

2014-2015 Season Review

FREMONT ROSS BOYS BASKETBALL

Little unchanged in new year

Little Giants
revamp style
to fit new
personnel

By Rich McGowan
Ast. editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — Fremont Ross' boys basketball team will wear purple and white uniforms this season.

Aside from their colors, almost everything about the Little Giants will have a different look this season.

Gone is the plodding style of basketball, taking the air out of the ball and pounding it inside to the post where a collection of big bodies roamed. Gone is a starting lineup that consisted of playing mostly in the 6-foot-4 range and helped Ross to a 10-12 record.

Instead the Little Giants of 2014-15 will be smaller, quicker and playing an aggressive up-tempo pace on both ends of the floor.

"We will be a much different team," said Ross coach Mark Gedeon, heading into his 20th season.

"Teams knew last year we wanted to pound it inside and try to win the games in the paint. This year we're going to have to win it from outside the paint, whether it's the 3-point line, whether it's in the transition, whether it's pressure defense or constant movement on offense."

Senior Grant McConnell returns as the only full-time starter from last year. While he played shooting guard last season, his 6-2 frame may



JONATHON BIRD/NEWS-MESSENGER
Fremont Ross' Dylan Jagodzinski fights for position near the basket during a game against Sandusky on Dec. 27.

have to play more in the post this year.

Seniors Chris Liggins and Jalen Slick, who each started on a part time basis last year, return, as does Jarren Hampton and James Wright, who missed eight games because of injury last year. All four, however, stand right around the 6-foot mark.

"I think for us to have success we're going to have to shoot the basketball very well," Gedeon said. "Shooting percentages — with me being a math teacher I'm very big on my statistics — shooting percentage, I think is going to be one of our big stats."

The need to shoot a

high percentage is all the more vital given the Little Giants' reduced size in the paint fighting for rebounds. In addition to McConnell, Ross will look to juniors Steven Blodgett (6-5) and Tavarious Simms (6-3) to lead the way under the boards but the guards also will need to snare their share of rebounds as well.

"The thing about playing fast is a lot of the time you're playing 3-on-3 basketball or 3-on-2 basketball, and so hopefully by using some quickness there it can open up some rebounding opportunities," Gedeon said. "Plus, if we shoot from the outside, it creates longer rebounds and we might be

able to use our quickness there, too."

One thing that won't change, however, is Ross' penchant for playing team-oriented, selfless basketball that makes opponents work to beat it.

"Coaches in the league always talk about how hard a Fremont Ross team plays and how they're amazed that nobody really cares who gets the credit. We've been very fortunate to get kids to buy in over the years that we don't need somebody to go out and score 20 points a game for us to be successful."

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FREMONT ROSS LITTLE GIANTS

Coach: Mark Gedeon (20th season)
Last season: 10-12 overall (4-10 TRAC)
Key losses: Jack Gedeon, Jarvis Jones, Dylan Jagodzinski and Drew Solander.

Key returners: Grant McConnell, Jalen Slick, James Wright, Jarren Hampton and Chris Liggins.
Key newcomers: Steven Blodgett, Tavarious Simms, Brody Chudzinski.

Outlook: The Little Giants are putting on their running shoes. Ross will pick up the pace on both ends of the floor this season to take advantage of an influx in speed on the perimeter and a reduction of size in the paint. Ross must replace four of its five starters, who also were the Little Giants top four scorers, top four rebounders and four tallest players. McConnell, Blodgett and Simms will prove Ross with some size down low, but the Little Giants plan to make their living by shooting the basketball from the outside. Gedeon hopes his team can hover around 33 percent from the 3-point line and force turnovers to lead to transition baskets.

2014-15 SCHEDULE

» 12/5 at Sandusky	» 1/24 at Fostoria
» 12/6 at Start	» 1/27 at Woodward
» 12/12 Central Catholic	» 1/30 at Central Catholic
» 12/19 at Findlay	» 1/31 Port Clinton
» 12/20 Columbian	» 2/3 Findlay
» 12/23 at Lima Senior	» 2/6 Lima Senior
» 1/6 Whitmer	» 2/10 Marion Harding
» 1/9 at Clay	» 2/13 at Whitmer
» 1/16 at St. Francis De Sales	» 2/17 Clay
» 1/20 Sandusky	» 2/20 St. Francis De Sales
» 1/23 St. John's Jesuit	» 2/27 at St. John's Jesuit

"Coaches in the league always talk about how hard a Fremont Ross team plays and how they're amazed that nobody really cares who gets the credit. We've been very fortunate to get kids to buy in."

MARK GEDEON, Ross boys basketball coach

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Alumni game honors ex-manager

Nearly 10 years after his death, Billy Stierwalt still a part of Little Giant hoops

By Rich McGowan
Asst. editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — Though it's been nearly a decade since Billy Stierwalt died, his life and memory are anything but forgotten by the Fremont Ross boys basketball team.

The Little Giants will host their annual Billy Stierwalt Memorial Scholarship Alumni Basketball game at 6 p.m. Friday. The game offers a night of re-

membrance, reminiscing and helping the Little Giants of today look toward tomorrow.

A lifelong sports fan, Billy Stierwalt, who suffered from muscular dystrophy, began serving as the team's manager his sophomore year. On Feb. 22, 2005, a day before Ross opened

Sectional play during his senior year, Stierwalt died, leaving a legacy of lives touched that remains just as strong today.

"We've been saying his name

after every single practice and game and open gym just to remind our players how fortunate they are with each and every day they have," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "When you come into our gym, there is a plaque where he used to sit, in the corner by the stage. After every time our players get introduced, after they shake the coaches' hand they got over and touch the plaque."

Gedeon said he expects at least 20 former Little Giants to take part in the alumni game. He said numerous other graduates have made donations to the

college scholarship fund that awards \$1,000 each spring to basketball student-athletes who display the true meaning of being a Little Giant. Since 2005, the fund has issued 23 scholarships.

Admission to the alumni game is free, but donations to the scholarship fund are appreciated. Concessions will be available, a 50/50 drawing and raffles also will raise funds.

For Billy Stierwalt's father, Bill, the alumni game is a bitter-sweet event. The memories of losing a child never fade or soften, but neither does the pride in

seeing how much impact his son's life had on those around him.

"I knew he was a good kid, but I didn't realize how many lives he touched in the short time he was here," Bill Stierwalt said. "He's your son and you kind of take things for granted and you don't realize how many were influenced by his presence at practice and in games. It's quite an honor to be called his dad."

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SANDUSKY 62, FREMONT ROSS 58

NO MIRACLES HERE



JONATHON BIRD/STAFF PHOTO

Fremont Ross' Chris Liggins puts up a shot over the Sandusky defense during the teams' basketball game Friday. Sandusky led 58-53 with 36 seconds left before a flurry of action completed its 62-58 win.

Fremont Ross unable to capitalize on late chances to pull off comeback

By Rich McGowan
Assistant editor/sports reporter

SANDUSKY — Fremont Ross' boys basketball team can't say it didn't have its chances to win its season opener Friday night.

The Sandusky Blue Streaks gave the Little Giants numerous chances for a final-minute miracle but Ross never got the ball to fall through the basket when it needed to most in a 62-58 loss.

"The gym was electric and it's great to open up in this type of atmosphere," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "You spend all off-season hoping to get this opportunity. I think for both teams it was exciting."

Ross trailed by five, 58-53, with 36 seconds to play. Following a pair of free throws by Grant McConnell to cut the deficit to a one-possession game, Ross' defense forced Sandusky into a five-second violation on the ensuing inbounds. Ross' had trouble with its own inbounds, nearing turning the ball over, but the Little Giants were saved by a foul call against Sandusky.

Moments later, Ross missed the front-end of a 1-and-1 and the Blue Streaks looked as though they put the game away with a pair of

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Basketball

Continued from Page 1B

free throws for a five-point lead with 21 seconds to play. James Wright, however, drew a foul while shooting a 3-pointer, giving the Little Giants new life.

Wright converted only one of his free throws and soon thereafter Sandusky held a 61-56 lead with 16 seconds to play.

Game over, right? Not quite.

Wright drove the length of the floor and scored on a layup while drawing a foul, trimming the deficit back down to three. Wright missed the foul shot but the Ross grabbed the rebound.

The Little Giants soon turned the ball over and Sandusky, after making a free throw with five seconds remaining,

sealed the win 62-58.

"A couple times we got down five and they're shooting free throws and it would have been very easy for kids to sulk and say 'That's it,'" Gedeon said. "We found that the game of basketball really is 32 minutes and hopefully that will be an early lesson our kids can take down the road."

Ross (0-1) got Sandusky (1-0) in early foul trouble and used the advantage to take a 25-18 lead into halftime. Following the break, however, Sandusky became the aggressor, pushing the pace and playing tighter defense.

