

# Trio finally joins forces for Ross

Lyle, Jones, Clark drive 17-3 Giants

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM  
Sports editor

Fremont Ross senior basketball stars Luke Lyle, Terrence Jones and Chad Clark used to spend more time together off the court.

Lately, they've gone their separate ways. It's nothing personal.

"We just don't hang out as much," Jones said with a shrug Monday.

"Girls kinda got in the way," Clark confided.

That admission drew hoots from Lyle and Jones, who with Clark form the three-headed force that drives the 17-3 Little Giants. They claimed it's mainly Clark's devotion to girlfriend Sarah Berger that prevents guy time.

Clark shot back that Lyle

## Boys Basketball: Sectional Previews

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spends his free moments with girls basketball player Nicole Marroquin.

"Yeah, but I'll bring her around the guys. You won't even bring Sarah around," Lyle said.

Chimed Jones, "I haven't seen Sarah yet."

The current disconnect is nothing new to the three Ross players. It mirrors the difficulty they had finding their way to the same basketball team.

In fact, their senior cam-

paign marks the first time in seven years of organized basketball they spent the entire season together.

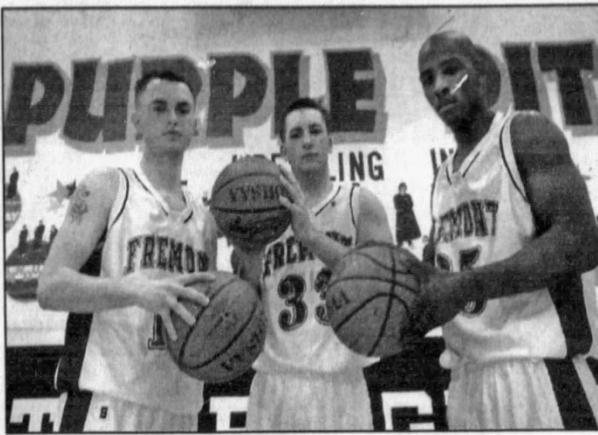
"It seemed like forever before we were going to get together," Lyle said.

It all began in fifth grade, when Lyle and Clark played on the same YMCA team. Jones got cut.

"I remember him coming up to me in fifth grade, saying, 'Yeah, you're pretty good,'" Clark said of Lyle. "I was like, 'Yeah.' ... We got to be pretty good friends."

Jones and Clark were placed on the same sixth-grade team. By then, Lyle had moved away. He didn't return until the eighth grade.

See ROSS, B2



News-Messenger/Ben French

FREMONT ROSS seniors, from left, Luke Lyle, Chad Clark and Terrence Jones lead the Little Giants into Division I tournament play Friday at Willard.

## Ross leaders succeed in first full season together

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That year, Lyle and Jones played on one of Fremont Middle School's teams. Clark was on the other.

As freshmen, Jones played varsity, Clark was on the junior varsity and Lyle competed for the freshman team.

Clark moved away for a year as a sophomore before returning to lead the team in scoring as a junior. Meanwhile, Jones was academically ineligible for the final eight games of his junior year.

Fortunately for the 11th-ranked Little Giants, Jones, Clark and Lyle finally have made a standing appointment on Friday and Saturday nights this winter. They have combined to average more than 50 points per game for the Little Giants, who open Division I

sectional play Friday against either Mansfield Senior or Mansfield Madison at Willard.

The trio forms a formidable triple threat as a playmaker (Lyle), slasher (Jones) and back-to-the-basket scorer (Clark).

Ross head coach Mark Gedeon said he first began planning for this season when he saw Lyle and Jones win the league tournament as eighth-graders. Lyle nailed five 3-pointers in the championship game.

Little did he know the twists and turns it would take to get the Little Giants on the floor at the same time.

"It's like, 'OK, I see a vision of a point guard, a wing player and a post player here,'" Gedeon said. "I was definitely hoping to get them together, let's put it that way."

