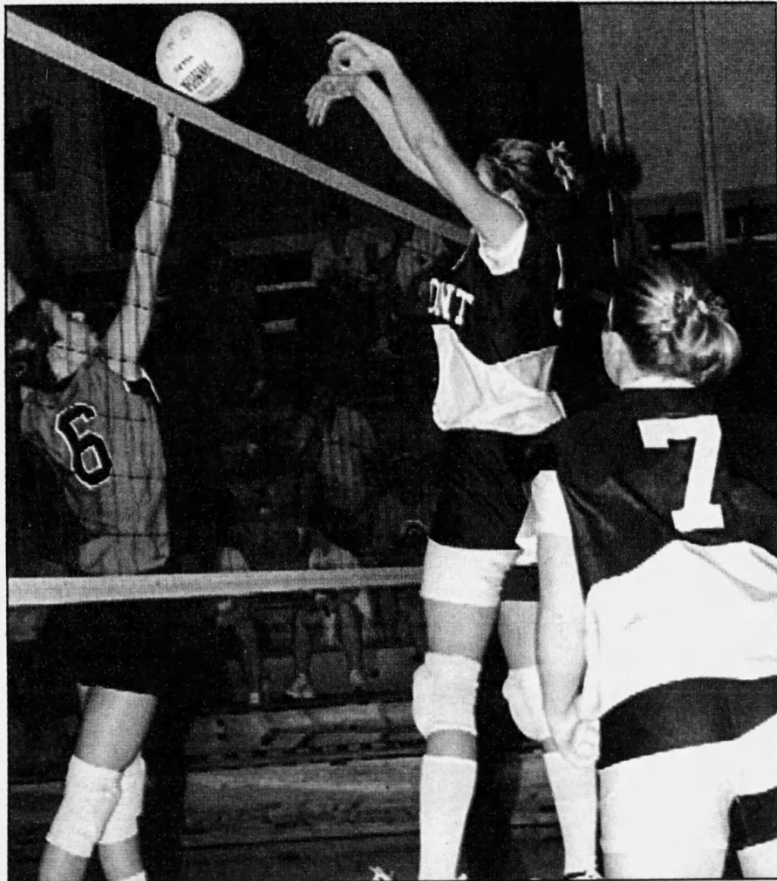
But the Redmen refused to quit, and closed the gap to 10-6. But the Little Giants proved to be too tough, and took five of the last six points.

"After we had beaten them in the first game, it would have been easy to lose our concentration in the second," said Ross coach Karrie Gardner. "But we came out just as hard."

The Little Giants rebounded from Tuesday's tough three-set loss to Oregon Clay.

"I thought we came back well from Tuesday's loss," said Ross co-coach Maggie Bliss.

The Little Giants play in the Irish Invitational Saturday at Toledo Central Catholic.



News-Messenger/Frank Beier

ALLISON DECKER of Ross blocks Erin Kamisky of Fostoria in the Little Giants' win.

Top-ranked Chieftains silence Streaks

By SCOTT TAPPA
Sports editor

When the first Ohio High School Volleyball Coaches Association poll was released on Wednesday, Hopewell-Loudon rested atop Division IV. Coach Dave Reinhart said his team's primary goal this season was to retain the No. 1 ranking wire-to-wire.

The Chieftains took a big step toward achieving that goal Thursday night, beating St. Joseph Central Catholic 15-2, 15-2.

"I don't think there's anything they don't do well," said St. Joe coach Brian Miller, whose team fell to 4-3. "Their coverage is great, their blocks are there, they get touches on just about every hit."

Di Di Reynolds was the top Hopewell-Loudon hitter early in the first game, recording a sideout kill and the kill which gave her team a 5-0 lead. From there, Beth Cook took over, converting four of setter Carrie Norris's sets into kills.

The Crimson Streaks tried to claw their

way back into the match with a Sally Fey ace and a Chieftain net violation, but the points were not enough.

"We never give up," Miller said. "We've come back before from 14-1, and this year we almost came back from an eight-point deficit, so we're never going to quit."

Annette Kupka had two kills in the first set, while setter Jessica Ash had six assists. Norris, who has committed verbally to play at the University of Pittsburgh, had 13 assists in the set, while Susie Norris and Beth Cook had three kills apiece.

Hopewell-Loudon got off to another fast start in the second set, racing to a 10-0 lead on Reynolds' three kills. Reinhart continued to rotate all 11 players — nine recorded kills — and the Chieftain attack did not slow.

"No matter who I sub in, they play the game well," Reinhart said.

See ST. JOE, B2

Little Giants 1-2 in Toledo tourney

St. Joe splits at New Riegel

News-Messenger reports

TOLEDO — After a tournament-opening victory against Wauseon, Fremont Ross dropped its last two matches at the Irish Invitational Saturday.

"We played fairly well against Wauseon," said Ross coach Maggie Bliss, whose team was led by Jodi Fick's nine kills and Krissy Lotycz's 21 assists. "We got off to a slow start, but we came out of it all right."

After the 15-4, 15-10 win over Wauseon, Ross fell 15-8, 15-8 to Perrysburg, a loss which didn't upset Bliss.

"Perrysburg has a really nice team," she said. "I was pleased with the way we played. Even though we lost, I thought we played really well."

Fick also had nine kills against Perrysburg, while Lotycz had 17 assists.

