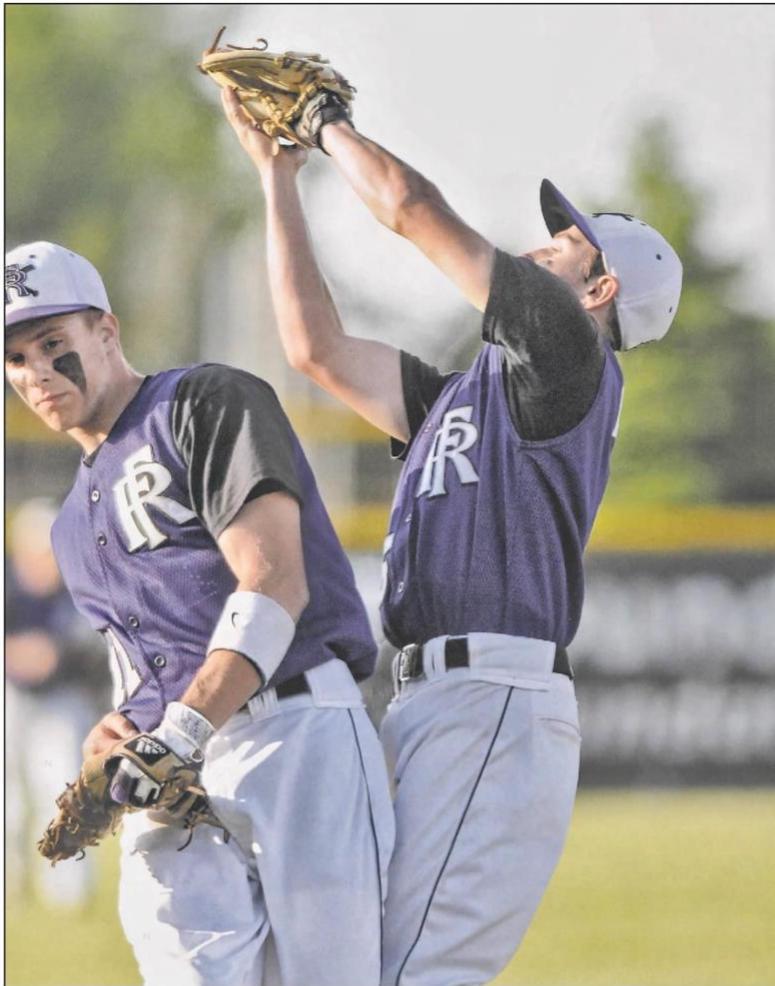

HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL » FREMONT ROSS PREVIEW



Fremont Ross' Brandon Weiker makes a catch for an out over Tyler Wolf during a baseball game against Anthony Wayne on Thursday, May 10, 2012. JONATHON BIRD/NEWS-MESSENDER

Ross pins hopes on its defense

Little Giants want to limit opponents' big innings

By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

FREMONT — Putting crooked numbers up on the board was a specialty of the Ross baseball team in 2012.

Loaded with big bats up and down the lineup, the Little Giants could hit with the best of them, doing so as a team at a .369 clip. The new BBCOR (Ball-Bat Coefficient of Restitution) bats had little effect on the numbers.

The problem for Ross was

keeping those big innings from popping up on the opposite line score. Of its 11 losses in 2012, six came in one-run contests. The biggest culprit: Defensive lapses. A 6-0 lead after 4 1/2 innings turned into a 7-6 loss at Findlay to open Three Rivers Athletic Conference play. Two days later, the Little Giants blew a 3-1 lead in the final two innings in a loss to Oregon Clay at Toledo's Fifth Third Field, prompting coach Mark King to call his team, "the only team in the

TRAC with an 0-2 record that no one wants to play."

"In this league, all you got to do is leave the door open a little bit with a mistake here, a mental error or a couple physical errors back-to-back there, and teams will take advantage of that," King said. "We lost a game to St. Francis (de Sales) in Fremont that we should have never lost. Then we lost that game to Clay up at Fifth Third Field that could have

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Baseball

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gone our way, too. When you get an opportunity in this league to get an out, you have to take that out. There's so much talent in this league."

Needless to say, it's no surprise that work with the gloves was the main focus over the off-season.

Ross went 18-11 in 2012 and 7-7 in the TRAC, losing the title game of the conference tournament to Toledo St. John's Jesuit, 8-4, in another game that got away from it after pulling ahead in the final innings.

"Right now, I think the whole coaching staff is extremely excited about what we're seeing in the defensive aspect of the game right now," King said. "The kids worked really hard at that aspect. But with all that said, we had fielding percentage over .900 last season, which was the best in my five years as coach."

Senior Tyler Wolf returns as Ross' big bat and arm. A "five-tool player" as King refers to the senior, Wolf was the Little Giants' third-leading hitter as a junior with a .400 batting average, which included him tallying 40 hits, driving in 15 runs and scoring another 20. He'll hit third in place of graduated catcher Jordan Garcia.

On the mound, Wolf will be the No.1 arm coming off a 7-2 campaign that saw him post a 2.60 earned run average.

"In my book, he's a Division I recruit," said King, of Wolf, also receiving looks for football. "But he'll have some options. He's one heck of an athlete."

Shortstop is Wolf's main position of strength, but his pitching is coming along, too. Last year was his first on the mound at the high school level.

"He's been working a lot on his off-speed stuff," King said. "I think that's only going to benefit him down the road and make him an even bigger commodity in big games."

Pitching depth won't be a problem. Ross will have seven pitchers at its disposal this spring up from the usual four to five. Senior Andy Mapus returns to the hill after going 2-1 with a 1.62 ERA.

"He's a big kid who throws hard," said King, of Mapus.