Not only did the Blue Streaks come back to take the lead by the midpoint of the third quarter, they also reversed the Little Giants' fortunes in fouls as well. Sandusky was shooting the bonus with 2:34 to play in the third and was

in the double bonus just over a minute into the fourth quarter.

Both teams struggled at the line, but Sandusky's advantage in attempts, made the difference. Sandusky made 15-of-31 from the line while Ross was 10-19.

"It's tough to defend a free throw," Gedeon said. "That's a little frustrating for us. Our kids are actually good free throw shooters, that's something we take pride in and tonight, whether it was the first-game jitters or whatever, we didn't shoot the ball the way we would like to and I'm sure Sandusky would say the same thing too."

Wright led Ross with 13 points while McConnell and Blodgett each added 10. Blodgett grabbed a team-high eight rebounds.

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Sandusky 62, Ross 58

Ross	14	11	19	14	—	58
Sandusky	13	5	23	21	—	62

Ross

Steven Blodgett 4 2-3 10, Brody Chudzinski 3 0-1 8, Jermani Homler 0 6, Grant McConnell 3 3-4 10, Tavarious Simms 3 3-4 9, Jalen Slick 1 2, James Wright 5 2-8 13.

Sandusky

George Brown 5 2-5 14, Cavon Croom 5 2-10 13, Davion Fisher 4 3-4 11, Demond Hopkins 4 2-4 10, Treven Johnson 1 1-2 3, Deontre Palma 1 3, Jayrese Williams 0 4-5 4, Keith Williams 1 1-1 4.

AREA ROUNDUP

McConnell scores 18; Little Giants fall

Grant McConnell scored 18 points but Fremont Ross's boys basketball team fell to Toledo Start, 78-70.

James Wright had 14 points and Chris Liggins added 10.

ROUNDUP

Ross boys lose 52-39 to Findlay

The Fremont Ross boys basketball team just couldn't overcome a slow start Friday, losing 52-39 to Findlay in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference.

The Little Giants (0-3, 0-1) scored just four points in the opening quarter and trailed by fifteen upon its conclusion—a lead the Trojans (3-1, 2-0) would not relinquish.

Jalen Slick led Ross with seven points, including a 3-pointer. Jermani Homler and Tavarious Simms added five points apiece for the Little Giants.

Grant Niswander led the Trojans with 15 points. Three Findlay players reached double-digits.

Ross hosts Tiffin Columbian Saturday.

FREMONT ROSS 61, TIFFIN COLUMBIAN 45

HOME SWEET HOME

Little Giants
pick up 1st win
in home opener

By Rich McGowan

Asst. editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — If only every game could be played at home. The Fremont Ross boys basketball team finally got to play on its home court Saturday, and the Little Giants thrived in familiar surroundings.

Ross opened its home schedule in fine style, raining 3-pointers upon Tiffin Columbian en route to a 61-45 victory — its first of the season.

"It's great coming home, getting our first win here," senior point guard James Wright said. "It felt amazing."

Coming off of a loss to Findlay the night before, in which Ross was outscored 19-4 in the first quarter, the Little Giants were anxious to get off to a better start against Columbian. Using the energy from a large home crowd, Ross did just that. The Little Giants led 14-11 after the opening quarter and then extended that lead moments into the second on a 3 by Brody Chudzinski.

"I think he made me look like a pretty good coach when I put him in and we ran something for him right away and he goes out and drains them," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "That's one of the things we expect from him."

Chudzinski was on fire from long-range — hitting in the waning seconds of the first half and again at the end of the third — to give his team big surges of momentum. He finished with



RICH MCGOWAN/NEWS-MESSENDER

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Fremont Ross' James Wright shoots over the arm of Tiffin Columbian's Alec Demith on Saturday.

Giants

Continued from Page 6A

14 points, including four 3s.

"It feels pretty good," Chudzinski. "Coach told me to keep firing them up, get open shots, and knock them down."

Ross took a 29-24 lead into the third quarter where, as turnovers mounted for Columbian, Ross' offense continued to roll led by Wright. He opened the second half with a nice pull-up jump shot. A minute later, Wright hit a 3 while being fouled. He converted the foul shot for a four-point play, which gave Ross its first double-digit lead at 35-25.

Wright finished with 13 points.

"James, in some aspects, I think slowed down a little bit; he saw the floor better," Gedeon said. "You can tell he's got plus-speed, plus-ball-handling skills, and he really can make some things happen. But the reading-reacting part, taking what's given to



RICH MCGOWAN/NEWS-MESSENGER

Fremont Ross' Grant McConnell (No. 3) and Brody Chudzinski celebrate in the waning moments of Ross' 61-45 win over Tiffin Columbian on Saturday.

him and not (forcing) the issue, not only makes him a better player, and he scores more points, it makes us a better team too."

Grant McConnell scored 14 for Ross, which benefited from strong play from its bench as 10 players registered in the scorebook. The starters only outscored the reserves by three points, 32-29. The Little Giants also hit nine 3s.

"It shouldn't matter who is on the floor for

us," Gedeon said. "We can say, easily, many positives on every single player. We need to have that kind of depth in order for us to be successful."

"It's definitely a good feeling, for our staff for our players," he added. "Some of the lessons that we learned in the last three games, to come out and apply it (Saturday) is also rewarding."

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HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL

Saturday's scores

Ross 61, Columbian 45

Columbian	11	13	9	12	—	45
Ross	14	15	14	18	—	61

Columbian

Jake Adams 1 0-0 2, Jacob Bupp 1 0-0 2, Cody Daniel 3 1-4 7, Alec Demith 3 0-0 6, Derek Dryfuse 7 2-5 16, Ro'Naugi Durham 0 1-2 1, Stone Simmons 1 2-2 8, Matt Zirger 1 1-3 13. Totals 19 7-16 45.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 1 0-0 2, Brody Chudzinski 4 2-2 14, JaVonte Garza 1 1-2 3, Jarren Hampton 2 0-0 5, Jermani Homler 2 0-0 4, Chris Liggins 1 0-0 3, Grant McConnell 4 5-6 14, Tavarious Simms 0 1-2 1, Jalen Slick 1 0-0 2, James Wright 4 3-4 13. Totals 20 12-16 61.

3-Point Goals - Ross 9 (Brody Chudzinski 4, Jarren Hampton 1, Chris Liggins 1, Grant McConnell 1, James Wright 2), Rebounds - Columbian 29 (Cody Daniel 6, Derek Dryfuse 8), Ross 20 (Tavarious Simms 5, James Wright 5).

ROUNDUP

Little Giants lose 75-63 to Lima Senior

The Fremont Ross boys basketball team got 17 points—including four triples—from Grant McConnell, but the team lost 75-63 to Lima Senior in Tuesday's Three Rivers Athletic Conference matchup.

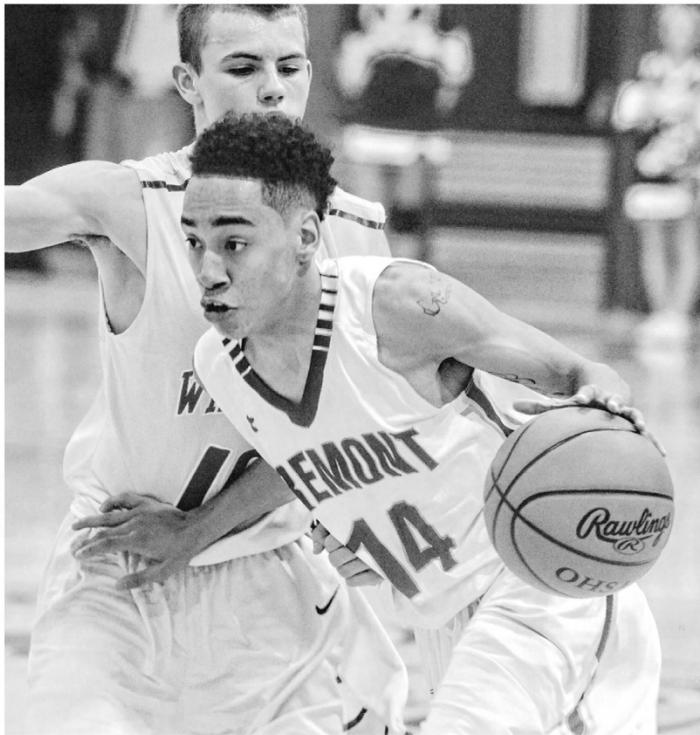
The Little Giants (1-4, 0-2) trailed by just two points at halftime, but they couldn't overcome a dismal third-quarter performance in which they were outscored 23-12 by the Spartans.

Brody Chudzinski added 11 points for Ross. Steven Blodgett had eight points and James Wright and JaVonte Garza scored seven apiece.

Xavier Simpson led Lima Senior with 28 points.

Ross will host Toledo Central Catholic on Jan. 2.

TOLEDO WHITMER 66, ROSS 33



JONATHON BIRD/STAFF PHOTO

Fremont Ross' JaVonte Garza drives through the Whitmer defense on Tuesday.