In the finale, Ross dropped a demoralizing match to host Toledo Central Catholic.

"We fell apart against Central Catholic," Bliss said. "We couldn't get our offense going at all."

Erin Barr had six kills against the hosts, while Heidi Haslinger served for seven points.

Ross visits Toledo Whitmer Tuesday in a Great Lakes League match.

New Riegel Invit.

NEW RIEGEL — St. Joseph Central Catholic

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dropped an opening-match decision to Arcadia 15-8, 15-5, but bounced back to beat Fostoria 15-7, 12-15, 15-8.

The Crimson Streaks improved to 5-4.

Woodmore 6-15-15,

Lakota 15-10-10

ELMORE — Laura Runion had nine kills and eight assists, while Laurie Bergman had eight kills and five assists as the Wildcats beat the Raiders.

Renee Brickner led Lakota with four aces, while Jenny Hammer served for 11 points.

Woodmore improves to 1-4, while Lakota falls to 2-6.

Old Fort 15-15,

McComb 9-0

Old Fort 15-15,

Miller City 10-7

Randi Whitman had 33 assists, Jennice Egbert had 12 kills and Rachel McCalla had 10 kills to lead the Stockaders, which improved to 4-2.

Perkins 8-15-15,

Bettsville 15-6-5

Danbury 15-15,

Bettsville 12-9

Stephanie Feller had nine kills and LaVonna Williams had eight in the Bobcats' loss to Perkins, while Williams led the way with seven kills in the loss to Danbury.

Ross 15-15, Whitmer 12-9

TOLEDO — Jodi Fick had 15 kills to lead the Little Giants to a 15-12, 15-9 win over Toledo Whitmer in a Great Lakes League match.

“I was really pleased with our performance tonight,” said Ross coach Karrie Gardner. “We took an early lead and got off to a better start (than in Saturday’s Irish Invitational).”

Krissy Lotycz had 11 assists and Rachelle Domiray had five digs for Ross, which improved to 4-3 overall, 2-1 in the GLL.

“We’ve got to do a better job of playing when we have the ball,” Gardner said.

Fremont Ross

Coaches: Maggie Bliss and Karrie Gardner

Overall record: 4-4

League record: 2-2

Key players: Jodi Fick, Krissy Lotycz, Allison Decker, Rachelle Domiray, Brittany Brudzinski, Erin Barr, Rebecca Brown, Tiffany Sweeny, Kira Wojdyla, Heidi Haslinger, Jessica Fick

Coach Bliss's outlook: "We're really just getting into the season now. Everybody had a head start, since we had that two-week layoff. We're a young team, but we're definitely headed in the right direction. We're making a lot of mental mistakes, but as the season goes on, we are only going to get better."

Ross fares well against state powers

News-Messenger reports

Fremont Ross went 1-2 Saturday, defeating Northwood while falling to Mansfield Madison and Stow.

"We made some adjustments from what we'd been running," said Ross coach Maggie Bliss. "We made some changes in the lineup."

The Little Giants fell 15-10, 15-7 to Madison, the defending state champions

ranked No. 1 in Division I, beat the Lady

Rangers 8-15, 15-9, 15-11 and lost 12-15, 15-13, 11-15 to Stow, the state's seventh-ranked team which lost in the state semifinals to Madison last year.

"We were pleased with the way we played on Saturday," Bliss said. "We knew Saturday would be tough, and we played extremely well.

"We gelled together as a team."

Ross hosts rival Oregon Clay Tuesday.

VOLLEYBALL

Ross surges past Clay

Fick carries Little Giants in GLL

By SCOTT TAPPA
Sports editor

The last time the Fremont Ross volleyball team visited Oregon Clay, senior Jodi Fick saw something interesting hanging in the hallways.

She saw stick figures. Stick figures with their eyes crossed out, tongues hanging out, emblazoned with Fick's No. 7.

"I stole a couple of them," admitted Fick with a sly smile.

Tuesday night, Fick and the Little Giants stole an important Great Lakes League match from the rival Eagles, winning 15-4, 12-15, 15-5 at the Purple Pit.

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Fick recorded 15 kills and six aces as Ross evened its record at 6-6, avenging the loss at Clay earlier this season.

"This is the best game of the year, I love playing Clay," the senior said. "This was my last time, so we were going to win."

A win was not a certainty after the visitors evened the match with a 15-12 second set victory. After rallying from an eight-point deficit to tie the score at 12-12, Ross watched Clay rattle off three straight points to forcing a deciding third set.

Enter the serving of Fick and freshman Erin Barr. Barr started the set with a pair of aces and a kill, and served the last two points — including another ace.

"I thought they improved on their serving, and the one kid who kept hitting the hard top-spin serves, she really hurt us," said Clay coach David Habegger.

Barr, who added five kills to her three aces, impressed coach Karrie Gardner with her mature play.

"You cannot tell that girl's a freshman," said Gardner. "She never gets rattled, she just hits and hits. She hits one out, she comes right back."

Taking a cue from her teammate, Fick mixed up her service approach, first going deep, then working the sides. The result was nine straight points, transforming a tight 3-3 battle into a laughter.

"A couple of our top-spin servers, they were really coming in on, so I figured they were coming in on me, too, and I started serving deep," Fick said.



News-Messenger/Frank Beier

See ROSS, B4

JODI FICK records one of her 15 kills in the Little Giants' 15-4, 12-15, 15-5 win over Clay.