Ty Wilson is another senior pitcher King expects some big showings from. Wilson had a 1.40 ERA out of the bullpen a year ago. Seniors Brandon Weiker and Mike Egbert are others that will be inning-eaters on the mound. But Weiker and Egbert also provide solid sticks at the plate.

Egbert, who will bat leadoff, hit .393 and scored 26 runs a season ago.

"We think he's cut out of the

same mold that TJ (Harkness) was," King said. "He's a real leader at the top of the order for us."

Weiker surprised many, including his coach.

"He came out of nowhere and hit .347 for us," King said. "He wasn't somebody that we expected to have that kind of production from, but he just continued to pick it up. I expect him to continue that."

Junior Kole Amor will play catcher. He batted over .400 in 50 plate appearances.

Going around the diamond, Weiker is slated for the hot corner at third base, with Cole Bowers at second, Wolf or Fostoria transfer Elijah Hampton at third, while Mapus will play at first. The outfield will most likely feature Egbert in center and senior Spencer Conklin in left with right field still being anyone's guess.

Jalen Slick is another player expected to make an impact.

"We're extremely excited about playing this year and we're ready to go," King said. "There's going to be seven teams that can win this league if they get the right contributions and the team plays up to the level its capable of playing at. Night in and night out, we're going to take turns beating each other up."

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Baseball: Clyde 9-5, Ross 5-7

CLYDE—The Fliers and Little Giants combined to score 26 runs on Saturday as the two teams split a non-league season-opening doubleheader.

Mike Egbert homered, tripled and drove in four total runs for Ross (1-1), which also got a homer, double and two RBI from Brandon Weiker. Spencer Conklin tallied three RBI in the two games while Jalen Slick doubled and drove in a run for the Little Giants who also got RBI from Tyler Wolf and Elijah Hampton.

Ross' Ty Wilson was the winning pitcher in Game 2, striking out four and walking one in $4\frac{1}{3}$ innings. Weiker recorded the save. Andy Mapus struck out five Fliers in $4\frac{1}{3}$ innings of work in Game 1.

Clyde's Clayton Farrar earned the win on the mound in Game 1 and tallied four hits, two doubles and three RBI at the plate. Derek Gray finished with two hits and two swiped bags for the Fliers while Seth Magers hit a double and homer. Brad Smith added two RBI, Drake Camarata had a double and an RBI for Clyde as did Konnor Garcia and Colin Gregory.



Fremont Ross' Michael Egbert pitches Monday against Port Clinton. The Little Giants won, 9-4. JONATHON BIRD/NEWS-MESSENDER

A unique route to RBIs

Amor hit three times to drive in two in Little Giants victory

By Matthew Horn
Sports writer

PORT CLINTON — One of the definitions of amor is cupid.

Kole Amor of Fremont Ross was not feeling the love in Monday's 9-4 non-conference victory over Port Clinton. Instead of arrows, Amor was struck by three pitches — two of which drove in runs — to prove that sometimes love hurts.

"Just take it for the team," Amor said. "Do what I need to do for a cushion."

Amor, who made a couple nice throws at catcher to erase runners, has been hit five times in two games.

"Your adrenaline is going," Amor said of not being worried about any bruises. "Whatever gets me on base."

Amor was hit with the bases loaded in a



Port Clinton's Kyle Radloff slides into second base ahead of the tag from Fremont Ross' Tyler Wolf on Monday, April 1, 2013. JONATHON BIRD/NEWS-MESSENDER

five-run third and again for a run in the fourth. He was hit and scored in the sixth.

"We teach them to stand strong and stand tall," Little Giants coach Mark King said. "Don't bail. He's the kind of kid that won't back out."

Elijah Hampton, Cole Bowers, Michael Egbert, Brandon Weiker and Tyler Wolf

each scored one run in the third as Ross (2-1) took the lead for good at 5-4. Amor added an RBI as the Little Giants benefited from three errors in the inning.

"We started extremely rough," King said of an error, walk and several wild

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Baseball

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pitches leading to three runs in the first inning. "Good pitching will be ahead of good hitting right now. (Addison) Rospert threw well. We knew he was a great player coming in. It was Egbert's first start (on the mound) in a few years. He was around the zone."

Hampton relieved Egbert to start the third and tossed two scoreless innings. Weiker finished with three shutout innings of his own.

Hampton made his first varsity appearance on the mound while Weiker also threw the final three innings in a victory Saturday.

"(Weiker) has a great array

of pitches -- slider, fastball, curve, changeup," King said. "He has a great head on his shoulders. He'll be around the strike zone with four quality pitches.

"(Hampton) has a live arm. He battled. Elijah put out a fire and let us get back in it."

Mason Contreras reached on an error and scored in the fourth, and Egbert and Wolf also scored in the sixth. Spencer Conklin had a two-run single while Jalen Slick added one RBI in the sixth.

"When we hit, we'll roll," King said. "Defensively, we're better than last year. We'll use seven pitchers. We've got more depth."

And nobody plans to bail.

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Baseball: Fremont Ross 15, Columbian 4

TIFFIN — Tyler Wolf went the distance for the Little Giants Thursday, giving up four runs on five hits in a 15-4 win over the Tornadoes.

Wolf also went 2-4, scoring a pair of runs and collecting two RBIs. Ross (4-1) had four players with multiple hits.

“I’m extremely pleased,” said Ross head coach Mark King. “We got a strong pitching performance, zero errors and we hit well.”

Michael Egbert led the Little Giants, going 4-for-5 with a triple, an RBI and four runs scored. Kole Amor went 3-for-4 with a double and three RBIs and teammate Jalen Slick was 2-4 with three RBIs for Ross.

Baseball: Rockets

double-up Ross

FREMONT — AJ Cecil impressed from the bump hurling a four-hit shutout in Oak Harbor's 9-0 win over the Little Giants in Game 1 of Saturday's doubleheader.