Little Giants suffer behind the arc in loss

By Rich McGowan
Asst. editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — When playing to its capabilities, Fremont Ross' boys basketball plays scrappy defense, makes the extra pass to find an open man and relies on hitting 3-pointers with a host of perimeter shooters.

None of that happened Tuesday night.

From the game's opening minutes the Little Giants were out-hustled and over-matched by a Toledo Whitmer team that shot the lights out from long-range en route to a 66-33 blowout win at Ross High School.

"They beat us in every phase of the game. There is no question they played great," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "We didn't respond to the challenge in the competitive way that I want a Fremont Ross team to play."

Ross' starters totaled just seven points and the Little Giants made shot just 1 of 17 shots from 3-point range. Whitmer, on the other hand, hit Ross with the inside presence of Montreese Collins and a barrage of outside shooting as the Panthers hit nine shots from beyond the arc.

"We shared the ball and passed the ball well and found open people," Whitmer coach Ryan Brown said. "We haven't always done that this year. We



JONATHON BIRD/STAFF PHOTO

Fremont Ross' Brody Chudzinski and James Wright battle for a loose ball Tuesday.

found people. I didn't think they were contested threes, they were open threes."

Sam Hickey led Whitmer (2-5 overall, 1-3 Three Rivers Athletic Conference) with 18 points, including four 3-pointers, while Collins added 17 and grabbed a game-high nine rebounds.

After trailing 14-9 after the first quarter, the Little Giants' hole continued to grow. Unlike previous TRAC games against Lima Senior and Toledo Central

Catholic, which also saw Ross fall into an early hole but battle back, the Little Giants' never threatened to cut into the Panthers' advantage.

Ross committed six second-quarter turnovers and continued to take rushed shots that did not fall. The Little Giants (1-6, 0-4) scored only three points in the period and went more than five minutes before making its first—and only—field

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ROSS

Continued from Page 4A

goal of the quarter. Whitmer held a 30-12 lead at halftime and pushed its lead to 30, 48-18, heading to the fourth.

“From the opening possession I did not like our defensive energy, our shot selection was poor,” Gedeon said. “Once we started digging ourselves a hole...we compounded it by making mistakes we shouldn’t be making, whether it was a quick shots, spacing.”

Ross’ frustration showed itself early in the second half. Ross junior guard James Wright was ejected after getting involved in an altercation with a Whitmer player. While both teams were accessed technical fouls, Wright was the

only player ejected from the game and by OHSAA rules will have to sit out the Little Giants’ next two games.

Steven Blodgett and Grant McConnell led Ross in scoring with just five points each.

“We’ve had now a couple games in a row where we made four, five, six passes and got that open shot,” Gedeon said. “Tonight if you put the time of possession out there, like they do in football, it would be very one-sided toward Whitmer.

“We’re going to find out how we respond (Wednesday) in practice and Thursday in practice,” Gedeon added. “And hopefully we have a much better effort (Friday) against Clay for another TRAC game.”

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Ross 66, Whitmer 33

Whitmer	9	3	6	15	—	33
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Ross	14	16	18	18	—	66
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Whitmer

Darnell Cathey 1 0-0 2, Montrece Collins 7 4-4 17, Shamus Dempsey 1 3-3 5, Avion Franklin 0 2-2 2, Sam Hickey 6 2-2 18, AJ Kurdys 2 2-2 7, Zamon Paris 1 0-0 2, Travis Sanders 1 0-0 3, Zack Smith 0 0-0 0, DJ Triplett 3 0-0 8. Totals 21 14-15 66.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 2 1-2 5, Tre Bulger 2 0-0 4, Brody Chudzinski 0 0-0 0, JaVonte Garza 0 4-4 4, Jarren Hampton 1 0-2 2, Jermani Homer 1 0-3 4, Chris Liggins 1 0-0 3, Grant McConnell 1 3-4 5, Tavarious Simms 1 0-0 2, Jalen Slick 0 0-0 0, James Wright 1 0-0 2, Kaleb Young 2 0-0 2. Totals 12 8-15 33.

3-Point Goals - Whitmer 9 (Sam Hickey 4, AJ Kurdys 1, Travis Sanders 1, DJ Triplett 2), Ross 1 (Chris Liggins 1), Rebounds - Whitmer 27 (Montrece Collins 9, Sam Hickey 8), Ross 32 (Tavarious Simms 8).

FREMONT ROSS 45, OREGON CLAY 35

Little Giants warm up after half

Win first for Ross in
Three Rivers after
0-4 conference start

By Rich McGowan
Asst. editor/sports reporter

OREGON — By looking at the scoreboard alone at halftime Friday night, it might appear as though the Fremont Ross boys basketball team was afflicted with the same malaise that led to a lopsided loss to Toledo Whitmer just three nights earlier.

And while the Little Giants trailed Oregon Clay by a bucket after two quarters, it wasn't because of lack of hustle, discipline or execution. Ross' first-half field goal shooting was simply colder than the arctic temperatures outside the gymnasium.

Finally, however, the Little Giants warmed up in the third quarter, continued to create offensive chances thanks to an opportunistic defense, and did an outstanding job moving the ball in the halfcourt en route to a 45-35 victory.

"Against Whitmer we had just two total assists for the game and tonight it was much better," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "Our recognition was much better and that third quarter, getting our shooters good shots to knock down, certainly makes the game, for us, a lot easier."

The win not only removes the bitter taste left in the Little Giants' mouth from Tuesday's 33-point loss to the Panthers, it also gives Ross (2-6 overall) its first win in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference (1-4).

"We said we weren't going to

See ROSS, Page 2B



JONATHON BIRD/STAFF PHOTO

Fremont Ross' Jarren Hampton drives to the hoop against Clay on Friday. Hampton hit a 3-pointer in the third quarter that helped the Little Giants pull away.

ROSS

Continued from Page 1B

dwell on it, we were going to move past it," said Ross senior Grant McConnell of Tuesday's loss. "We struggled today in the first half, but we kept together, decided what we were going to do and we did it and won. It feels good."

From the last two minutes of the first quarter to the end of the second quarter, Ross' defense forced 15 Clay turnovers. The Little Giants, however, could not buy a bucket as open shots from the perimeter and layins from the paint refused to fall through the basket. While the Eagles took a 19-17 lead into halftime, the Little Giants did not let their low field goal percentage get them frustrated.

"It was really hard not to get frustrated, but I believe in them and they believe in me," junior Brody Chudzinski said. "We just went out and executed what coach told us to do and we came out with the W."

The third quarter saw Ross warm up and find its shooting touch, none more than Chudzinski.

McConnell and Jarren Hampton hit 3-pointers a minute apart to give Ross the lead. Chudzinski then hit three 3-pointers in a two-minute span, to send the Little Giants to a 37-28 lead entering

the fourth quarter.

"It was just a matter of our kids being confident in themselves and in each other and knocking down some shots," Gedeon said.

With a double-digit lead, Ross proceeded to milk the clock in the fourth quarter. Possessing the ball for long stretches of time in the final period, Ross rotated the ball, continued to find the open man and kept the clock running. Ross rarely attempted a shot, and it didn't have to, as Clay (0-10, 0-5) struggled the gain possession and never again climbed back within single digits.

Chudzinski scored all nine of points during his late third-quarter outburst. McConnell, who was Ross' only source of offense when the Little Giants struggled early, had a stellar night on both ends of the floor and finished with a game-high 17 points and tied for the team lead with five rebounds.

"I thought he was outstanding in multiple ways," Gedeon said of McConnell. "Whether it was defensively, hitting some shots from the outside or taking things to the hole. Most importantly was his leadership. It's nice when you have a player on the floor, a battle-tested senior, who has the ability to keep his teammates up."

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Ross 45, Oregon Clay 35

Ross	9	8	20	8	—	45
Oregon Clay	12	7	9	7	—	35

Ross

Brody Chudzinski 3 0-0 9, JaVonte Garza 2 2-3 6, Jarren Hampton 3 0-0 7, Chris Liggins 0 0-0 0, Grant McConnell 5 4-4 17, Tavarious Simms 2 2-3 6, Jalen Slick 0 0-0 0, Kaleb Young 0 0-1 0. Totals 15 8-11 45.

Oregon Clay

Nate Bush 0 0-0 0, Noah Durcynski 1 0-0 2, Garycl Hahn 0 4-4 4, Steven Nguyen 3 0-0 9, Christian Orr 3 2-3 8, Chris Walters 4 0-0 12. Totals 12 6-7 35.

3-Point Goals - Ross 7 (Brody Chudzinski 3, Jarren Hampton 1, Grant McConnell 3), Oregon Clay MS 5 (Steven Nguyen 1, Chris Walters 4), Rebounds - Ross 18 (Grant McConnell 5, Tavarious Simms 5), Oregon Clay MS 19 (Garycl Hahn 5, Christian Orr 6).