Ross beats Clay in GLL

Continued from B1

Ross coach Maggie Bliss said a strong service game completes Fick's offensive arsenal.

"I think that up until this year that's been one of the weakest parts of her game," said Bliss. "She's really concentrated on that, and look what she's done."

In the opening set, Fick concentrated on hitting and blocking. Eight kills and two blocks later, the Little Giants had a surprisingly easy 15-4 victory.

"They're a good blocking team, so I have to give a lot of credit to my setters," said Fick, referring to Krissy Lotycz and Tiffany Sweeney. "I tried to go line a lot, they usually left that open."

The improvement of Lotycz, a freshman who recorded 13 assists, and Sweeney, a junior who had 12 assists, has been notable in recent games, said Gardner. The pair's play was key to strong performances against state-ranked Mansfield Madison and Stow on Saturday, performances the Ross coaches believe carried over to Tuesday's match.

"I think, because of Saturday, we played well tonight," Gardner said. "We had a lot of confidence after last weekend."

Conversely, Habegger said the Eagles were tired from Saturday matches against Toledo Central Catholic, Newark Catholic and Archbold.

"It was a long day, and we played very well, but tonight we just played like we were exhausted," said Habegger. "We were just really slow, a half-second behind the play mentally. That's not taking anything away from Fremont, they played very well."

"The saw a weakness and took it to us."

Ross hosts Findlay Thursday.

Ross loses big third-set lead

By **SCOTT TAPPA**
Sports editor

Findlay's Samantha Williams stood anxiously at the south end of the Purple Pit, waiting to serve what would be the winning point in the Trojans' 12-15, 15-9, 15-13 victory over Fremont Ross on Thursday, and the 5-foot-10 senior dribbled the ball slowly.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Against the backdrop of an otherwise eerily quiet crowd, Williams' dribbling sounded like inclement weather brewing in the distance, the calm before the storm.

Truth was, the storm had already past.

Trailing 11-1 in the deciding third set, Findlay scored 12 straight points to grab the lead, then fought off a late Ross rally to improve to 4-2 in the Great Lakes League, 7-6 overall. Ross falls to 6-7.

"I just told them I expected them to win it," said Findlay coach Jackie Weaver. "When we had the timeout, I told them, 'I still expect you guys to win this game.' They looked at me like, 'We're down 11-1,' but they went out and played hard."

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Jodi Fick and Allison Decker had helped Ross build the 11-1 lead, Fick with a kill and a block and Decker with a kill and two blocks. Three Findlay hitting errors provided the final points of the cushion, prompting Weaver's timeout, and the insertion of Beth Dolce for Williams.

"At that point we said, 'You've got them where you want them, you just have to finish it,'" said Ross coach Karrie Gardner. "We had the serve, it was 11-1, it was in our hands, our game, and we didn't get it done.

"We were winning 11-1, acting like we were the ones who were down."

The first Ross serve after the timeout went into the net, setting the stage for 10 Trojan points with setter Lauren Speelman serving. Findlay would score two more points before Erin Barr's ace temporarily stopped the bleeding.

A Findlay net call would tie the game at 13-13, but a Ross double hit and Katie Wendt kill ended the match.

"I really thought that after the weekend and after what happened with Clay, we were done with this (getting) off to a bad start, done with this playing tentative," Gardner said.

Ross got off to a slow start, trailing 8-4 in the first set after shanking a serve. But a Rachelle Domiray ace and two Findlay hitting tied the set at 10-10, and three Fick aces gave the Little Giants the room they needed.

Fick led the Little Giants with 11 kills and five aces, while Barr had seven kills and four aces. Setters Krissy Lotycz and Tiffany Sweeney had 10 and nine assists, respectively, while Decker had three blocks.

Ross hosts the Fremont Invitational on Saturday.

Ross splits pair

News-Messenger reports

Fremont Ross continued its off-again, on-again routine in Saturday's Fremont Invitational, losing 17-15, 10-15, 7-15 to Bowling Green and defeating Toledo Bowsher 15-6, 17-19, 15-11.

"The Bowling Green game, we pulled our old 'get off to a bad start,' and we couldn't get it together," said Ross coach Karrie Gardner, whose team improved to 7-8. "Then, they played excellent against Bowsher."

In the Bowling Green loss, Jodi Fick led the Little Giants with 11 kills, Tiffany Sweeney dished out 14 assists and Allison Decker had four block assists.

The play of Decker and Rebecca Brown was one of the major positives of the Invitational, Gardner said.