Lyle, already voted the District 6 Coaches Association Player of the Year, averages 19.1 points and 7.2 assists per game. On Feb. 11, he set the

school's career assist record, breaking Rob Ritzman's mark of 260. Lyle has dished out 277 assists for his career. He needs 17 to break Ritzman's single-season record of 160 assists.

"I gotta give them credit for breaking the assist record," Lyle said of Jones, Clark and his other teammates. "Without them, I wouldn't have that."

Clark, a District 6 first-team selection, is averaging 16.2 points and 4.7 rebounds per game.

Jones, the top second-team vote-getter in District 6, is right behind Clark at 15.5 points and 5.8 points per game.

Any one of Ross's triplets would average several more points if he were on a team with fewer threats.

Lyle creates his own shots by putting his head down and driving to the basket. Jones jukes defenders out of their shoes or simply jumps over them. Clark combines agile post moves with

a silky touch around the basket.

It's no wonder the Little Giants are averaging 76.7 points per game.

"If you take one of these players and put them on a team, you build your offense around them," Gedeon said.

"You put three of them together, and we try making sure we're very team-oriented. ... We don't run a lot of special plays, like we have in years past. We just let the flow of the game dictate because of their abilities and their teammates' abilities."

The players said they don't mind sharing the glory, especially when the team is doing as well as Ross is. Clark and Jones don't begrudge Lyle his scoring prowess, even though he's the one who doles out the shots.

"Since he's scoring, it takes all the anger away," Jones said. "We're winning games. It doesn't even matter if we're losing games. I'd be mad. But he's doing his thing, what he's supposed to do."

The Little Giants had won 12 straight games before Friday's regular season-ending loss to Sandusky. They've set a school record for regular-season victories and clinched a third straight Great Lakes League championship on Feb. 7.

Ross has accomplished just about everything the three seniors stars dreamed about as young players.

The only remaining goal is a state title. That road begins Friday.

"We couldn't wait until we got older," Clark said of the early days. "I used to always go with Luke to watch (Luke's brother) Steve (Dagg) play when we were in eighth grade. We couldn't wait until we got up there. It went fast."

Their coach said the trio has been well worth the wait.

"I would say if you look at the league titles, and if you look at the overall record, they've been very successful," Gedeon said.

# Little Giants favored in tourney showdown with Mansfield Senior

By **TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM**  
Sports editor

The Fremont Ross boys enter Friday's almost annual tournament showdown with Mansfield Senior in a unique position.

Rare is the team that prepares to meet Mansfield as a favorite and with more depth and athletic ability than the Tygers.

"I think we match up pretty well this year," Ross head coach Mark Gedeon said cautiously.

"One of the things with Mansfield is you've got to have people who can handle the basketball. We feel that's one of our strengths. We have a bunch of people who can put the ball on the floor and create opportunities for themselves and teammates."

Top-seeded and 11th-ranked Ross (17-3) does battle with Mansfield Senior (17-4) at 6:30 p.m. Friday in



**Friday**  
Mansfield Sr.  
vs. Ross  
6:30 p.m.  
at Willard

an anticipated Division I sectional final at Willard High School.

The two teams have met five times in the past six post-

seasons with four of those meetings going into overtime. The Tygers lead the series 3-2 and won last year's battle 77-73 in regulation.

"It's a great rivalry. It's going to be a great atmosphere. It's something that I think everybody's excited to see what's going to happen," Gedeon said.

Mansfield Senior head coach Gregg Collins, whose team is unseeded for the first time in his seven-year tenure, said his squad is

**See ROSS, A2**

# Ross, Mansfield square off Friday in Div. I sectional

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more dependent upon one scorer than it has been in the past.

Senior point guard Antonio Graves leads the Tygers at 19.2 points per game. He has connected on 39.5 percent of his 3-point attempts. Last season, Graves poured in 24 points against Ross.