"AJ came out and threw strikes and kept them off balance," Rockets coach Rob Schimmoeller said. "The second game we just swung it well. It was nice to get up 9-1."

Cecil fanned seven Ross batters and walked just two and improved his record to 3-0. Ty Wilson, who allowed seven runs on 10 hits, took the loss for the Little Giants (3-3).

"I was able to throw strike one and once I got ahead I was able to hit my spots off-speed," Cecil said.

Jourdan Maguire, Andy Rathbun, Logan Winke and Mark Konieczny all had two hits for the Rockets. Rathbun drove in three runs.

In the second game, Oak Harbor won 17-7 behind a 5-for-5 performance from Konieczny. Konieczny doubled twice, scored three times and drove in eight runs after catching for the first time since his freshman year in the first game.

"I just forgot about the past and started fresh from (Saturday) ... see what I can do," Konieczny said of a slow start that included some hard-hit outs and two strikeouts in one game. "I decided I had to get it going."

Rathbun and Winke had three hits apiece for the Rockets (6-1). Cody Schultz scored three runs and drove in two in the second game, Mike Osbourne scored three runs. Rockets assistant Nick Lance is working with Winke to load early, adjust his feet and timing, and hit fastballs.

"When there are guys on, you have to put the ball in play for a chance to score," Winke said. "Everybody hit the ball solid. I just want to stay hot."

Konieczny, Rathbun, Cecil and Winke combined to go 20 for 30 on Saturday.

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Ross's Mike Egbert was 2-for-2 with a double and three RBIs.

Bottom of the lineup aids Ross victory

By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

FREMONT — Cole Bowers didn't have to choke up his bat too much to have a productive day at the plate on Monday.

Aided by a steady northeast wind that was blowing out to left field, Ross' seven-hole hitter only had to make sure he got his bat out in front of the ball. The wind did the rest.

Bowers went 2 for 4 and tallied a game-high five RBIs, including a bases clearing three-run single through the left side in the first inning as the Little Giants earned a 12-2 non-league victory over Fostoria in six innings on Monday at Alumni Fields.

Up 11-2 in the bottom of the sixth inning, Bowers scored the winning run — his third of the game — when Jalen Slick's sharp-single to short caught the bare hand of Redmen pitcher Anthony Dean and came to a stop between the mound and second base. Bowers

"It was easy to see the ball," Bowers said. "I was just out there doing my role. I trust the guys at the top of the lineup to get on base and it's my role to bring them in."

Bowers added a fielder's choice RBI in the second inning. He also doubled in a run in the fifth when he found the gap in left center on a 2-2 pitch. The bottom three — Bowers, Nick Michael and Knick Lippert — of the Ross lineup went a combined 4 for 10 and drove in seven runs. Each player in the lineup tallied at least one hit.

"That's excellent," said Little Giants coach Mark King, of the production from the bottom of his order. "We haven't gotten a whole lot of production from the bottom of our lineup. Cole Bowers is starting the swing the bat. He started swinging the bat two to three games ago. We knew it was going to come from him sooner than later."

Fostoria (0-8) opened the scoring in the first inning when first baseman Casey Kitchen doubled in pitcher Rob Crotty to give the Redmen a 1-0 lead. But Ross starter Andy Mapus battled back to retire eight of the next nine hitters.

Mapus earned the victory as he gave up two runs on four hits. He struck out eight, walked none and had two hit by pitches.

On the opposite side, the Little Giants had 11 hits. They scored four in

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Giants

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the first inning and five in the second to lead 9-1 entering the third.

"I'm extremely happy with the way Andy threw and the fact that we didn't have any errors," King said. "We should hit the baseball. And we hit a little bit Saturday (two losses 17-7 and 9-0 to Oak Harbor in a doubleheader). But Saturday was the worst performance I've seen from a Little Giants baseball team in the eight years I've been associated with the program. We didn't do the little things right.

"Today was going to tell a lot. We came back out today, Andy got back on the hill, kept the ball down and he was extremely effective. It was a good overall performance for us to shake off

Saturday."

Mike Egbert and Brandon Weiker each drew walks in the first inning for the Little Giants who staked a 4-1 lead. Spencer Conklin's double to right center scored Egbert while Weiker, Conklin and Elijah Hampton, who reached by getting hit by a pitch, all came home on Bowers' single that went between the shortstop and the bag at second.

Lippert led off the second inning with a double to center, went to third on a double to right center by Egbert and scored on Slick's two-RBI double. Slick came home on the play as he advanced to third on a fielding error by the centerfielder and went home on a throwing error by the centerfielder. Slick finished 2 for 4 with three RBIs.

Ross scored six of its runs with two outs on the board.

"For us to forget about Saturday, we had to play good today,"

Bowers said. "So this was a part of moving on from that."

Bower's RBI double in the fourth inning, paired with a sacrifice fly from Lippert gave Ross an 11-2 lead after the Redmen cut into the deficit on an RBI single up the middle by Lance Smith.

Bowers, a senior, split time a year ago at second base with Weiker and TJ Harkness.

"Coach helped me tweak my swing a little bit recently," Bowers said. "Once I figured that out, my hitting just got better. It's easier to see the ball once you got a nice swing going."

The Little Giants return to action Wednesday when they host Marion Harding, an old Greater Buckeye Conference foe, in a non-league contest scheduled for 5 p.m. at Alumni Fields.

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BASEBALL

Ross wins in grand fashion over SJCC

Little Giants hit two grand slams in win over cross-town rival

By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

FREMONT — Stuck inside for a majority of the past week, Ross coach Mark King was eager to see how his Little Giants' bats would respond when put back into an in-game situation.

