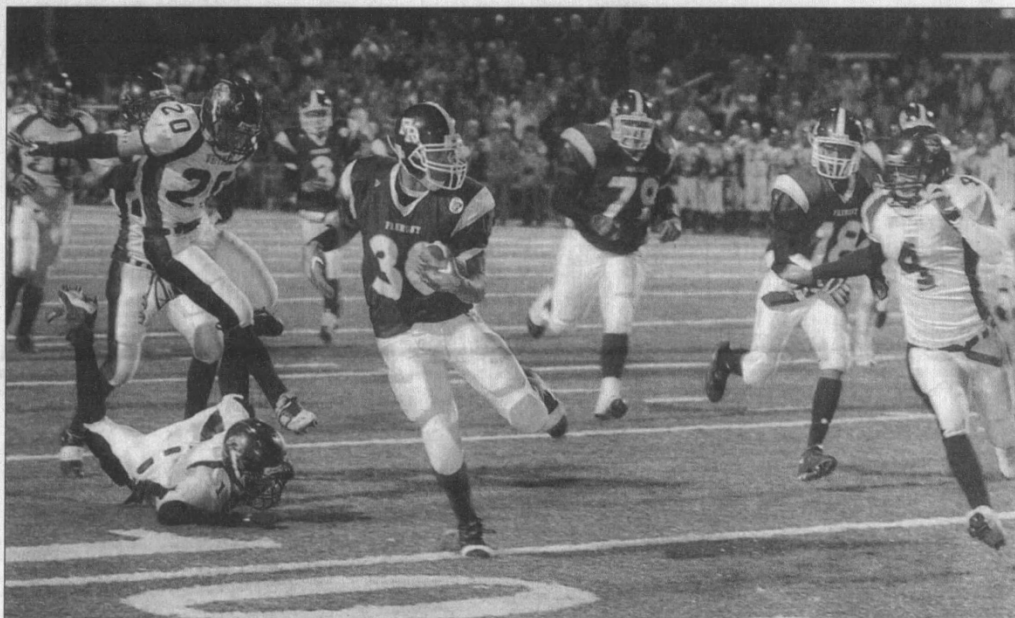


2006 DIVISION I PLAYOFF...

Little Giants lose rematch to Whitmer



Photos by Charlie Longton/News-Messenger

THE LITTLE GIANTS' Devin Johnson runs during Saturday's playoff game against Whitmer

68-yard pitch return seals game for Panthers

By VINCE GUERRIERI
Sports Editor

It's going to be a long winter in Fremont.

The Little Giants' special football season ended suddenly and prematurely with a heartbreaking loss, 21-17, in a rematch with Toledo

Whitmer in a Division I Region II quarterfinal Saturday night in Fremont.

Holding a 17-14 lead with four and a half minutes to play, it appeared that Ross would beat the Panthers for the second time this year by withholding a Whitmer rally.

After holding the Panthers to a three-and-out and getting the ball back on their own 49-yard line, the Little Giants (10-1) had moved 14 yards and appeared to be set to score. But on third and 8, quarterback Ryan Ottney was pitching left on an option play when David Donovan

made the play of his life.

Whitmer had been blitzing all night, and Donovan broke through the line, caught the pitch on the fly and ran 68 yards for the winning score.

The Little Giants got the ball back twice more after that, but gained just 5 net yards.

"We just let some opportunities slip," said Ross coach Derek Kidwell. "Now it's tough to say good-bye to these seniors."

"We're going to let this hurt. We're going to say

Little Giants defense performs admirably

By MATTHEW HORN
Sports Writer

Fremont Ross seemed angry. Toledo Whitmer had opened a Division I postseason contest at the Little Giants home stadium by scoring first as quarterback Donnie Dottei ran in from the 1-yard line.

So the Ross defense decided to do something about it.

The Little Giants held the Panthers to zero or negative yardage on first down of their next four possessions — during which time Whitmer had only one first down — on the way to a 17-7 half-time lead.

Steven Snyder stopped Dottei for a loss of 3, setting up a punt that appeared to lead to a Ross drive that would have sealed the first Ross playoff win in 23 years, but David Donovan snatched an option pitch and raced 55 yards for the game-winning score.

Snyder keyed the first-half defensive surge with a sack and tackle on Jeremy Jones for a loss of 15 combined yards.

"He did what he does all the time," Ross coach Derek Kidwell said of Snyder. "He plays hard and causes havoc. He played an outstanding game."

See LITTLE GIANTS, B2

See DEFENSE, B2

Little Giants upset

Continued From B1

good-bye to a good group of seniors."

It was a stunning end to a magical season that saw the Little Giants:

- go 10-0 for the first time since 1997
- return to the top 10 in the Associated Press

- win a league championship for the first time since 1998

- win the Greater Buckeye Conference for the first time ever, and

- host a playoff game for the first time since 1983.

Whitmer (8-3) also scored 21 points in the first game against the Little Giants — an old rival from the defunct Great Lakes League — but this time, it was enough to win, thanks to the Panthers' defense.

"Total credit goes to our defense and our defensive staff," said Whitmer coach Joe Palka.

Kidwell, now 0-3 as a head coach in the playoffs, had praise for his own defensive unit, which held the Panthers to 14 points while recovering one fumble and intercepting Whitmer quarterback Donnie Dottei.