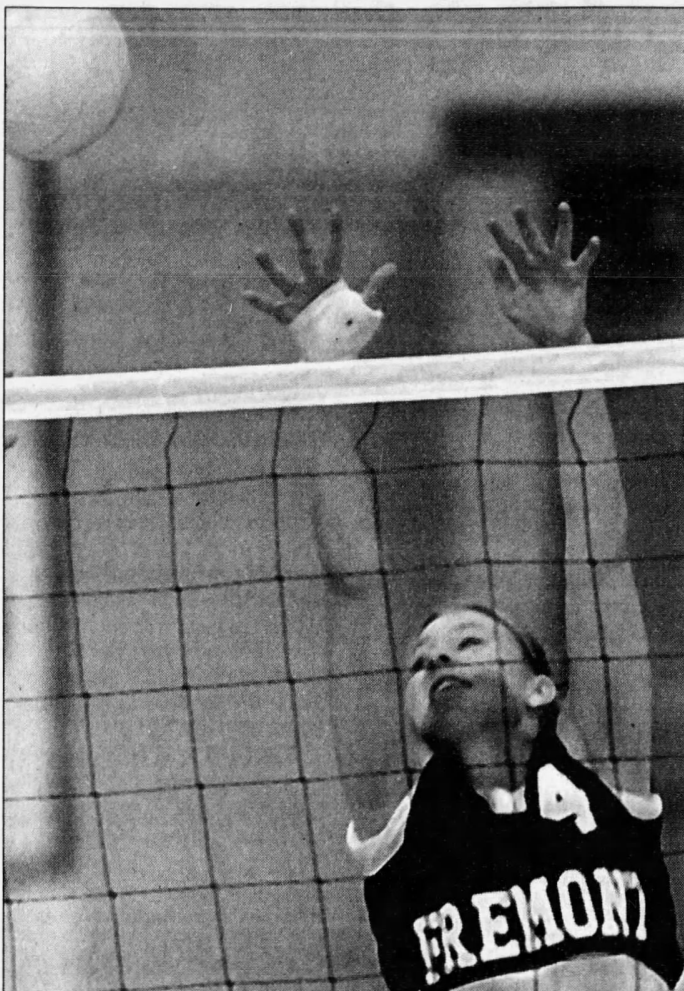
"We're really excited about that, we've been trying to get our middles more involved," she said.

In the Bowsher win, Fick led the Little Giants with 14 kills, Decker had three solo blocks and four block assists, while Brown had four block assists.

Gardner also praised the play of defensive specialist Rachelle Domiray.

"I asked the girls after the Bowsher game 'What did you do different?' because they played so much better," Gardner said.

Ross got a boost from the setting of freshman Jessica



News-Messenger/Frank Beier

ERIN BARR of Ross gets a hand on the ball during the Fremont Invitational Saturday. The Little Giants split games with Bowling Green and Toledo Bowsher.

Fick, a backup setter who usually plays front row.

"We hit a lot better off of her," Gardner said.

"She went in and played really well. She was the difference in the game."

Catholic Schools Tournament

St. Joseph Central Catholic went 2-1 on Saturday, beating Norwalk and Cardinal Stritch, while losing to St. Wendelin.

Jessica Ash served 25 points for the Crimson Streaks, who improved to 10-7. Molly Yeager had 25 assists, while Annette Kupka had 18 kills and 13 digs for St. Joe.

Woodmore 12-15-15, Elmwood 15-0-10

Dayna Brown had 12 points to lead Woodmore past Elmwood.

Brown and teammate Nicole McCarthy were also 13-for-14 in service reception for the Wildcats, who improved to 4-7. McCarthy chipped in 11 kills.

Old Fort - W. Res. - Vermilion - Carey

The Stockaders swept their opposition Saturday, beating Western Reserve 15-4, 15-7, Vermilion 15-7, 15-12 and Carey 15-11, 15-2.

Rachel McCalla had 19 kills and 29 points for Old Fort, which improved to 12-2.

Ross 15-15, Fostoria 9-2

FOSTORIA — Jodi Fick had 10 kills to lead the Little Giants, who improved to 8-8. Rebecca Brown had three blocks and Krissy Lotycz 11 points for Ross, which beat the Redmen for the second time this season.

Ross tames Panthers

St. Joe wins at North Baltimore

By SCOTT TAPPA
Sports editor

Youth was served Thursday night at the Purple Pit, as the Fremont Ross volleyball team rolled past Toledo Whitmer 15-8, 15-1.

Fittingly enough, the serving was done by the Little Giants' youth.

In a quick Great Lakes League match, Ross pounded out 13 aces — all but one recorded by freshmen and sophomores — to improve to 9-8.

"We work on that all the time in practice, serving it deep, serving the corners, and it showed tonight," said freshman Erin Barr, whose three aces to start the first game set the tone for the night.

In addition to Barr's three aces, sophomore Rachelle Domiray had four, sophomore Kira Wojdyla had three, freshman Krissy Lotycz had two and junior Heidi Haslinger had one.

"If they would serve with confidence all the time, then it

would be a great weapon," said Ross coach Karrie Gardner. "A lot of times, if they miss a couple of those in warmups, they're not going to hit it that hard in the game."

No such hesitations were present Thursday night. Barr's aces staked the Little Giants to an early 3-0 lead, and after Whitmer rallied to grab a 7-5 lead, Domiray's tough serving, including two aces, separated Ross from its hosts.

In addition to her strong serving, Domiray impressed her coaches with her defensive play.

"We spend a lot of time in practice on defense and serves, that's how you win games," Gardner said. "You've got to pass the ball, and I thought Rachelle Domiray just played incredible defense."

Ross passed well all night, making life easier for setters Tiffany Sweeney and Jessica Fick, who combined for 17 assists in the brief match. In the Little Giants' three-setter rotation — Lotycz is the third — accurate passing is even more important than usual.

"I think our passing was right on target," said Fick. "I really didn't have to move for the ball."

Jessica's sister Jodi, who had eight kills, and Barr, who had seven kills, were the chief beneficiaries of the solid setting. When the Little Giants' hits weren't going down, sophomore middle blocker Allison Decker was there to clean up, finishing with three blocks.