Apparently, it had little effect. The Little Giants tallied five hits and scored eight runs in the first inning which included a grand slam from Mike Eg-

bert as they bested St. Joseph Central Catholic on Tuesday in a non-league contest at Alumni Fields.

"Our big deal is that it's been eight days since we've competed in any kind of competitive nature," King said. "So we were worried about getting some repetitions in for our regular players and getting everyone some work. But they all accomplished exactly what we wanted them to do today. It was good

team win and everyone responded."

Egbert, who has been Ross' hottest hitter in the first nine games, gave the Little Giants (6-3) an 8-0 lead with his blast to left field that went over the fence and ricocheted off a car parked just on the other side. He also walked once, got hit by a pitch and doubled as part of a 2-for-2 effort where he scored three runs and drove in four.

"I've been working at home a lot and it's been helping out quite a bit," said Egbert, of his hot streak. "I hope I'm able to stay hot and do whatever can to help the team keep the wins up."

Egbert scored the game's first run when Spencer Conklin's grounder to short was mishandled by SJCC shortstop Zach Yekley, allowing everyone to reach safe. Two batters later, Elijah Hampton brought home two runs with an RBI single to center, before another error by the Crimson Streaks (2-7) allowed Conklin to score. Michael Hufford's sharp single then bounced over the head of first baseman Jacob Wurzel, loading the bags up for Egbert's first career four-run homer.

"(SJCC) pitcher Bennett Weickert) kept it up and I had to drive it," Egbert said. "He had

thrown an off-speed and then came back with that high fastball."

Added King: "Mike has been just ungodly hot all year. He continued that today. He hit the ball strong."

The Crimson Streaks got a run back in the second inning when Wurzel's double to center scored Marcus Kerr from second base for an 8-1 deficit. But Ross took the run right back when Conklin singled on a 0-1 pitch to left center to score Tyler Wolf. It was the last at bat for Weickert who gave up nine

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runs but was only credited for two.

“Errors hurt us tonight,” SJCC coach Robert George said. “Plus, we couldn’t throw our ace with a league game on Thursday. So we gave some our younger guys a chance tonight and some of them looked good at some points.”

Wolf drew a bases loaded walk in the third for a 10-1 Ross advantage before Kole Amor tallied his team’s second grand slam. Like Egbert, Amor also put one in the parking lot in left field. The Little Giants’ catcher finished 2-for-2, drawing two walks and driving in four runs.

“Kole had two nice swings today,” King said. “Tyler Wolf also had some nice cuts. Mike Hufford had a nice swing, as did Spencer Conklin. That was what it was all about. We just needed to get these guys playing again.”

Ty Wilson got his regular start in on the mound for the Ross. He gave up two runs (one earned) on five hits.

“He did what he needed to do,” said King, of Wilson who struck out four and didn’t allow any bases on balls. “In his last outing, he struggled mechanically with keeping the ball high in the zone. Today, he got the ball down a little better

and got his mechanics corrected.”

Ross was originally scheduled to play Galion Tuesday but the Tigers had to cancel their trip after a member of their team died over the weekend. The game with the Crimson Streaks marked the first time the teams had met each other in a regular season game in quite some time.

“Galion is dealing with a tragedy right now, so rightfully so, they had to cancel,” said King, of the scheduling change. “We were trying to find someone to get on the field with and St. Joe was nice enough to come over. We usually scrimmage each other every year, but it just didn’t work out this year.

“I graduated from Ross and grew up around and I can’t remember us every playing (SJCC).”

Lucas Michael added an RBI double for the Crimson Streaks in the fifth inning.

“Days like today are only going to get us better for the games in our league,” George said. “Playing up ion competition is always good in my opinion. And playing a game was much better than us just practicing.”

Ross will make up a game with Marion Harding today at Alumni Fields. The Streaks are off until Thursday.

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Baseball: Ross 17, Marion Harding 0

FREMONT — Brandon Weiker needed only 53 pitches to make it through five innings as he tossed a three-hit shutout in leading the Little Giants to a Wednesday non-league win over the Presidents.

Weiker, a senior, struck out three and walked one. Behind him, the Little Giants (7-3) committed a single error.

“Brandon did what he needed to do,” Ross coach Mark King, “He did a nice job of mix-

ing his slider and curveball with consistency and he stayed in the zone. With our defense averaging only one error a game, we feel we can be pretty successful on the mound...”

Mike Egbert continues to swing a hot bat at the top of the Little Giants’ order. On Wednesday, he was 4-for-4, including a triple and an RBI.

“Whatever is going on with Mike, I hope he doesn’t wake up from it,” King said.

Kole Amor also stayed hot at the plate, going 3-for-3 with an RBI. Weiker added two hits and an RBI while Spencer Conklin tallied three RBIs and Cole Bowers had two RBIs.

“We’re really happy right now with the way we’re playing,” said King, whose team opens Three Rivers Athletic Conference play against Findlay on Friday at Alumni Fields. “Now the road gets tougher. But I was encouraged with how we performed the last two days after being off for eight days.”



Fremont Ross' Cole Bowers connects for a hit during a baseball game against Clay High School at Fifth Third Field in Toledo on Tuesday.
JONATHON BIRD/NEWS-MESSANGER PHOTOS

Clay bunts past Ross

Despite preparation, Fremont fails to execute and falls short

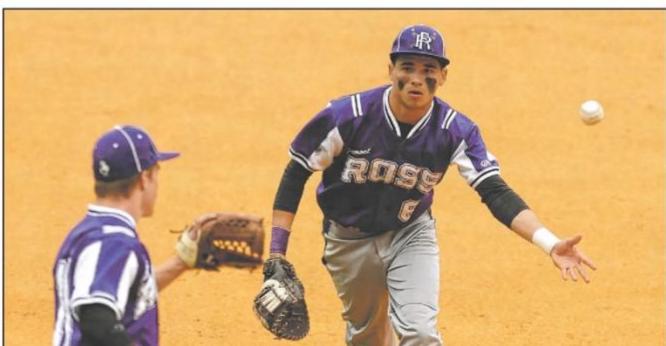
By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

TOLEDO — Ross spent most of Monday working on its bunt defense in preparation for Tuesday's game against Three Rivers Athletic Conference favorite Oregon Clay, knowing the Eagles are a team that love to sneak in a squeeze play.