BASKETBALL ROUNDUP

Short-handed Ross falls to St. Francis

Fremont Ross boys basketball coach Mark Gedeon couldn't fault his players after their 61-50 loss to St. Francis de Sales Friday night.

The Little Giants battled the Knights with only six varsity players in uniform, two of which eventually fouled out, leaving Ross to give minutes to several players from the junior varsity squad.

Despite its short-comings in personnel, Ross managed to stay close to St. Francis.

"My kids never quit, they battled and most of the game it kept going back-and-forth between five and 10 points," Gedeon said, "until inside the last minute they knocked down the free-throws to extend the lead out."

JaVonte Garza led Ross with 12 points while Grant McConnell added 11 as the Little Giants' record fell to 2-7 overall, 1-5 in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference.

"You can't question their effort, you can't question their heart," Gedeon said of his team. "(St. Francis) just made a couple more plays than we did."

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Fremont Ross' Grant McConnell shoots over the Sandusky defense.

DOUG HISE/NEWS-MESSENDER

Blue Streaks drop hammer on inconsistent Little Giants

By Rich McGowan
Asst. editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — It's been a few weeks since the Fremont Ross boys basketball team has had its entire lineup available. With players shuffling in and out in recent weeks because of injury, illness and more, the Little Giants' have not had the consistent personnel groupings most teams expect to have by the season's midpoint.

That inconsistency showed Tuesday, as Ross was out-matched by a Sandusky team that entered the Purple Pit and limited the Little Giants to 21 percent 3-point shooting as Ross suffered a 62-42 loss to the Blue Streaks.

"There is definitely an issue with our timing, our spacing, and those things are easily solved by practice," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "But when you don't have people in practice, it obviously creates a lack of execution, or at least a lower percentage of execution."

The Little Giants (2-8 overall) made just 5-of-24 shots from 3-point range, were out-rebounded 26-21 and routinely appeared out of sync on offense, with numerous errant passes totaling 15 turnovers.

"For us, it's about having five guys executing together, playing as



Fremont Ross' Jarren Hampton puts up a shot against the Sandusky defense.

DOUG HISE/NEWS-MESSENDER

one," Gedeon said. "We did not do that offensively or defensively. It seems like we always had one or two guys who wanted to do their own thing. And in any team game, that doesn't work. I don't care what the sport is."

Ross scored the first basket of the second quarter to trim its early deficit to 15-10. Sandusky, however, answered with 10-1 run as the Little Gi-

ants went nearly five minutes without a field goal. The Blue Streaks took a 34-18 lead into halftime.

Midway through the third quarter, JaVonte Garza hit just Ross' second 3-pointer of the night, giving his team a spurt of energy as the Little Giants trailed 38-24. That moment, however, was short-lived. The Blue Streaks smothered any chance of Ross' spark becoming any threat of a comeback, answering Garza's 3-pointer with a 12-0 run and opening up a 50-24 lead, the game-largest advantage.

"I don't think we took a lot of high-quality shots," Gedeon said. "We've seen at times this year where we reversed the basketball, moved it, got the inside-outside stuff going, and our offensive efficiency is much better."

"It's not like we have a superstar out here where we can give him the ball and say 'Go create some stuff for us,'" Gedeon added. "We got to make sure we are doing what the play dictates, what the offense dictates, what our team concept is. We always talk about taking our shot. I don't think took too many our shots tonight."

Sandusky's Jayreese Williams led all scorers with 18 points while

See GIANTS, Page 5A

Giants

Continued from Page 4A

George Brown scored 16 with nine rebounds as the Blue Streaks improved to 11-4 overall.

Grant McConnell's 12 points and five rebounds led Ross while Garza added nine points.

Things won't get any easier for Ross as the Little Giants welcome Toledo St. St. John's Friday night. The Titans are

ranked No. 11 in Division I with a 10-3 overall record and a 6-0 mark in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference.

Gedeon knows his team is in for a difficult task.

"St. John's is one of the top teams in the state of Ohio," Gedeon said. "Clearly a top 10 team in the state. The way they defend, the way they execute offensively, it's going to be a big-time challenge for us."

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LOCAL SCORES

Boys basketball

Sandusky 62, Ross 42

Sandusky	15	19	16	12	—	62
Ross	8	10	11	13	—	42

Sandusky

George Brown 6 2-2 16, Cavan Croom 0 -0 0, Davion Fisher 7 -0 14, Demond Hopkins 3 -0 6, Deontre Palmer 0 1-2 1, Keenen Robinson 1 -0 2, Jayrese Williams 8 -0 18, Keith Williams 1 2-3 4. Totals 22 4-5 62.

Ross

Brody Chudzinski 1 0-2 2, JaVonte Garza 3 1-2 9, Jarren Hampton 0 1-2 1, Chris Liggins 2 2-2 8, Grant McConnell 3 6-8 12, Tavarious Simms 1 0-0 2, Jalen Slick 1 0-0 2, James Wright 1 3-4 6. Totals 12 13-20 42.
3-Point Goals - Sandusky 4 (George Brown 2, Jayrese Williams 2), Ross 5 (Brody Chudzinski 1, JaVonte Garza 2, Chris Liggins 2), Rebounds - Sandusky 26 (George Brown 9, Demond Hopkins 9), Ross 21 (Grant McConnell 5).

TOLEDO ST. JOHN'S 68, FREMONT ROSS 21

Looking beyond the final score

Little Giants' coach says he's seeing progress in his team despite lopsided loss

By Rich McGowan

Assistant editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — To call Fremont Ross' 47-point loss to St. John's Jesuit Friday as being closer than the score indicates may not necessarily be true.

But to say the Little Giants played better than suggested by the 68-21 final score, that might be a fair statement.

While Ross was overmatched by the Three Rivers Athletic Conference leaders, the Little Giants did not let the margin of the scoreboard determine the energy with which they played.

Coming off a 20-point loss Tuesday to Sandusky, in which the Little Giants were outplayed and out-hustled, Ross

coach Mark Gedeon wanted to see his team play with more passion and more cohesiveness on both ends of the floor. For the most part, he saw what he wanted.

"I thought today our energy level was significantly better than it was on Tuesday," Gedeon said. "Our shot selection was

better. I felt like we made positive steps. The score is tough to analyze when you compare Tuesday night's to tonight but I thought we played a lot better tonight than we did Tuesday."

Despite too many early turnovers, 14 in the first half, the Little Giants showed good patience with the ball in the half-court, making the extra pass to find an open shot. Though Ross

See GEDEON, Page 2B



Mark Gedeon



JONATHON BIRD/STAFF PHOTO

Fremont Ross' Tavarious Simms puts up a shot over the St John's Jesuit defense during the first half of their matchup on Friday night.

Gedeon

Continued from Page 1B

was able to get good shots, getting those shots to fall was another matter.

Ross finished the night with just seven field goal and made just one of its 16 3-point attempts.

"I think we pressed a little bit. I think we got better shots than we did on Tuesday, they didn't fall for us," Gedeon said. "A lot of shots went off the back iron of the rim, which means they were rushing a little bit instead of relaxing and just taking the shot. I thought there was only a few poor shots we took tonight where against Sandusky it was a long list."

While Ross (2-9 overall, 1-6 TRAC) struggled to generate points, the Titans (11-3, 7-0) had no such issue. St. John's attacked the basket from the game's opening moments and never let up, while also shooting a high percentage.

Junior Kaleb Vaughn was outstanding, scoring 12 of his game-high 20 points in the opening eight minutes with a pair of 3-pointers and a slam dunk on a fast-break following a Ross turnover.

Vaughn finished the night with eight field goals, one more than Ross' entire roster.

"We wanted to make sure we got off to as good start and Kaleb hit some shots early and kind of got us jump-started," St. John's coach Ed Heintschel said. "He shot real well. We need him to do a lot of

different things and he's trying to do that, to diversify his game and make himself an all-around player."

Vaughn led the Titans to a 20-5 lead after the first quarter and a 36-10 advantage at halftime.

Despite the lopsided score, the Little Giants continued to play with energy on both ends of the floor in the third quarter. Ross cut down on its turnovers, just six in the second half, and improved its defense, playing St. John's to a 7-7 tie in the period.

"There is always that concern at half-time, with teenagers they might look at that scoreboard and see what they see there when it was 36-10," Gedeon said. "But for us to come out and improve, which was our mantra for the day...that was a nice reward."

James Wright led Ross with six points while Jarren Hampton added five to go along with three steals. Steven Blodgett grabbed seven rebounds.

"Jarren Hampton was probably the leader of our defensive intensity, I thought he had a phenomenal game," Gedeon said. "He was all over the place and I think our team fed a lot off him because they all gave us the energy we were looking for."

Ross returns to the court Saturday night when the Little Giants welcome Fostoria (1-10) into the Purple Pit.