"We've been on Allison a lot, because she's got so much ability, and she's really starting to become the player we know she can be," Gardner said. "If she blocks like that, we don't even need her to hit."

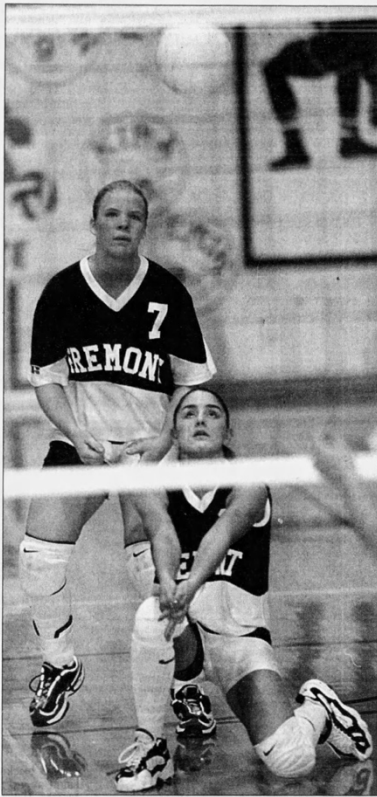
Still, coach Maggie Bliss would like to see her setters utilize Decker and Rebecca Brown with more frequency.

"We don't use our middles enough," she said. "When we have a perfect pass, we need to be going to our middles."

Ross hosts GLL rival Sandusky — ranked 12th in the state in the latest coaches poll — Tuesday at 7:30 p.m., and Gardner thinks that with the continued improvement of the young squad, the game will be better than the rout in Sandusky earlier this season.

"Our younger kids were the ones who were playing," Gardner said. "Erin Barr had a really good game, Rachelle Domiray had a really good game, Jessica Fick had a good game."

"That's a good sign when you've got your young players playing that well."



RACHELLE DOMIRAY passes the ball as Jodi Fick looks on. News-Messenger/Frank Beier

and 13-15 in the first game.

Jessica Heberling served six points in the second game, getting some quality playing time in the back row.

"We've still got to work on our passing and service reception," Miller said.

St. Joe hosts Mohawk on Parents' Night Tuesday, before hosting New Riegel on Thursday.

Lake 13-16-15, Lakota 15-14-13

MILLBURY — After winning a close first game, the Raiders lost two equally close game to lose the Suburban Lakes League match.

Megan Stouling and five aces and eight assists, Renee Brickner

had 14 kills, Jenny Hammer had nine assists and Jamie Ray had seven kills for Lakota, which falls to 3-13 overall, 3-9 in the SLL.

Woodmore 11-15-15, Elmwood 15-6-4

BLOOMDALE — Woodmore ran its record to 6-7 and 4-7 in the SLL with the 11-15, 15-5, 15-4 win over the Royals.

Laurie Bergman had eight kills and eight assists for the winners. Laura Runtion also scored six points on 9-for-10 serving and also went 35-for-36 hitting with 10 assists. She also was 19-for-20 hitting with three kills for Woodmore.

See ROCKETS, B4

School menus

All menus include milk.

Monday

Bettsville	No school.	Corn dog.
Clyde H.S.	Chicken nuggets, celery sticks, peaches, Spanish rice.	Broccoli/beans, fruit
middle, elementary	Chicken nuggets, celery sticks, peaches, Spanish rice.	Broccoli/green bean
Clyde St. Mary's	Cheese or pepperoni pizza, salad, pudding.	Hot dog brownie.
Fremont Ross	Breaded chicken nuggets or hoagy/beef sandwich.	Ham/cheese
Middle School	Breaded chicken nuggets or hoagy/beef sandwich.	Ham/cheese
Elementaries	Check school menu.	Check school menu.
Breakfast where served	Super cinnamon bun.	Granola bars
Gibsonburg	Chicken nuggets, peas, peaches, bread/butter.	Burrito, Sr. green bean
Lakota H.S.	Hot dog, baked beans, chips, mixed fruit.	Cheeseburger peaches.
Junior high	Hot dog, baked beans, chips, mixed fruit.	Cheeseburger peaches.
Central	Hot dog, baked beans, chips, mixed fruit.	Cheeseburger peaches.
East	Hot dog, baked beans, chips, mixed fruit.	Cheeseburger peaches.
West	Hot dog, baked beans, chips, mixed fruit.	Cheeseburger peaches.
Margaretta H.S.	Chicken patty or egg salad sandwich or cheeseburger deli.	Toasted fish/cheese
Bogart	Hot dog or chicken patty sandwich, corn, ice juice, tortilla chips.	Toasted w/peas.
Townsend	Hot dog, corn, fruit ice juice, chocolate cake.	Toasted c/peaches, d

Natural born hitter

Ross senior Fick wants the ball in the clutch

By SCOTT TAPPA
Sports editor

It's a hypothetical situation Jodi Fick loves to play out on a real life stage, the pressure-packed, all-eyes-on-you moment on which a volleyball match hinges.

Her Fremont Ross team could need a sideout in the worst way, it could need one more point to clinch a road win, it could be 6-3 in a pickup game in practice. It doesn't matter.