But when it came time to execute on the big stage at Toledo's Fifth Third Field on game day, it was back-to-back bunts that proved to be the winning hits for Clay in a 5-4 victory.

With the bases loaded in the fifth inning, Eagles' catcher Ty McAtee's bunt single scored Ryan Fournier from third to break a 2-2 tie. Kyle Row followed with another well-placed squeeze that took a Clay bounce over the mound as pitcher Tyler Wolf and shortstop Brandon Weiker overran the ball in pursuit. The hit brought Lucas Robson home from third base and Jordan Grosjean scored from second.

"It was a carbon copy of last year's game here (a 4-3 loss to Clay on April 18), and it was the same kind of situation that cost us," Little Giants coach Mark King.



Fremont Ross' Jalen Slick tosses the ball to Tyler Wolf for an out at first Tuesday.

"Last year, it was two first and third plays that we failed to execute on. Tonight, it was two squeeze bunts that we failed to execute. And I can honestly say, it wasn't for a lack of preparation because we knew that's the kind of ball Clay plays. It was our focus all day yesterday coming in.

"Unfortunately the role or the bounce

didn't go our way. One rolled off Tyler's (Wolf) hand and the other got through us, but we have to make that play to compete at this level."

Robson, who started for the Eagles (5-6, 2-0) on the mound, was solid on the

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ROSS

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hill and got the big outs when needed in a complete game seven-inning effort. But he struggled to find his pitches in the first inning as Ross (8-6, 0-2) loaded the bases up. Spencer Conklin's one out sacrifice fly to center field scored Mike Egbert for a 1-0 lead.

Cole Bowers run increased the Little Giants advantage to 2-0 in the second inning on an RBI groundout by Weiker. Bowers drew a one-out walk, went to second base on a Michael Huf-ford single, then to third on Eg-
bert's single to left field.

Robson got some help from McAtee in limiting the damage. Wolf followed Weiker and hit a pop-up that appeared to be heading behind the plate into foul territory. Suddenly, the ball changed direction and came toward fair territory in

front of the plate where McAtee made a great over-his head-catch while falling to his back as Egbert ran by to cross the plate.

"Lucas was a little rough after the first inning, just didn't have his rhythm," said Clay coach Garry Isbell, of Robson, who struck out seven and walked three. "But after that, he settled down and threw very, very well."

Clay cut the deficit to 2-1 in the bottom of the second inning on Josh Pennington's sacrifice fly to deep center field. The Eagles tied the game in the third inning on Robson's fielder's choice groundout.

Wolf, who reached 51 pitches on his first batter of the third inning, allowed just two hits — the squeeze bunts — in the final three innings. He allowed five runs (four earned) on six hits, struck out three and walked six in an unofficial 113-pitch effort. Unfortunately for Wolf, three of the bases on balls came in the Eagles' half of the fifth inning.

"I'm extremely proud of the

way our kids competed tonight," King said. "Clay is an absolutely solid baseball team. You got to play your 'A' game if you want to compete with them. And Tyler Wolf gave us every bit of a chance to win this baseball game."

Down 5-2 and with the top of its order up in the seventh inning, Ross was far from down. With two outs, Wolf reached base when Pennington dropped a fly ball in right. He scored on Kole Amor's RBI double down the right field line. Amor, who reached second base, scored on a throwing error as he and Conklin traded spots. The rally ended, though, when Jalen Slick grounded out to short.

"Our league is just a meat grinder. It's just nuts, and anybody can win any game in this league," Isbell said. "I'm happy with the way the kids finished it. Any time we get a league victory, it's a good victory."

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ROUNDUP

Weiker's stellar pitching spoiled in loss to Titans

News Herald staff reports

FREMONT — Ross senior Brandon Weiker gave the Little Giants seven strong innings of work, throwing 130-plus pitches in the process, but St. John's Jesuit squeezed out just enough offense to leave Alumni Fields with a 3-1 Three Rivers Athletic Conference win Friday.

"That was a top shelf effort by Brandon," Little Giants coach Mark King said. "He'd thrown two shutouts going into tonight and he gave us every opportunity to win the baseball game. Looking in, we decided we'd thrown Tyler (Wolf) in our two big league games before, so we decided to switch it up. We knew (St. John's) was a fastball hitting team. The thing with Brandon is he has control off the off-speed game and he did a beautiful job of mixing his pitches."

Weiker struck out four and walked four, allowing a single earned run on nine hits. The Titans scored single runs in the first, third and fourth innings.

Weiker drove home Ross' lone run in the home half of the third inning with an RBI single. Spencer Conklin and Cole Bowers each had two hits for the Little Giants (8-7, 0-3).

"You can't give away extra outs in the league and we did that early," King said.

Bowers reached third base in the bottom of the seventh inning, by St. John's closer Jimmy Scott got Mike Egbert to go down swinging for the final out.

"I'm proud of the kids competing, we just came up short," King said.

Jack Raymond earned the win for Lakota (6-5, 3-1) tossing five innings, allowing three runs (one earned) on four hits. He struck out five and walked one. Nick Watts picked up the save allowing a single hit in two innings of scoreless relief.

