

MANSFIELD SR. 42, ROSS 31

Heartbreaking



News-Messenger photos/David Distelhorst

AN EMOTIONAL Sue Wolf walks away from some of her players after Ross's disheartening 42-31 loss to Mansfield Senior in the first-round game of the Division I sectionals on Tuesday. A horrific injury to senior Abby Werling in the final minutes made it difficult for the Giants to concentrate on basketball.

Injury, late Tyger run end Giants' year on sour note

By **MATTHEW HORN**
Sports Writer

BASCOM — Even the most hardened coach would have let their emotions flow on Tuesday.

In fact, veteran Fremont Ross taskmaster Sue Wolf did just that.

Not only did Wolf lose a "special" senior class with a 42-31 setback to Mansfield Senior in the first-round Division I sectional game at Hopewell-Loudon, but she was also forced to watch starter Abby Werling leave the game with a horrific injury late in the fourth quarter.

The two teams entered the final period knotted at 23-23, but the Tygers scored the contest's last nine points after the Little Giants had cut the deficit to 33-31 on a Tia Simms three-point play with 2:22 remaining.

Seconds after Simms' basket and free throw, it became almost impossible for the Giants to focus on basketball.

Werling, who Wolf characterized as "fearless" while struggling to maintain her composure,

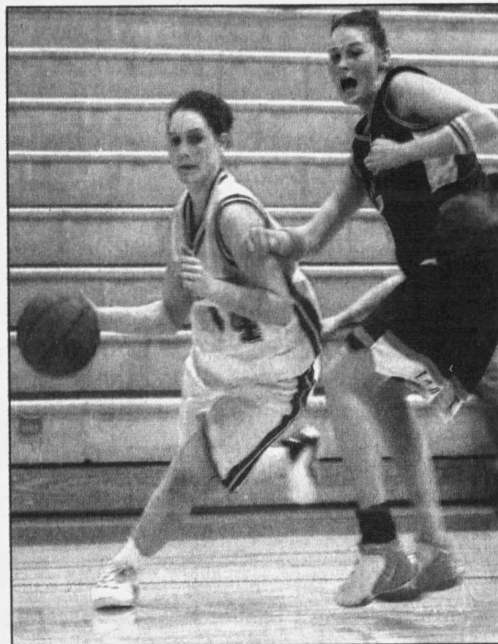
incurred a gruesome compound fracture of her left arm. The Giants, seemingly energized by Simms, were completely halted thereafter.

"The injury stopped their momentum," Tyger coach Andrea Thompson said. "They were heating it back up."

It's certainly difficult to find fault in the Giants' lackluster finish after being forced to endure Werling's departure.

Mansfield, which reached the final four last season, scored the first four points of the game before the Giants took a 6-4 lead. Ross didn't relinquish the advantage until the Tygers took a 25-23 lead with 6:55 to play in the fourth quarter.

The Giants turned the ball over 27 times while forcing 22 miscues. Each team played a sluggish and methodically inefficient game offensively and scored in double digits in only one quarter.



ROSS'S RACHEL HAMMER dribbles past Mansfield Senior's Amanda Smith on Tuesday. Hammer finished with a game-high 15 points, but Mansfield scored the final nine points of the game — all after a horrific injury to Ross's Abby Werling — to earn a victory.

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Understandably, Giants struggle in final minutes

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"We gave them too many opportunities and missed some easy shots," Wolf said. "We had opportunities but didn't put it in the basket."

Mansfield had only one player, Enisia Curry (10), reach double figures but its 19 fourth-quarter points proved insurmountable.

"You have to be able to answer back," Wolf said.

Rachel Hammer scored 10 of Ross's 16 points in the first half. She scored 15 of the Giants' 31 points overall and led all scorers.

"She was doing it all for them," Thompson said. "We told the girls that was somebody we needed to stop."