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St. John's Jesuit 68, Ross 21

St. John's Jesuit	20	16	7	25	—	68
Ross	5	5	7	4	—	21

St. John's Jesuit

Zach Buescher 1 0-0 3, Myles Copeland 2 2-2 6, Joey Fretti 1 0-0 3, Houston King 3 0-0 8, Gabe Kynard 1 4-4 6, Ethan Pina 1 0-0 2, Harrison Riggs 4 0-0 9, Aaron Thompson 2 0-1 7, Kaleb Vaughn 8 0-0 20, Vincent Williams 2 0-0 4. Totals 26 6-7 68.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 1 0-1 2, Jarren Hampton 2 1-3 5, Chris Liggins 1 1-2 4, Grant McConnell 0 2-2 2, Jalen Slick 1 0-0 2, James Wright 2 2-3 6. Totals 7 6-14 21.

3-Point Goals - St. John's Jesuit 10 (Zach Buescher 1, Joey Fretti 1, Houston King 2, Harrison Riggs 1, Aaron Thompson 1, Kaleb Vaughn 4), Ross 1 (Chris Liggins 1), Rebounds - St. John's Jesuit 31 (Aaron Thompson 8), Ross 22 (Steven Blodgett 7).

Simms scores 14 points as Fremont Ross beats Fostoria

Tavarius Simms scored 14 points and had four steals as the Fremont Ross boys basketball team defeated Fostoria 49-33 in a non-conference matchup.

Fostoria (1-9) scored no more than 10 points in any quarter. The Little Giants (3-9) led 39-24 after three quarters.

“We had good defensive pressure,” said Ross head coach Mark Gedeon. “We were able to cause 29 turnovers.”

James Wright added eight points and Jarren Hampton had seven for the Little Giants.

Ross 49, Fostoria 33

Fostoria	7	7	10	9	—	33
Ross	8	12	19	10	—	49

Fostoria

Kaleb Bemis 2 1 6, Kobey Bemis 3 8, Noah Hammer 1 2, Bishop Mahan 2 2, Jordan Marshall 1 2 4, Rayshon Martin 2 4, Dugan Smith 2 5, Jayden Stanton 1 2. Totals 12 5 33.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 2 1 5, Brody Chudzinski 1 1 4, Jarren Hampton 1 4 7, Chris Liggins 2 2, Grant McConnell 2 5, Tavarious Simms 4 6 14, Jalen Slick 1 1 4, James Wright 3 1 8. Totals 14 16 49.

3-Point Goals - Fostoria 4 (Kaleb Bemis 1, Kobey Bemis 2, Dugan Smith 1), Ross 5 (Brody Chudzinski 1, Jarren Hampton 1, Grant McConnell 1, Jalen Slick 1, James Wright 1),
Turnovers - Fostoria 29.

Ross boys lose in final seconds to Woodward

The Fremont Ross boys basketball team made a valiant attempt at a come-from-behind win Tuesday against Toledo Woodward, but came up a point short.

The Little Giants trailed by six points after the third quarter, but Ross tied the game at 53-53 with less than a minute to play. Woodward (7-8) would then get to the foul line, hitting the second of two free throws to take a one-point lead.

The Little Giants had a pair of shot opportunities in the final 20 seconds of play, but could not convert.

Chris Liggins and Grant McConnell scored 16 and 15 points respectively for Ross (3-10).

Craig Krikwood had a game-high 18 points for Woodward.

Tavarious Simms added eight points for Ross, and teammate James Wright had seven.

Woodward -Toledo 54, Ross 53

Ross 10 10 14 19 — 53

Woodward -Toledo 9 17 14 14 — 54

Ross

Steven Blodgett 1 2, Jarren Hampton 2 2, Chris Liggins 5 2 16, Grant McConnell 5 4 15, Tavarious Simms 3 2 8, Jalen Slick 2 1 3, James Wright 2 3 7. Totals 17 14 53.

Woodward -Toledo

Fraiser 3 6, Jones 1 2, Craig Kirkwood 8 16, Lee 1 2, Terrell Robinson 3 3 11, White 2 2, Daijour Whittington 5 13. Totals 21 5 54.

3-Point Goals - Ross 5, Woodward -Toledo 7 (Craig Kirkwood 2, Terrell Robinson 2, Daijour Whittington 3).

Fighting Irish too much for Ross boys

Grant McConnel and Brody Chudzinski scored eight points apiece, but Ross's boys basketball team lost to Toledo Central Catholic, 56-36, in Friday's Three Rivers Athletic Conference tilt.

The Little Giants (3-11, 1-7) were held to single digits in each of the first three quarters.

BOYS BASKETBALL

Central Catholic 56, Ross 36

Ross	9	8	8	11	—	36
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Central Catholic	9	12	16	19	—	56
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Ross

Steven Blodgett 2 2, Brody Chudzinski 2 2 8, Jarren Hampton 1 3, Chris Liggins 4 4, Grant McConnell 3 2 8, Tavarious Simms 2 1 5, Jalen Slick 1 2, James Wright 1 2 4. Totals 10 13 36.

Central Catholic

Casaun Anderson 2 2, Jermiah Braswell 3 7, Campbell 1 1 3, Jalen Daoust 2 4, Kendall Denko 1 1, Andrew Grombacher 1 2 5, Zachary Hoover 2 4, Jerry Moore III 4 1 9, Jamarr Parker 3 2 9, Keith Smith 4 1 10, Marcus Winters 1 1 3. Totals 20 11 56.

3-Point Goals - Ross (Brody Chudzinski 2, Jarren Hampton 1), Central Catholic (Jermiah Braswell 1, Andrew Grombacher 1, Jamarr Parker 1, Keith Smith 1).

BOYS: FREMONT ROSS 55, PORT CLINTON 31

Running away with a victory

Ross scoring outbursts lead Little Giants to win

By Rich McGowan

Asst. editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — What's worse than seeing the opposition go on a 15-point run during a basketball game?

How about seeing it happened twice?

That exactly what Fremont Ross' boys basketball team did to Port Clinton on Saturday. The Little Giants' first run gave them an early cushion, and the second allowed them to put the game away. Ross won, 55-31.

"Part of it was aggressiveness, part of it was trying to use our quickness," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "We knew we had a little bit of a quickness advantage over them. They're a team that shoots the ball well from the outside and they run a bunch of sets; we did not want them to get comfortable so we tried to change things up with half-



DOUG HISE/NEWS-MESSENGER CORRESPONDENT

Ross' Tavarious Simms grabs the rebound against Port Clinton.

court traps and full-court traps and making sure we always recognized where their shooters were."

Ross got off to a hot start thanks to Grant McConnell draining a pair of 3-pointers in the game's first four minutes. McConnell's second trey

was followed shortly by a 3 from James Wright, which lifted Ross to a 12-2 lead. A minute later, Brody Chudzinski scored on a putback to complete Ross' first 15-0 run. It gave the Little Giants a 17-2

See ROSS, Page 7A

ROSS

Continued from Page 6A

lead with three minutes to play in the opening quarter.

"We always come out flat, either at the beginning of the game or the second half, and (Saturday) we played the whole game," McConnell said. "We came out with the pistons firing. We came out strong and put them away early and they couldn't come back."

After struggling offensively through the first half — committing 13 turnovers and attempting 14 field goals — Port Clinton tried to mount a comeback. The Redskins opened the third quarter trailing by 14, but four baskets in the first four minutes of the quarter brought the Redskins to within 31-22.

Following a timeout, the Little Giants answered with Wright and McConnell leading the

way.

Wright scored on a drive to the basket for Ross' first bucket of the half. Soon he found McConnell with an in-bounds pass, which McConnell laid in the hoop. Ross scored the final six points of the third quarter and continued the momentum into the fourth.

Wright scored on a baseline drive. McConnell hit a pair of free throws before Wright dished back-to-back assists to Chudzinski and then to a wide-open Jalen Slick for a 3 and a 46-22 lead.

"Coach (Mark) Gedeon called timeout and kind of yelled at us a little bit," McConnell said. "He got us back together and said, 'OK, guys let's not allow them back into any more than we already did.' Then we came out and put them away."

Said Gedeon: "Hopefully when you encourage them loudly they'll respond the right way."

Wright finished with 15 points, while McConnell scored 11 as the Little Giants improved to 4-11.

"It's relieving. It feels good to get a win," Wright said. "We got a couple more games coming up real soon and we'll see if we can keep it going."

Port Clinton (6-9) turned over the ball 25 times while Ross had nine. Stefan Daniels led Port Clinton with 12 points.

"They got up into our guards and our guards were uncomfortable with that and we turned it over a little more than we usually do early," Port Clinton coach Von Graffin said. "They made some shots, shot some open threes. Our defense didn't pick them up and they banged them (in) before you knew it. They got to the free-throw line and they made theirs and we missed ours."