Baseball: SJCC 12, Monroeville 2 (5 innings)

FREMONT — The Crimson Streaks used a nine-run second inning to rout the Eagles on Friday in non-league play.

Zach Yeckley finished 3-for-3 with an RBI for SJCC (8-8) — winners of six straight games — while Marcus Kerr had three RBIs and Jacob Wurzel added two RBIs. Matt Macielewicz was 2-for-3 with an RBI.

"We're improving every game and that's all I can ask of them right now," Crimson Streaks coach Robert George said. "We're not where we need to be yet but we're getting close."

Brett Michael earned the win on the mound for the Streaks.

Baseball: Elmwood 9, Woodmore 1

BLOOMDALE — Zach Brosia went just $3\frac{1}{3}$ innings for the Wildcats in Friday's 9-1 Northern Buckeye Conference loss to the Royals.

Brad Bringman doubled for Woodmore and teammate Evan Ulinski went 2-for-3 for the Wildcats.

Elmwood's Zach Foster doubled twice and drove in four runs, while striking out

Baseball: Bellevue 6, Ross

1

BELLEVUE — Alex Manner and Jake Smith combined to throw a one-hitter while the Redmen scored four runs in the sixth inning to cruise to win over the Little Giants in a non-league tilt on Saturday.

Mike Egbert's third-inning homer was the lone hit and run for Ross (8-8) which drew six walks, two coming from Kole Amor.

Manner, who was also 1 for 3 at the plate with an RBI, tossed the first five innings for Bellevue (13-2), giving up a single hit and run. He struck out six and walked six. Smith tossed two scoreless innings of relief to earn the save, tallying three strikeouts.

Nick Raifsnider tripled, doubled and drove in a run for the Redmen. Trent Stamm doubled twice and had an RBI and Triston Snezek was 2 for 3 with two RBIs.

Little Giants awake bats in a 6-5 victory

By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

FREMONT — Yogi Berra once said, "Slump? I ain't in no slump ... I just ain't hitting."

The same quote could have easily been said by many of the hitters in the Ross lineup this past week. Coming into Tuesday's non-league game with Cardinal Stritch, the Little Giants managed to score only a single run in three straight losses and eight total runs during a five-game losing skid.

But like most team hitting slumps, all it takes is one or two hits and all of a sudden hitting becomes contagious. That happened in the fifth and sixth innings Tuesday of Ross' come from behind 6-5 win over the Cardinals.

Trailing 4-1 in the bottom of the fifth inning, Cole Bowers singled up the mid-

ALS Awareness Game

When: Today, 5 p.m.

Where: Alumni Fields.

What: The Ross baseball team will host a Playing Hardball Against ALS (PHAALS) Foundation event for Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as "Lou Gehrig's Disease," when it hosts Toledo Central Catholic. Both teams will wear Playing Hardball Against ALS shirts and play the game in memory of Paul King, father of current Little Giants coach Mark King and a former Ross baseball coach who died of ALS in 2008. Paul King will be inducted into the PHAALS Hall of Fame at the game. The Central Catholic game was chosen because Irish volleyball coach and Sylvania Northview teacher Melissa Belcher, is currently battling ALS, which she was diagnosed with over two years ago. Donations will be accepted at the game. Wrist bands for ALS will be available as well. Attendees can also learn more about the organization's scholarship program.

dle for an RBI and nearly got a second run in. However, Brandon Weiker was thrown out attempting to score at the plate.

But the bats were alive.

One inning later, Michael Hufford

started the frame with a pinch hit single. A batter later, Jalen Slick was hit by a pitch then moved to second when Weiker drew a two-out walk to load the bases for Tyler Wolf. Wolf, who had been one of Ross' better hitters stuck in a slump,

then lined the first pitch he saw down the left field line where it rolled to the fence, clearing the bases to tie the game up at 5-5.

"It's been really frustrating, we're just trying to stay together and work through it," said Wolf, of his team's hitting struggles. "You're going to have slumps like this in the game of baseball. It's just how it is. You just have to learn to overcome it and I think we did that tonight. We did what we needed to do to win."

The Little Giants (9-9) tallied seven of their nine total hits in the final three innings. Cardinal Stritch (5-7-1) led 4-1 after four innings and had out-hit Ross 10-2 thru 4 1/2 innings.

"It was nice to see us respond because we had struggled at the plate for the first

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Victory

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five innings again tonight with runners on base. And when we did it hard, we hit it right at somebody," Ross coach Mark King said. "Then we finally come up with a big two-out hit (fifth inning) and a kid throws an absolute seed to the plate to get us out. At that point in time, I thought the baseball gods were still against us.

"But just like losing is contagious, winning is contagious, too. And hitting is contagious. We had been in that losing mode and not hitting where one guy got cold and the rest of us got cold. That all turned in the sixth and seventh innings."

With one out, Bowers

reached base on a single to left field in the Ross half of the seventh inning. Hufford was intentionally walked and Nick Michael hit an infield single to short to load up the bases again. This time, it was Jalen Slick coming through with the big hit as he drove in Bowers with gap shot to right center.

"Jalen has been one of the kids that's been struggling," King said. "The kid is a heck of an athlete. He got a nice pitch, kept his swing short and drove the ball over the outfielder's heads for the game winner. It was nice to see."

Andy Mapus earned the win in relief. He pitched his way out a jam in the fifth inning when the Cardinals got runners at second and third base with no outs. He also stranded runners in scoring position with less two

outs in the final two innings, giving up a single earned run.

Mike Egbert went 2-for-4 with a lead off double in the first inning. He would later score in the same inning on a double steal to tie the game at 1-1. Bowers was 2-for-3 with an RBI and two stolen bases while Michael finished 2-for-2.

Ryan Ballesteros paced Stritch with a 3-for-4 effort at the plate that included RBI singles in the first and third innings.