The Little Giants need a kill, and all eyes are on the 5-foot-8 senior, because no matter how much their coaches preach setting the middle, setters Tiffany Sweeney and Jessica Fick know they have the 1997 Great Lakes League player of the year at outside hitter, and she wants the ball.

"When it's a tough situation, I want the ball to go to me," Fick says.

All eyes on her. Her eyes are on the setter.

"I'm watching, watching, watching whoever sets," she says. "Usually we call (the play) before, and I run a shoot or a '2', sometimes a middle."

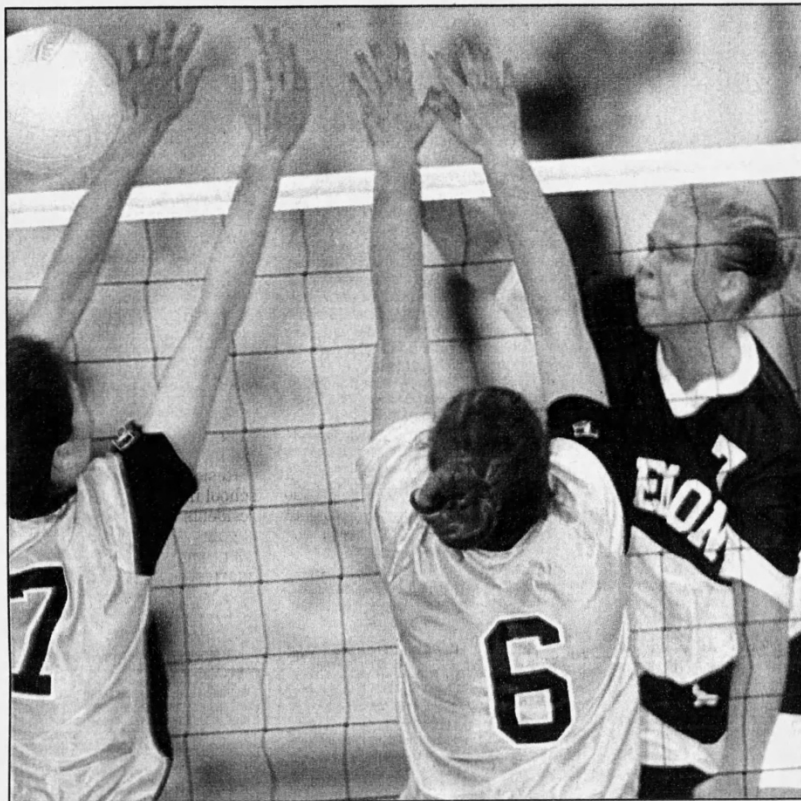
More often than not, Fick is going outside, and more often than not, so are two opposing blockers. Should her upcoming hit make it past these two roadblocks, four more defenders wait crouched, ready to keep the ball alive.

"I'm looking, and I'm always trying to find holes, because when you're 5-8, you have to find holes," Fick says with a laugh.

With the preliminary assessment of the upcoming attempt out of the way, Fick begins her approach, which, while one step longer than conventional volleyball wisdom would suggest, is necessary for what's about to happen.

"I use a four-step, and I think my approach is a very powerful one," she says. "I put a lot into it, because I have to."

Then, once airborne, Fick reevaluates the situation at hand, probing the defense in a process she says is now "automatic."



News-Messenger/Frank Beier

JODI FICK (7) has been a Fremont Ross volleyball mainstay at outside hitter for the past four seasons.

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Jodi Fick profile

School: Fremont Ross

Grade: Senior

Sports: Volleyball, basketball

Hobbies: Watching football and basketball games, relaxing with "Dem Bones" candy and a Mountain Dew Freeze

Family: Father: Joe; Mother: Jill; Sister: Jessica

"I'm looking for a hole in the block," she says. "If it's not there, I'm looking line. If that's not there I look to cut to the 10-foot line."

And then....

"I have a really quick arm swing," Fick says.

Sideout, match point, whatever, this week's News-Messenger Athlete of the Week has come through in the clutch again. Though ecstatic, no one around her is the least bit surprised.

"Whenever Jodi gets the ball, you know it's going in," says Brittany Brudzinski, Fick's Ross teammate and best friend since fourth grade at St. Ann's.

That Fick is a volleyball standout should come as no surprise. Fick's parents, Joe and Jill, have been members of the coaching community for quite some time, which may explain why Jodi had a volleyball in her hands at age 3, why she was winning passing drills at high school camps when she was in grade school.

Yet Fick's value to the Ross volleyball program extends far beyond her role as a left-side kill machine. Maybe she was once just an enthusiastic freshman with a big arm in her first varsity season, but now, in her fourth, she fills so many roles, she could fit in on Saturday Night Live.

For starters, on the court Fick is Ross's top defender and serve receiver, an underrated part of the game often overshadowed by the thundering hits.

"I think she definitely doesn't get enough credit for her defense," says Ross coach Karrie Gardner. "It amazes me every game: I think nobody's getting there, and out of nowhere comes Jodi digging it up."

Gardner and co-coach Maggie Bliss also see Fick digging up valuable nuggets of information during the match, casting her as the proverbial coach-on-the-court.

"When she's behind (freshman outside hitter) Erin Barr, for instance, you can hear her telling (Barr) what's open, because she reads the court so well," Bliss says. "She's talking to everybody the whole time she's out there, telling them things that we can't see, because we're not right there at that moment, so she's a teacher out there too."