Ross's largest lead was six points early in the second quarter. A put-back basket by Tashlai McKinstry, an assist from Hammer to Kara Willoughby and a steal by Nicole Marroquin that led to a basket by Hammer on successive possessions made the score 22-16.

But just as it did in a 45-43 loss to Mansfield Senior on Feb. 7, Ross went nearly 10 minutes without a field goal. Surprisingly, a Hammer steal and transition basket ended the drought with the Giants trailing only 29-27 midway through the fourth.

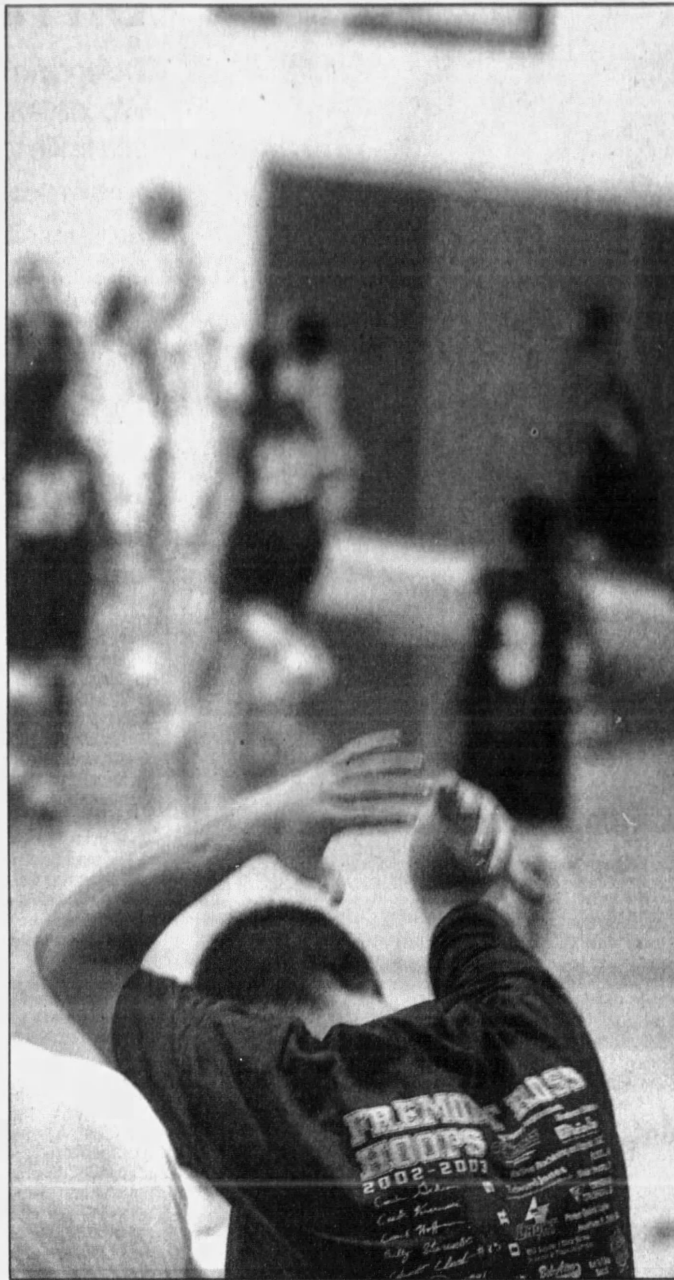
Simms scored only five points in the game after leading the team with 16 in the earlier matchup.

Hammer, Marroquin, Willoughby and Shannon Hickey played their final game for Ross.

"We'll miss their leadership," Wolf said. "They came in and gave their best every day. You hope they left it behind with the other kids. I probably could count on one hand the days they didn't come in and put the most they could put in."

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— Ross coach Sue Wolf on the loss of her seniors



News-Messenger/David Distelhorst
FREMONT ROSS senior Aaron Gray reacts during the first half of the Little Giants' 42-31 loss to Mansfield Senior in the Division I sectional opener on Tuesday.