Ross will host Toledo Central Catholic today in a Three Rivers Athletic Conference tilt.

"We needed this win. It gives us a big boost," Wolf said. "Central Catholic is a great team and they're going to come out fighting. But we're going to come out fighting, too."

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ROUNDUP

Baseball: Toledo Central Catholic 2, Ross 0

FREMONT — The Little Giants could only muster five hits as they once again spoiled a great pitching performance by Brandon Weiker in a Wednesday Three Rivers Athletic Conference loss to the Fighting Irish.

Weiker allowed two runs (one earned) in seven innings pitched where he gave up six hits, struck out five and walked two.

“Today was another outstanding pitching performance by Brandon Weiker,” Ross coach Mark King said. “Unfortunately, it’s a similar story for us once again on offense. We’re struggling. I can’t take anything away from their pitcher because he threw a great game, too, but we had some loud outs again tonight.

“I’m proud of the way my kids are competing. We just have to stay at it and try to be a force in the conference tournament.”

Weiker had two hits for the Little Giants (9-10, 0-5). Spencer Conklin, Cole Bowers and Michael Hufford each were 1-for-3.

Baseball: Ross 12, Lima Senior 1

LIMA — A three-hit game from Tyler Wolf and a home run by Spencer Conklin paced the Little Giants to a 12-1 win over the Spartans in conference play Thursday.

Wolf was 3-for-4 and scored three runs while Conklin's homer plated three runners. Cole Bowers also drove in three runs for Ross (10-10, 1-5) going 2-for-4.

Andy Mapus got the win from the bump, allowing an earned run on five hits and striking out nine Spartans over six innings.

ROUNDUP

Weiker's arm stays hot in Ross win

FINDLAY — Brandon Weiker has given a Ross team with struggling bats a chance to win a lot of games lately.

On Monday, Weiker was stellar again, allowing two runs on nine hits in a complete game effort as the Little Giants took advantage of five Findlay errors in the final two innings to steal a 4-2 Three Rivers Athletic Conference victory on the road.

Tyler Wolf tripled for the Little Giants (11-11, 2-6) who also got RBIs from Mike Egbert and Spencer Conklin.

Seniors have big day for Ross in win over Lima Senior

FREMONT — Baseball is suppose to be fun. And that's what the Ross baseball team had Tuesday night in its home finale.

The Little Giants collected 15 hits and scored 12 runs in the third inning as they routed Lima Senior 17-3 in a Three Rivers Athletic Conference contest that marked the last home game for Ross' seniors.

"We had lots of fun out there tonight, which was the biggest thing," Little Giants' senior Spencer Conklin said. "The last couple weeks we had been coming out kind of lackadaisical. But tonight we came out and put it on (the Spartans)."

Conklin finished 3-for-4 with a double, RBI and accounted for two runs scored. Brandon Weiker, another senior, was 3-for-4 with two RBIs and a double while senior Mike Egbert was 1-for-4 with and RBI and two runs scored, senior Tyler Wolf doubled and drove home two more runs and senior Cole Bowers scored three runs.

Senior Ty Wilson earned the win on the mound, giving up three runs on eight hits. He struck out five and walked two.

"It feels great," said Conklin, on winning his final game at Alumni Fields. "I've played here and started all four years and it feels great to win coming here my last time. It was great seeing my teammates coming out here and play for us (seniors). Hopefully Thursday we can come out, keep the intensity up and take it to Perrysburg and prove ourselves. A lot of people have doubted us."

The Little Giants (13-12) will play the sixth-ranked Yellow Jackets (19-1) in a Division I sectional final Thursday at 4:30 p.m. at Bowling Green's Carter Park.

"Coach (Mark) King told us to just forget about everything going to sectional play this past Saturday," Conklin said. "He said we're starting a new season, let's come out and play Fremont Ross baseball. The past few games we've come out and played Fremont Ross baseball."

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LOCAL SPORTS ROUNDUP

Ross baseball to compete in TRAC final four

The Ross baseball team can no longer chase a state championship, but the Little Giants sit just two wins away from a Three Rivers Athletic Conference championship.

Ross upset Whitmer 2-0 on Monday in the first round of the TRAC baseball tournament. It'll face Toledo Central Catholic in the TRAC final four Monday at Toledo's Mercy Field. First pitch is set for 12:30 p.m. The game will immediately follow the 10 a.m. semifinal between St. Francis de Sales and St. John's Jesuit. The third-place and championship contests are at 4:30 and 7 p.m. respectively Tuesday.

The Little Giants (14-13) have competed in the semifinals in each year of the tournament's existence. A year ago, they topped Clay 4-3 in the semifinals and led St. John's in the championship game by the same score in the sixth inning, before the Titans earned the first conference championship with an 8-4 win.

Ross was 4-6 in the TRAC in 2012. This time around, the Little Giants are 3-7.

"I told these guys they could still carbon copy exactly what our team did last year, and possibly even do more," Ross coach Mark King said. "Monday was by far the best game we've played all season.

We made tremendous defensive plays in the field and Brandon Weiker pitched another outstanding game."

Weiker had a two-hitter going in the seventh inning when the Panthers got two infield singles to get runners in scoring position. But the Little Giants turned a double play to end the game and preserve the four-hit shutout.

Ross scored single runs in the fourth and sixth innings. Tyler Wolf drove in one run with Spencer Conklin accounting for the other.

Mike Egbert, the TRAC's leading hitter, continued to swing a hot bat, going 2-for-3 with a double. Elijah Hampton and Kole Amor also picked up hits.

"Central Catholic is a solid ball club," King said. "We'll have our hands full."

The Fighting Irish topped Ross 2-0 on May 1 at Alumni Fields. Weiker allowed two runs, one earned, in seven innings pitched where he gave up six hits, struck out five and walked two. But the Little Giants were held to five hits. Mercy Field is Central Catholic's home facility.