See FICK, B3

Fick, Little Giants host No. 12 Sandusky tonight, Senior Night

Continued from B1

Perhaps most important is Fick's role as the Little Giants' emotional leader. For instance, after Ross dropped a tough GLL match in Sandusky earlier this year, it was Fick who drove home what Gardner and Bliss had been unsuccessfully trying to express.

Bliss: "After we lost to Sandusky, she was in the locker room with all those kids, and she just poured her heart out."

Gardner: "We'd been drilling the same thing over and over, and she just stepped up as a senior and a leader."

Bliss: "She cut that article out, made copies of it, hung it in all their lockers."

Patiently dealing with adversity has been crucial for Fick this season. After playing on a senior-dominated team in 1997, her 1998 season has been spent helping freshmen and sophomores grow accustomed to varsity-level volleyball.

"At the beginning of the season, we had a talk with her about how she was going to need to be patient, because we have such a young team," Bliss said. "I think she has done a tremendous job. She has been so patient where, I think, other kids would get really frustrated."

Goes with the territory, says Fick. After seeing how Amber Brenamen, now playing collegiately at Findlay, treated rookies, Fick wouldn't have it any other way.

"As a freshman, she really meant a lot," Fick says. "She stayed with me, and that's why I really try to get along with freshmen now, because I know how much of an impact she had on me."

Other players who have impacted Fick include:

■ Hopewell-Loudon setter Car-

"She loves the game so much."

— Brittany Brudzinski,
on teammate Jodi Fick

rie Norris, a Pittsburgh recruit who set Fick for four years in club play. "I really enjoyed hitting off her," Fick says.

■ Cleveland State's Michelle Smith, a former Ross teammate. "Michelle really helped me with my blocking," she says.

■ Emily Dowell, Fick's "dog" for three years on varsity. "We were 'Left Side for Life' for three years," Fick says. "We fed off each other, and I'd say we were the best left-side hitter combination in the state last year."

Next year, Fick, a prospective sports broadcaster, will likely land at Marshall, Dayton, Ohio, or Cleveland State, universities she has either visited or plans on visiting. Academically, Fick says OU has the edge, although Marshall would give her the opportunity to hit right away, and, as she says, "Michelle goes to Cleveland State."

Of more immediate concern is tonight's rematch with Sandusky, the 12th-ranked team in the state, according to Ohio coaches. It is also Senior Night for her and Brudzinski, the lone seniors on this year's squad.

"It will be sad, but it'll be the worst for her, because she's been around so long," said Brudzinski. "She loves the game so much."

So whether or not Fick and her teammates extinguish the "sour taste in our mouths" that lingered earlier this season, one thing has been made certain over the course of Fick's 40-plus games in the Purple Pit.

"She's definitely left her mark on Fremont Ross volleyball," Bliss says.

Not to mention the Purple Pit floor.

Ross rallies, can't catch Sandusky

Fick, Brudzinski play last match at home

By **SCOTT TAPPA**
Sports editor

Tuesday night was Senior Night for the Fremont Ross volleyball team, the last time Jodi Fick and Brittany Brudzinski would don their jerseys in the Purple Pit, and emotions were running like a river.

"It was total emotion," said Fick, who will become the Little Giants' first four-year letterwinner at season's end.

"Once I stepped out on that floor, it was like, 'This is my last time, I better make this memorable.'"

She did, with the help of her teammates and visiting Sandusky, which rebounded from an opening game loss to win 5-15, 15-10, 15-13. Ross falls to 9-9, while Sandusky improves to 15-15 overall, 8-1 in the Great Lakes League.

If Fick wanted something memorable, she got it in the deciding third game. Coming off an impressive run to close game two, Sandusky raced to a 10-1 lead early, capitalizing on several Ross mistakes and the hitting of Khaisha Alexander.

Yet Brudzinski's serving revitalized Ross, serving the first five points of a nine-point run which pulled the Little Giants even at 10-10.

"Brittany came in and served her tail off," Fick said. "I've never seen

Inside: Terra, high school volleyball roundups. **Page B3**

her play with so much enthusiasm in her life. She really wanted it bad. We all did."

So did Sandusky. Showing the form which has brought them within one win of the GLL title, the Blue Streaks responded, with setter Jeannette Dubois serving an ace.

After mistakes by both teams made it 12-12, Kelly McCormick's kill pushed Sandusky ahead by one point. Erin Barr put down the sideout kill for Ross, and made the score 13-13 with another kill.



FICK



BRUDZINSKI

See ROSS, B3

Ross falls to Sandusky in final home match

Continued from B1

But Mandi Miller dropped an ace in front of the Ross serve receivers, and Kenya Graves' kill ended the match.

Graves ended the night with 11 kills, while Fick had 15.

Sandusky coach Jim Fish said that with the way Fick and Graves — club teammates in the off-season — were trading kills, it was crucial his team put the game away with the Ross star in the back row.

"That was kind of the match — Fick on this side, Kenya on that side," said Fish, whose team plays Oregon Clay Thursday for the GLL title.

"We knew when Fick was in the back row, we better score some points. In fact, I told my assistant, 'It's 13-12 and Fick's going to be in the front row in one more rotation, so we better do it right now.' And we did."

Said Ross coach Karrie Gardner: "We knew we needed to rotate one more time."

Ross had the upper hand early, coming out of an emotional pre-game ceremony honoring the seniors.