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Ross 55, Port Clinton 31

Port Clinton	6	8	8	9	—	31
Ross	19	9	9	18	—	55

Port Clinton

Ryan Alexander 0 3-7 3, Joe Brenner 1 0-0 2, Darius Daniels 1 0-0 2, Stefan Daniels 5 2-3 12, Drew Fodor 2 0-0 5, Cal Laurel 0 2-4 2, Kaleb Mizener 0 0-0 0, Carter Rumball 1 0-0 5, Tytan Rumball 0 1-4 1. Totals 10 18-18 31.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 2 3-5 7, Brody Chudzinski 2 4-4 8, Taylor Druckenmiller 1 0-1 2, Jarren Hampton 1 1-2 3, Chris Liggins 2 4-6 4, Grant McConnell 3 4-4 11, Tavarious Simms 0 0-0 0, Jalen Slick 2 0-1 5, James Wright 5 4-4 15. Totals 16 19-27 55.

3-Point Goals - Port Clinton 1 (Drew Fodor 1), Ross 4 (Grant McConnell 2, Jalen Slick 1, James Wright 1), Rebounds - Port Clinton 27 (Tytan Rumball 5), Ross 21 (Steven Blodgett 5).

FINDLAY 58, FREMONT ROSS 57

One point shy of victory

James Wright scores 20 points, but Little Giants lose to Trojans

By Rich McGowan
Asst. editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — Everyone in the Fremont Ross High School gym Tuesday night had to know James Wright would have the ball in his hand. And for good reason.

With the Little Giants trailing rival Findlay by one point with 9.3 seconds to play in the game, Wright had made all seven of 2-point field goal attempts to that point, all of which he scored on drives to the basket.

So it was little surprise when, with the game on the line, Wright drove to the hoop again, draped by Findlay's Chase Miller.

"We had a good, quality shot with a player who was hot ... and it just didn't go in for us. ..."

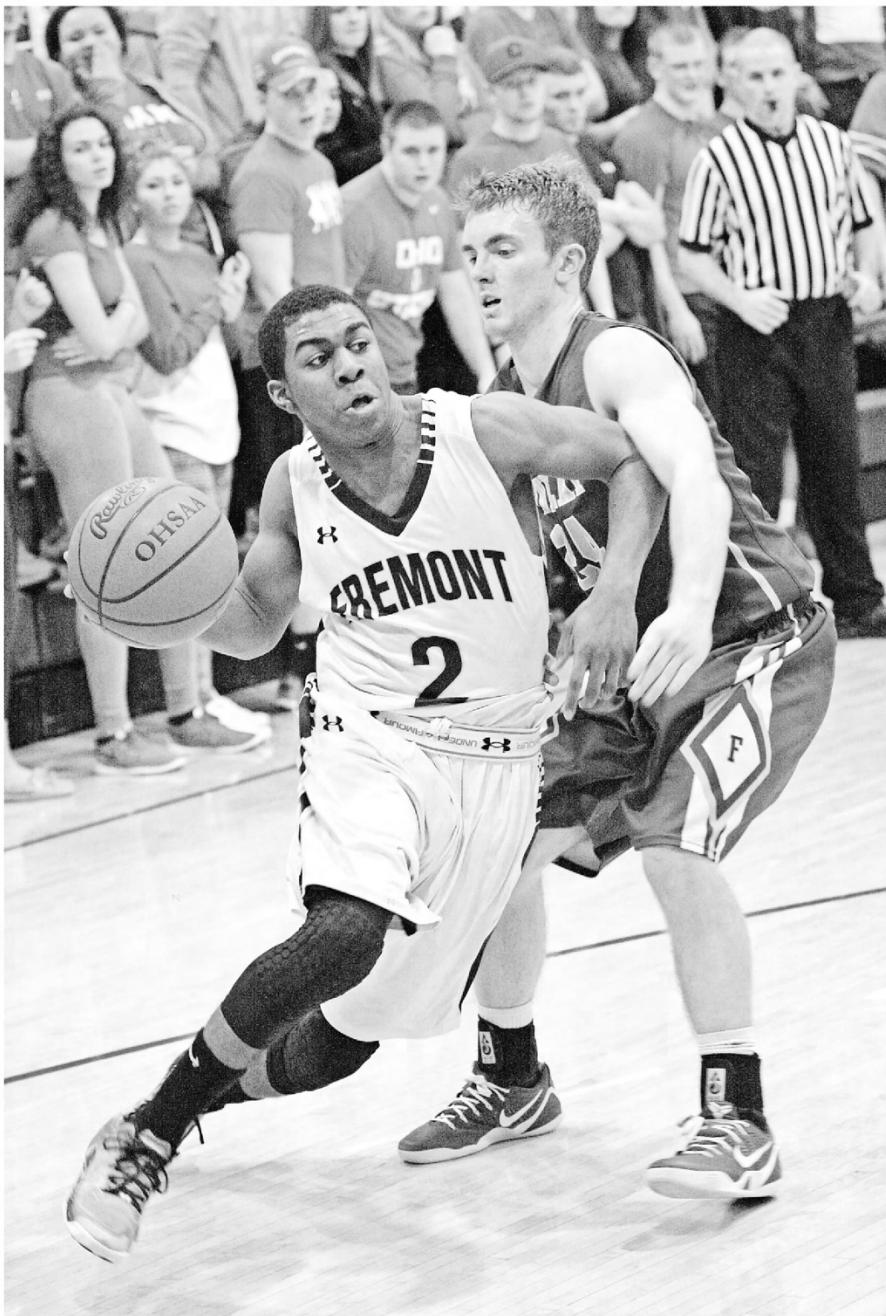
**ROSS COACH
MARK GEDEON**

Unlike all his other drives, however, the shot fell off the back iron of the rim and into the waiting arms of Findlay's Chaze Proehl, as Ross' best all-around performance fell one point shy of victory, 58-57.

"We had a good, quality shot with a player who was hot and who was confident and it just didn't go in for us there," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "We (told) our kids, life is not always fair. Why that is, I don't know. These kids played well enough to win, no question about it, and I can't say enough how proud I am of them. Hopefully, our time will be coming down the road here."

Wright finished with a

See FREMONT, Page 5A



DOUG HISE/NEWS-MESSENDER

Ross' James Wright drives to the basket against Findlay's Joey Hammond.

Fremont

Continued from Page 4A

game-high 20 points, making 7-of-9 field goal attempts and 6 of 7 at the free-throw line. Many of his drives to the basket finished with tremendous, circus-style, highlight reel layups.

“James had a really good game for us,” Ross senior Jalen Slick said. “That last shot, he feels like ‘I should have made the shot, should have had a better shot,’ but that’s the best shot you’re going to get down by one point. He did really good.

“He’s definitely the guy you want to have with the ball in that situation.”

The Little Giants’ last-second shot capped a thrilling game that saw the lead change hands 13 times with five ties in the second half.

Trailing 45-44 with 5:47 to play, the Little Giants (4-11 overall, 1-7 Three Rivers Athletic Conference) looked poised to pull off the upset. A pair of free throws by Wright gave Ross the lead. Moments later he scored on a drive through the lane. On Ross’ next possession, Wright whipped a pass through the Trojan defense to find a wide-open Slick for a lay-in and a five-point lead with 3:47 to play.

After Findlay (8-7, 6-3) responded with a pair of free throws, Wright answered with his top play of the night, a baseline drive that saw him switch hands in midair and score on a reverse layup.

“He was fantastic,” Gedeon said of Wright. “These are the things we know he is capable of. I think the biggest key for James is just slowing down, taking what the defense gives, reading the sit-

uation and making his attacks maybe the second or third time he gets the ball instead of initially trying to do everything off the dribble right away.”

Ross led 57-52 with 1:38 to play. Findlay’s Kyle Nunn scored on a layup to cut the deficit to three. Thirty seconds later, Grant McKinniss hit his fourth 3-pointer of the night to tie the game at 57 with under a minute to go. With under 20 seconds to play, Joey Hammond came up with a steal and was fouled on a fast-break. He made one of this two free throws to score the final point of the night with 15.5 seconds to play.

“I think it was our most consistent game,” Gedeon said. “We show we can play hard, we show our kids support each other but, for us to execute the way we did tonight, both offensively and defensively, I thought was by far our best.”

In addition to Wright’s brilliance, the Little Giants got nice performance from Steven Blodgett in the post, adding nine points and a game-high eight rebounds. Blodgett and Tarvarius Simms combined for 16 rebounds as Ross out-rebounded Findlay 26-14.

Ross’ biggest shortfall came at the free-throw line. The Little Giants entered the game shooting 65 percent at the stripe but made just 11 of 22 on Tuesday (50 percent).

“We can think about this tonight but tomorrow we have to get ready for Lima Senior and if we don’t get ready for Lime Senior it’s going to be ugly,” Gedeon said. “We saw some positive signs here, hopefully we see those rewards soon, too.”