Track: Division II district meet

FOSTORIA — Clyde's Dominique Loparo vaulted 9 feet, 6 inches at Tuesday's Division II district meet, finishing in third place in the pole vault to advance to the regional meet.

DISTRICT 9

Manner and Jaso honored district players of the year

News-Messenger staff report

Bellevue's Alex Manner (Division II) and Lakota's Tiger Jaso (Division IV) were recognized Northwest Ohio District 9 Baseball Coaches Association players of the year.

Michael Egbert and Tyler Wolf of Fremont Ross (Division I), St. Joseph Central Catholic's Zach Yeckley (Division IV), and the Redmen's Trent Stamm and Clyde's Derek Gray (Division II) were first-team selections.

Oak Harbor's AJ Cecil was first-team while Mark Konieczny was second-team in Division III.

The Little Giants' Brandon Weiker was second-team while Kole Amor was honorable mention.

Tight strike zone does no favors for Ross

By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

TOLEDO — Until the day a common, uniformed method is adapted to determine what a strike zone in baseball is, it'll always remain one of the human elements to the game. Sometimes an umpire's judgment works in a team's favor. Other times it doesn't.

Tuesday's second inning of the Three Rivers Athletic Conference consolation final is a fine example of what effect an umpire's judgment of the strike zone can have on a game. Facing a St. John's Jesuit team that

loves to hit fastballs, Ross' Tyler Wolf found himself pitching into a tight zone and he paid the price trying to work his way into that zone. Three walks, a well-executed bunt single and three hard hits to the outfield allowed the Titans to score six runs as they never looked back in a 10-3 victory to claim third place in a game played at Central Catholic's Mercy Field.

The Little Giants (14-15) had claimed an early 1-0 lead in the first inning on a sacrifice fly to center field by Kole Amor. Wolf, a pitcher who relies heavily on fastball location, gave up a two-out double to Titans' three-hole

hitter Jimmy Scott in the bottom half of the inning, but got out of trouble on fly out to left. Seconds later, the sky opened up as heavy rain and lightning delayed the game for nearly an hour.

When action resumed, that's when the night took a turn for Wolf. He ended up being credited for eight runs (seven earned) in 3 1/3 innings of work. He surrendered eight hits and walked five.

"Sometimes that's what happens with rain delays," Ross coach Mark King said. "Tyler came back out and I still thought he had good velocity.

We just weren't getting what we wanted in the strike zone and it forced things into the strike zone a little too much. That's a good baseball team. They put up a couple hits that inning and put up a six spot on us.

"After that, we had to spend all night battling back. But we got 11 hits and we hit the ball all night. It was just too big of a mountain to overcome. It took us out of our running game and out of our small ball game."

In a 3-1 win at Ross' Alumni Fields on April 26, St. John's (19-10) was kept off-balance by Brandon Weiker's nasty array of off-speed pitches. Weiker

threw over 130 pitches in the game and limited the Titans to a single earned run on nine hits.

On Tuesday, their eyes opened up wide when they saw Wolf's fastballs entering their hitting zones.

"Yes, we're a very good fastball hitting team," Titans coach Greg Christian said. "We really struggle with guys that throw off-speed stuff and keep the ball down in the zone. We have trouble staying back on the ball and driving it the opposite way. But when we see fastballs, we usually hit them pretty good. Even

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Ross

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the other night in districts against Clay (a 5-0 Eagles' win), we were hitting (Jordan) Grosjean's fastballs pretty good. But his off-speed stuff dominated us.

"But it's no secret, a lot of the 12 hits we had tonight had a lot to do with the strike zone. It was very tight for both teams."

Ross had two hits in each of the first three innings against Titan's starter Jacek Czerwinski. But the Little Giants stranded five base runners.

Corey Tipton's RBI double and an RBI single from Ben Brossia in the fourth inning staked St. John's to an 8-1 lead.

The Little Giants finally got back on the board in the top half of the fifth inning. Wolf drew a two-out walk, went to second base on a single up the middle by Amor and scored on Spencer Conklin's base hit to center.

Conklin went 3-for-4 in his final game wearing the purple and white, adding an RBI double in the seventh inning. Wolf, another Little Giant playing one last game, went 3-for-3 with a double.

Andy Mapus pitched the final $2 \frac{1}{3}$ innings for the Little Giants, giving up a single earned run on four hits.

TJ Lake, Scott and Tipton all had two hits and two RBIs

for the Titans.

"Today, we came out competing at the start. We just had that one bad inning that put us down big," King said. "But the kids didn't quit on me. They kept coming back right up until the last inning where they were still swinging the bats and trying to score runs.

"I'm extremely proud of where the kids have come this year and what they've accomplished. I wish all the seniors the best of luck. They're class kids that gave me everything they had for four years. The TRAC has been around two years and we've been in the final four both of them. This definitely gives us something to build off of."

Gone are going to be the likes of Wolf, Weiker, Conklin, leadoff hitter Michael Egbert and Cole Bowers.

"We had five sophomores in the dugout tonight and two or three them started for us," King said. "Kole Amor is probably going to have to be a leader coming back, but we feel good where we're at. Andy Mapus came in and showed he could throw against these kinds of teams. He came in tonight and battled. He'll probably have to be our No. 1 next year."

"We'll miss the seniors we're losing but we're certainly optimistic that we'll come back and have a good ball club next year."

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On the baseball diamond, Ross' Tyler Wolf and Mike Egbert earned first-team honors for a Little Giants team that made it to the TRAC Final Four for the second consecutive season, finishing fourth in the final league standings.

Cole Bowers, Brandon Weiker and Kole Amor were named honorable mention.