"I thought our defense played outstanding all night," he said.

The real struggle was in the offensive trenches, though. Palka and Kidwell had said that the key to winning was establishing the inside running game and keeping their opponents from doing the same.

The Little Giants, averaging 400 yards

and 37 points per game, were held to just 237 yards.

But as brutal as the Whitmer defense might have been, the Ross defense — the best in the Greater Buckeye Conference — was even better. The Panthers were held to 144 yards Saturday.

The Little Giants, however, couldn't stop the big play.

In Whitmer's opening drive, the Panthers were facing third and 8 from their own 47-yard line. However, Dottei hit tight end Kevin Kogel for a 28-yard completion that kept alive a drive that culminated in Whitmer's first score, when Dottei ran it in from a yard out to draw first blood with 3:50 left in the first quarter.

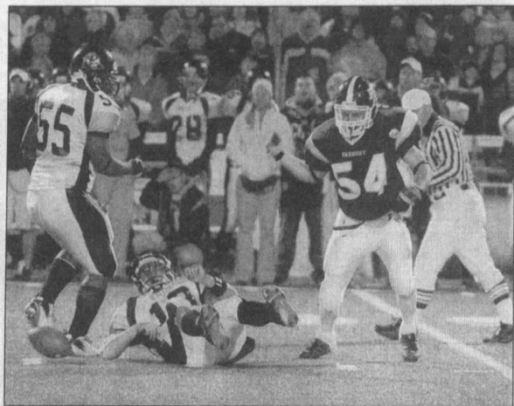
The Little Giants, though, answered right back, engineering a drive that ate up the rest of the quarter: Ottney hit Paul Hershey on a 15-yard strike, and Kirt Munson's extra point tied the game at 7.

Devin Johnson's 32-yard run to the 1-yard line set up another touchdown on an Ottney keeper. Munson, who kicked the extra point to make it 14-7, booted a 21-yard field goal with 43 seconds left in the first half to put Ross up 10, 17-7.

Whitmer sleepwalked through the first half of the first meeting between the two teams this year, but was fired up in the locker room during halftime Saturday.

"We said we were in a lot worse situation the last time we were here," Palka said. "The kids kept believing. Our kids played so hard and so aggressively."

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Charlie Longton/News-Messenger

STEVEN SNYDER celebrates after taking down Whitmer quarterback Donnie Dottei during Saturday's playoff game.

Defense plays well for Ross

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Dottei was thrown for a 2-yard loss on the first play following a 14-yard touchdown toss from Ryan Ottney to Paul Hershey. The Panthers went three and out and Ottney capped the ensuing drive with a 2-yard scoring run as the Little Giants scored on consecutive possessions.

"They showed ability to move, hit and wrap up," Whitmer coach Joe Palka said. "They completely shut the run down sometimes. They made us play with one arm behind our back."

Dewayne Frazier was stopped for no gain on first down Whitmer's next possession before Dottei ran 26 yards for a first down on the next play. Dottei, however, was sacked by Snyder on the next play and stopped by Antwone Spencer on second down before an incompletion led to another punt.

"They knew we'd have a hard time running with (Anthony) Allen out," Palka said. "They took that away."

Kidwell said that had been the Little Giants' strength all season.

"Shut down the run," he said. "Defensively we played well enough that we deserved to win. We let some opportunities slip away (offensively) and Whitmer made the plays."

Snyder cleaned up the pursuit of Jones for a 9-yard loss on first down the Panthers' next series. Spencer hit Dottei for a sack on third down before Aaron Hinkle recovered a fumble on the play.

Ross followed with a field goal before Dottei was hit for a 2-yard loss — again on first down. Ryan Quick recorded a sack to end the half.

Palka said scoring first was significant.

"It was important," he said. "Last time we went down 27-0. That kept us within striking range."

And ultimately helped force 11 to remain the toughest number for the Ross football program to crack.

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High School

Whitmer 21, Ross 17

Whitmer	7	0	0	14	—	21
Ross	0	17	0	0	—	17

Scoring summary

First quarter

W — Donnie Dottei 1 run (kick good) 3:50.

Second quarter

R — Paul Hershey 14 pass from Ryan Ottney (kick good) 11:56.

R — Ottney 2 run (kick good) 7:24.

R — Kirt Munson 21 field goal :43.

Fourth quarter

W — Dottei 7 run (kick good) 9:14.

W — David Donovan 55 fumble return (kick good) 4:18.

Team Statistics

	W	R
First downs.....	8	13
Rushes-yards.....	38-59	31-111
Passing yards.....	95	126
Comp.-Att.-Int.	8-17-1	12-30-0
Penalties-yards	4-30	0-0
Fumbles-lost	2-1	2-1

Individual Statistics

RUSHING: Ross — Devin Johnson 19-109, Ottney 12-2. Whitmer — Dewayne Frazier 16-37, Dottei 19-36, Jeremy Jones 3-(-14).

PASSING: Ross — Ottney 12-30-0 — 126. Whitmer — Dottei 8-17-1 — 95.

RECEIVING: Ross — Johnson 5-54, Hershey 3-34, Cory Clayton 4-33, Munson 1-6. Whitmer — Beau Norton 3-50, Jones 3-18, Donald Malloy 1-15, Eric Eckman 1-12.

Record: Ross 10-1, Whitmer 8-3.