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Findlay 58, Ross 57

Findlay	6	16	19	17	—	58
Ross	11	9	21	16	—	57

Findlay

Jake Elbin 1 0-0 9, Joey Hammond 0 1-2 1, Grant McKinniss 6 1-1 17, Chase Miller 4 5-6 13, Grant Niswander 1 5-7 7, Kyle Nunn 6 4-4 17. Totals 18 16-20 58.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 3 3-6 9, Brody Chudzinski 1 0-1 2, Jarren Hampton 0 1-2 1, Chris Liggins 3 0-1 9, Grant McConnell 3 1-3 8, Tavarious Simms 3 0-1 6, Jalen Slick 1 0-1 2, James Wright 7 6-7 20. Totals 21 11-22 57.

3-Point Goals - Findlay 6 (Jake Elbin 1, Grant McKinniss 4, Kyle Nunn 1), Ross 4 (Chris Liggins 3, Grant McConnell 1), Rebounds - Findlay 14 (Grant Niswander 4), Ross 26 (Steven Blodgett 8, Tavarious Simms 7).

Lima Senior proves too much for Ross boys

Grant McConnell had a team-high 10 points Friday, but the Fremont Ross boys basketball team lost to Lima Senior, 76-54, in the Three Rivers Athletic Conference.

The Little Giants (4-13, 1-8) fell behind 21-12 after the first quarter and were outscored 17-7 in the second quarter. James Wright added seven points for Ross, while Jalen Slick and Jarren Hampton had six points apiece.

	Lima 76, Ross 54				
Lima	21	17	15	23	— 76
Ross	12	7	12	23	— 54

Lima

TYLER DUNLAP 1 3, RUBEN FLOWERS 2 1 5, DARIUS GORDON 1 2 4, Marquis Miller 2 4, Anthony Shine 3 9, Xavier Simpson 8 3 19, Rico Stafford 5 10, Jaylin Thomas 5 1 12, Jarius Ward 1 2, Mark Wilson 2 4 8. Totals 30 11 76.

Ross

Trey Bulger 1 1 3, Brody Chudzinski 2 5, Taylor Druckenmiller 2 2, JaVonte Garza 1 2, Jarren Hampton 3 6, Chris Liggins 2 5, Grant McConnell 4 10, Tavarious Simms 1 2, Jalen Slick 2 2 6, James Wright 1 5 7. Totals 20 10 54.

3-Point Goals - Lima 5 (TYLER DUNLAP 1, Anthony Shine 3, Jaylin Thomas 1), Ross 4 (Brody Chudzinski 1, Chris Liggins 1, Grant McConnell 2).

Simms' last-chance put-back gives Little Giants win

The late heroics of Tavarious Simms helped the Fremont Ross boys basketball team beat Marion Harding, 48-46, Tuesday in non-conference action.

With just eight seconds remaining, Grant McConnell took the in-bounds pass from underneath, but missed. Simms was there, however, to clean up the shot, converting the rebound with just two seconds left—just enough time for a failed desperation heave by the Presidents (9-9).

McConnell led the Little Giants (5-13) with 13 points, while James Wright finished with 11. Simms finished with nine points.

Boys basketball Tuesday results

Ross 48, Marion Harding 46

Marion Harding	13	10	13	10	—	46
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Ross	10	11	14	13	—	48
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Marion Harding

Jason Ellis 3 4 10, Tyler Longstreh 2 3 8, Quinten McComas 5 3 15, Taylor Peterson 2 4, Will Reed 2 4, Bryce Starner 2 1 5. Totals 13 11 46.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 4 8, Brody Chudzinski 1 2 5, Chris Liggins 1 2, Grant McConnell 4 5 13, Tavarious Simms 4 1 9, James Wright 4 3 11. Totals 18 11 48.

3-Point Goals - Marion Harding 3 (Tyler Longstreh 1, Quinten McComas 2), Ross 1 (Brody Chudzinski 1).

Records: Ross 5-13, Marion Harding 9-9.

Next: Ross at Whitmer, Friday.

FREMONT ROSS 49, TOLEDO WHITMER 48

A DIFFERENT TEAM

McConnell hits game-winner at 0:06 in redeeming victory for Little Giants

By Rich McGowan
Assistant editor/sports reporter

TOLEDO — Call it sweet redemption.

Following a 33-point blowout loss at home to Toledo Whitmer on Jan. 6, Fremont Ross eagerly awaited its rematch with the Panthers on Friday night.

Everything that went wrong for Little Giants in January, went right Friday. None more so than Grant McConnell's drive to the basket and layup with 6.2 seconds left to give Ross the lead.

Ross' defense then held off Whitmer's last-ditch, game-winning shot attempt and held on for a 49-48 victory.

"James (Wright) went up, I thought he was going to drive it, I told him to drive and then dish," McConnell said. "Then he passed to me and I said, 'I've got to take the shot.' And it went in. It was great."

The victory erases the bitter taste remaining in the Little Giants' mouth from their 66-33 loss to the Panthers more than a month ago.

"It does feel good, especially for us, for how poorly we played the first time we played them," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "That one was definitely the worst game of the year, no question on that one."

The Little Giants quickly established they were not the same team the Panthers saw in January.

Ross started the game 7-for-11 in the first quarter to jump out to an 18-9 lead. Whitmer chiseled away at the deficit, trailing by five at halftime. The wheels nearly came off for the Little Giants in the third quarter.

Whitmer outscored Ross 11-0

See LITTLE GIANTS, Page 2B



JONATHON BIRD/STAFF

Fremont Ross' Grant McConnell drives to the basket in the first quarter of the Little Giants' game at Toledo Whitmer. McConnell later scored the game-winning basket with 6 seconds to play.

Little Giants

Continued from Page 1B

to start the second half and held Ross to just four points and one field goal in the third as the Little Giants trailed by as many as seven.

Whatever tightness Ross played with in the third quarter immediately vanished on the opening possession of the fourth quarter. Brody Chudzinski made his only bucket of the night, a 3-pointer from the corner, to bring the Little Giants back to within two. A 3-pointer by Wright two minutes later gave Ross the lead once again, 41-40.

"That's probably the second-biggest shot of the game," McConnell said of Chudzinski's basket. "That broke a big dry spell. That's the nice thing about having a team full of shooters, any one of us can make it at any time and he stepped up."

Ross led 47-46 with less than 30 seconds to play. Sam Hickey scored with 15.4 to go to put Whitmer ahead and set the table for McConnell's heroics.

"I knew (McConnell) had a hot hand coming in," Wright said of the final play. "Whether it was me or him, I knew somebody was going to make it. I just felt I needed another assist, so I gave it to

him."

Wright and McConnell lead Ross (6-13 overall, 2-9 Three Rivers Athletic Conference) with 13 points each.

Whitmer's Montreuce Collins led the Panthers (5-12, 2-9) with 13 points and 11 rebounds but, after dominating the first half with 10 points and nine boards, was held without a field goal in the second half by Ross' defense, led by Tavarious Simms, Steven Blodgett and McConnell.

"I had faith in my team for the back-side help so I was trying to front (Collins)," Simms said. "I had Grant McConnell on my back side so when they were trying to lob it to him, we were able to block the pass."

The win is Ross' second in a row where the Little Giants have scored the go-ahead basket in the game's waning moments. The Little Giants topped Marion Harding 48-46 Tuesday with a basket by Simms with two seconds to play.

"Back-to-back shots inside of 10 seconds and wins by one and two, you see the excitement of the kids right now," Geden said. "We kept talking about 'If you keep working hard, good things will happen.'

"Right now we're playing competitive basketball and that's exciting for us."

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LOCAL ANALYSIS



Fremont Ross' Steven Blodgett battles for a rebound during a basketball game against Clay on Tuesday.

JONATHON BIRD/STAFF PHOTO

Peaking at the right time

Fremont Ross wins third in a row, fifth out of last nine

By Rich McGowan
Asst. editor/sports reporter

FREMONT — Every team wants to hit its stride in time for the season's home stretch.

Peaking at the right time — tournament time — is the goal every coach has for his team.

That may just be what the Fremont Ross boys basketball team is doing.

With a 38-point thrashing of Oregon Clay on Tuesday night, the Little Giants won their third-consecutive game — a season-high. More impressive than the 83-45 final score is the way it came about.

Ross came out of the gates firing on all cylinders and didn't stop.

The offense ran smoothly, both with and away from the ball. The Little Giants enjoyed

a high-shooting percentage, 7 for 10 in the first quarter for a 19-6 lead, and 14 of 22 (63 percent) for a 43-12 halftime advantage.

While the offense rarely missed, the defense made sure Clay did. The Eagles shot a paltry 17 percent in the first half (4 for 23), Ross limited Clay to one-shot possessions by taking a 19-5 edge in rebounding in the first half.

"Everything is just smoother," said senior Grant McConnell, who scored a game-high 17 points. "The way we're passing, things are really starting to mesh together."