"Besides Antonio Graves, we don't have the athletes we've had in the past," Collins said Wednesday before practice. "If he's off his game, we could score 25 points. He creates off the dribble. It's something we haven't had to deal with much, but we're a one-man team."

Still, the Tygers have won five straight games, the most recent a 68-50 victory over Mansfield Madison in Tuesday's sectional opener. Graves scored 20 points, senior big man Yima Chia-Kur 18.

The Tygers have done it without second-leading scorer Kris Mathews, who was declared academically ineligible in late January after averaging 11.2 points per game.

But 6-foot-4 sophomore Jon Avery and Chia-Kur have picked up the slack.

Gedeon knows Ross will have to contain Graves, though.

"Antonio Graves is just a dynamite player," he said. "He's a well-rounded player because he can defend and rebound as well as score. He's the whole key to the team. As he goes, the rest of the team goes."

The Little Giants are concerned about Mansfield's rebounding prowess. Last season, the Tygers pulled down 18 offensive boards to Ross's seven and produced 20 second-chance points.

"If we put the number one key on the board right now, we have got to be able to rebound with them," Gedeon said. "If they do what they did to us last year and get second and third opportunities, that puts us in a big-time hole."

Ross will be without one of its big men, senior sixth man Matt Zilles. Zilles argued with a teammate and coaches before walking out of the locker room at half-time of Friday's 89-86 overtime loss to Sandusky. He hasn't returned to the team.

But Collins respects what remains of a Ross team that set a school record for regular-season victories and had a 12-game winning streak until the Blue Streaks ended it.

"You look at their team and there doesn't seem to be a weakness," Collins said. "They don't have a 6-foot-9 guy, but they have plenty of size underneath. They score inside and from the perimeter. It's a balanced basketball team."

Point guard Luke Lyle leads Ross at 19.1 points and 7.6 assists per game. Classmates Chad Clark and Terrence Jones add 16.2 and 15.5 points, respectively.

# Tygers stomp out Ross

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM  
Sports editor

WILLARD — The underdog role suits Mansfield Senior just fine, thank you.

The Tygers, unseeded for the first time in seven seasons, walloped top-seeded Fremont Ross, 85-61, Friday for the Division I sectional title at Willard High School.

Mansfield Senior blasted the 11th-ranked Little Giants with an 18-3 run to end the third quarter and cruised to Thursday's dis-



trict semifinal against Ashland.

Although they didn't expect the victory to be as easy as it was, the traditionally powerful Tygers had a hard time seeing themselves as Cinderellas.

"We were maybe the underdog, if you look at it," Mansfield head coach

Gregg Collins said. "They were the No. 1 seed. They have a great record, but we have a great record also. ... We didn't talk about that because we kinda felt we were as good as Fremont Ross."

Senior point guard Antonio Graves led the Tygers (18-4) with 25 points and seven assists. Big men Yima Chia-Kur and Jon Avery combined for 40 points and 36 rebounds. Chia-Kur

scored 22 points and pulled down 16 rebounds, while Avery, a sophomore, came up with career highs of 18 points and 20 boards.

Mansfield (18-4) recorded the first blowout in the storied six-game tournament rivalry with Ross. The Tygers had won three of the previous five games, four of which went into overtime.

"I give Mansfield all the credit. ... They brought

their A game, and we didn't make the grade at all," Ross head coach Mark Gedeon said.

Chad Clark led Ross (17-4) with 18 points. Luke Lyle chipped in with 16.

Gedeon said the Little Giants lost sight of what got them the top seed, an attitude of entitlement that surfaced long before last week's regular season-ending loss to Sandusky.

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See ROSS, B3

# Ross falls to rival Mansfield, finishes year with 17-4 mark

**Continued From B1**

"To be successful, you've got to play as a team. Unfortunately, we played as individuals," Gedeon said. "We were able to dodge so many bullets throughout the course of the year. I think the kids got that mindset that just showing up was good enough. ... It's a great lesson for life as well. Hopefully these kids will learn from it."