Getting strong performances from Fick (six kills in game one) middle blocker Rebecca Brown (a block and a kill for points) and Tiffany Sweeney (eight assists), Ross cruised to a 15-5 victory.

"We had kids doing things they hadn't done out there, like Rebecca and Tiffany Sweeney," said Ross coach Maggie Bliss. "They were just on fire."

The second game was the polar opposite. After the teams battled to a 6-6 tie early, Sandusky scored four straight points to grab the lead, and held off a Ross mini-rally.

"I knew they would come out fired up, I didn't know how long it would last," Fish said. "I knew

they would come off their high, and they did that second game.

"In the third game, we jumped on them."

After the game, Fick reflected on her Ross career.

"We went back in the locker room, and some people were crying, saying, 'Jodi, we let you down,'" she said.

"And I said, 'Did you try your hardest, put everything into it?' And they're like, 'Yeah,' so I said, 'Then you didn't let me down.'

"I just need to make those kids ready for next year. I hope they get to experience everything that I got to, because I've got so much out of this game, so much out of this school, and I'm going to miss it a lot.

"It's been like a second home to me for three years now, and it's going to be sad to leave."



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Ross cruises by listless Findlay

News-Messenger reports

FINDLAY — Fremont Ross spoiled Senior Night at Findlay, by drubbing the Trojans 15-7, 15-2 Thursday in a Great Lakes League match.

I thought they would be a little more fired up," said Ross coach Karrie Gardner. "But I guess not. They didn't play their starting lineup in the first game, because they wanted to play a lot of seniors."

Jodi Fick led Ross with six kills. Erin Barr served for 14 points, including five aces."

"Erin Barr had a nice serving game," Gardner said. "This was a nice win."

VOLLEYBALL

Thunder falls to Cincinnati State

News Messenger reports

CINCINNATI — Terra Community College gave Cincinnati State all it could handle, but fell 13-15, 16-14, 15-9, 14-16, 15-8, Thursday.

Sarah Wasserman led the Thunder with 15 kills, 21 assists and six blocks. Angie Beier had 10 kills, 21 assists and five blocks, Dawn Wilbur 10 kills and Aimee Fultz contributed six digs for Terra.

The loss dropped the Thunder to 2-7.

Ross's Fick repeats as GLL Player of the Year

SJCC's Kupka earns MAL honors

News-Messenger reports

While the Fremont Ross volleyball program has said goodbye to one of its most decorated athletes, but there is ample reason to believe the Little Giants' well of talent is far from dry.

For the second consecutive season, outside hitter Jodi Fick was named Great Lakes League Player of the Year. Fick, who led the Little Giants in several statistical categories — most notably kills — was a member of the all-GLL first team, as well as a first team all-Northwest Ohio pick.

VOLLEYBALL

Fellow senior Brittany Brudzinski was also honored by the GLL, earning honorable mention.

In addition to Fick and Brudzinski, several underclassmen earned postseason honors for Ross.

Fick's protege, freshman outside hitter Erin Barr, was the second Ross player to earn first team honors, and was also named second team all-Northwest Ohio. Fellow freshman Krissy Lotycz, who spent time at both setter and defensive specialist, earned honorable mention.

Sophomore Rachelle Domiray, who switched between the back row and outside hitter, was a second team all-GLL pick.

The Little Giants' award banquet is next Tuesday.

Volleyball

High School

Great Lakes League

1998 Standings

	League Overall			
	W	L	W	L
Sandusky.....	9	1	17	5
Clay.....	8	2	17	5
Ross.....	6	4	11	10
Findlay.....	5	5	11	10
Fostoria.....	1	9	6	15
Whitmer.....	1	9	6	17

GLL Player of the Year: Jodi Fick (Ross), Sr.

GLL Coach of the Year: Jim Fish (Sandusky)

1998 All-GLL team

First Team

Player (School)	Gr.	Ht.
Shellie Habegger (Clay)	Sr.	5-8
Jeannette Dubois (Sandusky)	Sr.	5-6
Samantha Williams (Findlay)	Sr.	5-9
Kenya Graves (Sandusky)	Jr.	5-9
Erica Anderson (Clay)	Jr.	5-9
Jodi Fick (Ross)	Sr.	5-8
Erin Barr (Ross)	Fr.	5-8

Second Team

Player (School)	Gr.	Ht.
Lindesy Breese (Clay)	Sr.	5-10
Khaisha Alexander (Sandusky)	Sr.	5-7
Mandi Miller (Sandusky)	Sr.	5-5
Brittany Russell (Fostoria)	Sr.	5-6
Rachelle Domiray (Ross)	Soph.	5-4

Honorable Mention

CLAY— Shelley Andrzejewski, Soph.; Jamie Dippman, Sr.; Julie LaPlante, Sr.; FINDLAY— Lauren Speelman, Soph.; Jessica Roberts, Jr.; FOSTORIA— Brooke Brandeberry, Jr.; Erin Kaminsky, Jr.; ROSS— Brittany Brudzinski, Sr.; Krissy Lotycz, Fr.; SANDUSKY— Kelli McCormick, Jr.; Krista Neill, Sr.; WHITMER— Alexis Osborne, Sr.; Kayla Hoel, Jr.; Ellyn Wieck, Fr.

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GLL Coach of the Year: Jim Fish (Sandusky)