While the numbers are impressive, the most noticeable difference in the Little Giants of today from those from most of the season is the confidence in their step and the cohesiveness with which they play.

Ross entered Tuesday's game against winless Clay expecting to win. But a team that expects to win doesn't always play as though it should. Ross had no issue being ready in the wake of its thrilling win over Toledo Whitmer last Friday.

"This game were able to play with a high-level of energy, we had the tempo," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "One of the things we tried to do was make them uncomfortable."



JONATHON BIRD/STAFF PHOTO
Fremont Ross' Tavarious Simms sends a pass across to a teammate during a basketball game against Clay on Tuesday.

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Analysis

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able and I think we did.”

Early in the season, Ross enjoyed a few games where it showed flashes of what a gritty, selfless team could achieve with no true star and several quality pieces playing as one unit.

Then the holidays came. And injuries. And illnesses. And players on vacation. And disciplinary issues.

For nearly a month, the Little Giants were a team without a consistent core. Practices weren’t effective as different starting lineups and substitution rotations were being re-worked on the fly. In a game Jan. 15, Ross suited up just six varsity players against St. Francis de Sales.

Finally, bodies returned from vacation and remained healthy and in the lineup. After a 2-9 start to the season, the Little Giants are 5-4 in their last nine, and two of their losses have been by one point.

“The key for us is consistency,” Gedeon said. “We’ve had our group here in practice, we’ve had them available for games. That’s allowed us to do, at least what we envisioned for

this team, what our blueprint was, that we have the pieces for everyone to do their roles and make us a more competitive team.”

That’s not to say Ross is on the verge of a state championship. With the exception of Marion Harding, who entered Tuesday with a 9-9 record, no team the Little Giants have beaten have more than seven wins. Clay and Fostoria have one victory between them.

Ross’ final two games, Friday at home against St. Francis and a week later at St. John’s, will show just how far the Little Giants have come this season – and how far they have yet to go.

But even if Ross drops its final two games, if the Little Giants can show they can compete they just may enter the postseason as the team no one wants to play.

“We don’t care who we play, we’re going to play the same way,” McConell said. “Whether it’s someone like Clay or if we end up playing Lima or someone like that down the road, we’re going to play hard and hopefully good things happen.”

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**Boys basketball
Tuesday night results**

Ross 83, Oregon Clay MS 45

Oregon Clay MS 6 6 13 20 — 45

Ross 19 24 13 27 — 83

Oregon Clay MS

Nate Bush 2 0-0 4, Jerimiah Davis 1 1-1 3,
Noah Durcynski 2 2-2 6, Garycl Hahn 1 3-4 6,
Josh Kiss 4 2-4 12, Steven Nguyen 2 5-8 9,
Christian Orr 1 0-0 2, Chris Walters 1 0-0 3.
Totals 14 13-19 45.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 4 0-1 8, Tre Bulger 1 1-1 3,
Brody Chudzinski 4 0-0 11, Taylor Drucken-
miller 1 0-0 2, JaVonte Garza 2 0-0 4, Jarren
Hampton 1 0-0 2, Jermani Homler 1 4-6 7,
Chris Liggins 0 2-2 2, Grant McConnell 7 3-3
17, Tavarious Simms 0 2-2 2, Jalen Slick 3 0-0 8,
James Wright 3 5-8 13, Kaleb Young 1 2-2 4.
Totals 27 19-25 83.

3-Point Goals - Oregon Clay MS 5 (Jerimiah
Davis 1, Garycl Hahn 1, Josh Kiss 2, Chris Wal-
ters 1), Ross 8 (Brody Chudzinski 3, Jermani
Homler 1, Jalen Slick 2, James Wright 2), Re-
bounds - Oregon Clay MS 15, Ross 29 (Steven
Blodgett 8).

Ross boys lose physical game to St. Francis de Sales

The Fremont Ross boys basketball team played a tough and physical game Friday but came up on the short end of a 56-49 Three Rivers Athletic Conference matchup with St. Francis de Sales.

The Knights (11-10, 6-7) dominated the paint, getting to the stripe 20 times—converting 17 free throws.

“They used their physicality to get to the line,” Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. “That was the difference. It was a close game throughout.”

The Little Giants (7-14, 3-10) led 12-11 after the opening quarter, and despite falling behind in the second quarter, Ross kept things close. The largest deficit of the game was just seven points.

James Wright had a team-high 16 points for Ross and teammate Grant McConnell added 11. Tavarious Simms had eight points.

Ross concludes its regular season Friday at St. John’s Jesuit.

St. Francis De Sales 56, Ross 49

St. Francis De Sales 11 16 16 13 — 56

Ross 12 12 13 12 — 49

St. Francis De Sales

Devon Beale 1 2, John Burnham 6 6 22, Jeremy Eid 2 6, Dontay Ellison 4 10 8, CJ Fagan 11 3, Nick Lankard 2 5. Totals 16 17 56.

Ross

Steven Blodgett 2 4, Brody Chudzinski 2 4, Grant McConnell 4 2 11, Tavarious Simms 2 4 8, Jalen Slick 2 6, James Wright 4 7 16. Totals 16 13 49.

3-Point Goals - St. Francis De Sales (Toledo) 7 (John Burnham 4, Jeremy Eid 2, Nick Lankard 1), Ross 4 (Grant McConnell 1, Jalen Slick 2, James Wright 1).

State-ranked St. John's overpowers Ross boys

The outcome of Friday's regular season finale was expected for the Fremont Ross's boys basketball team. They lost.

But to the Little Giants' credit, they played a St. John's Jesuit's team that's ranked 12th in the state in Division I and lost 75-43.

"We competed at times," Ross head coach Mark Gedeon said, "but their strength and athleticism was too much for us tonight."

Brody Chudzinski led Ross (3-11, 7-15) with nine points, all off triples. Both James Wright and Jarren Hampton had seven points.

Myles Copeland led the Titans (19-3, 14-0) with 26 points.

The Little Giants will open their sectional tournament against Bowling Green at Otsego High School this Wednesday.

St. John's Jesuit 75, Ross 43

Ross 9 12 13 9 — 43

St. John's Jesuit 15 16 21 23 — 75

Ross

Steven Blodgett 1 2, Tre Bulger 2 4, Brody Chudzinski 3 9, JaVonte Garza 1 2, Jarren Hampton 1 4 7, Chris Liggins 1 3, Tavarious Simms 1 2, Jalen Slick 2 5, James Wright 2 2 7, Kaleb Young 1 2. Totals 15 6 43.

St. John's Jesuit

Zach Buescher 1 3, Myles Copeland 8 11 27, Joey Fretti 1 2 5, Jordan 1 2, Houston King 1 3, Gabe Kynard 4 1 9, Ethan Pina 2 4, Aaron Thompson 5 1 14, Toerne 2 2, Williams 1 1, Vincent Williams 1 3 5. Totals 24 21 75.

3-Point Goals - Ross 7 (Brody Chudzinski 3, Chris Liggins 1, Jalen Slick 1, James Wright 1), St. John's Jesuit 6 (Zach Buescher 1, Joey Fretti 1, Houston King 1, Aaron Thompson 3).

Team Awards
Voted by the Players

Most Valuable Player: Grant McConnell

Most Improved Player: Steven Blodgett

Best Defensive Player: Jarren Hampton

Billy Stierwalt Award: Grant McConnell

Captain's Award – Chris Liggins, Grant McConnell, Jalen Slick, James Wright

AP Honors

All Northwest Ohio: None

Toledo Blade: Honorable Mention: None

Fostoria East-West All-Stars: Grant McConnell and James Wright

WLEC SBC versus area Area All-Stars: Grant McConnell and James Wright; Chris Liggins 1st alternate

2014-15 All-TRAC

Player of the Year: Myles Copeland, Sr., St. John's

First Team

Myles Copeland, Sr., St. John's
Xavier Simpson, Jr., Lima Sr.
Marcus Winters, Sr., Central
Gabe Kynard, Jr., St. John's
Dontay Ellison, Sr., St. Francis
Montrece Collins, Whitmer

Second Team

Kaleb Vaughn, Sr., St. John's
Jeremiah Braswell, Sr., Central
Kyle Nunn, Soph., Findlay
Jay Thomas, Jr., Lima Sr.
Elijah Pughsley, Sr., Lima Sr.
Sam Hickey, Jr., Whitmer

Honorable Mention

Central Catholic: Jerry Moore, Sr.
Clay: Steven Nguyen, Jr., Josh Kiss
Findlay: Grant Nieswander, Sr., Chase Miller, Jr.
Fremont Ross: Grant McConnell, Sr. and James Wright, Sr.
Lima Sr.: Rico Stafford, Jr., Ruben Flowers, Jr.
St. Francis: Devon Beale, Jr., John Burnham, Soph.
St. John's: Aaron Thompson, Jr.
Whitmer: Travis Sanders, Jr., DJ Triplett, Soph

Coach of the Year: Ed Hienschel, St. John's

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