"When we clinched the league title at Whitmer, I really thought our kids lost the focus of the goals we wanted to accomplish as a team. ... You play as you practice. Unfortunately, that showed tonight."

Ross was discombobulated from the tip of Friday's game. The Little Giants scored their first field goal with four minutes, 20 seconds to play in the first quarter.

Ross led briefly at 11-8, but Mansfield scored the next 11 points to grab the lead for good. Graves poured in the last seven points of the run.

The Little Giants, who averaged more than 76 points per game during the regular season, spent most of Friday's game out of sync. Ross finished 3-of-25 (12 percent) from 3-point range and 23-of-67 (34.3 percent) overall from the floor.

"We have seen Ross play a couple of times. I don't think there's any question we caught them on a right night," Collins said. "We didn't do anything differently than a lot of teams we've seen them play try to do. The difference is they shot (poorly) from the 3-point line. ... It just wasn't their night."

Mansfield led only 29-24 at halftime, mainly because of its own miscues. The Tygers committed 19 first-half turnovers to Ross's seven.

"We really felt the majority of those turnovers in the first half were unforced. ... If we don't throw those possessions away, with the way we're scoring, this isn't even a game at halftime," Collins said.

A 3-pointer to open the second

"When we clinched the league at Whitmer, I really thought our kids lost the focus of the goals we wanted to accomplish as a team."

**Mark Gedeon,  
Ross head coach**

half by Luke McElfresh got Ross within 29-27. But Mansfield responded by scoring the next eight points — Graves had five of them — to take over for good.

The Little Giants were still in the game at 44-38 after a Clark deuce with 4:15 to play in the third quarter.

That's when Chia-Kur and Avery stepped up for the Tygers. They combined for 16 straight Mansfield points as the lead ballooned to 62-41 after three quarters.

Mansfield enjoyed a 54-24 rebounding advantage, largely on the backs of Chia-Kur and Avery. Avery scored all 18 of his points in the second half.

"It just seemed like Jonathan and Yima were always around the basketball, both on the offensive and defense ends. That's obviously a key," Collins said.

Said Gedeon, "I thought Jonathan Avery was the player that busted open the game."

Ross and its eight seniors ended a remarkable season. The Little Giants became the first team in school history to claim a third straight league title, won a school-record 12 straight games and recorded the highest state ranking in recent memory.

"Hopefully the people remember those type of things," Gedeon said. "At tournament time, you know anything can happen. Those are neat things."

# High School Boys

**Mansfield Sr. 85, Ross 61**

## Division I Sectional

**ROSS** — Luke Lyle 6-3-16, Luke McElfresh 2-3-8, Terrence Jones 2-2-6, Chad Clark 8-2-18, Dan Thompson 2-2-7, Josh Smith 1-0-2, Kyle Hintze 1-0-2, Carl Sabinas 0-0-0, Antoine Davis 0-0-0, Kyle Tucker 1-0-2. Totals 23-12-61.

**MANSFIELD** — Dexter Jones 1-2-4, Ron Williams 2-3-7, Antonio Graves 10-4-25, Yima Chia-Kur 10-2-22, Jon Avery 8-2-18, Marquis Carter 1-0-2, Brandon Smith 2-1-5, Alfred Corbin 0-0-0, Andrew Williams 1-0-2, Kyle Stal-lard 0-0-0, Christian Lee 0-0-0. Totals 35-14-85.

**Ross** 11 13 17 20. — 61

**Mansfield** 12 17 33 23 — 85

3-point goals: Ross 3-25 (Lyle 1-7, McElfresh 1-5, Jones 0-6, Thompson 1-2, Hintze 0-2, Sabinas 0-2, Davis 0-1, Tucker 0-1), Mansfield 1-6 (Jones 0-1, Graves 1-5).

Rebounds: Ross 24 (Thompson 6), Mansfield 54 (Avery 20). Turnovers: Ross 11, Mansfield 26.

Records: Ross 17-4, Mansfield 18-4.