

Little Giants reach AAA sectional final

By BOB MARKER

News-Messenger Sports Editor

ASHLAND—John Sawyer was evasive.

He was treating the postgame interviews the same as he did Mansfield Senior High School's coaches during the semifinals of the Class AAA upper bracket sectional tournament at Ashland College Saturday. Sawyer's Ross High School team had disposed of Galion 67-58 to earn a shot at defending the title it won last year.

"I knew that Mansfield (14-7) was in the stands scouting," Sawyer, the Ross head coach, said, "and I wanted to give them as many looks as I could."

Then he broke down and grinned.

"Actually, it was a weird game out there tonight."

While Sawyer was playing his head game with Mansfield, the different looks being displayed by Ross, 9-13, may have helped keep Galion, 4-17, in the game.

"I think the kids could have been looking ahead," Ross assistant Coach Brian Wilch said.

"Nah," Chuck Lindsey, another Ross assistant countered, "Chris (Simmons) didn't know who we played next!"

Simmons, while not knowing that Ross was to face Mansfield in the finals at 6:30 p.m. tonight, knew what he was doing against Galion. The burly 6-2 junior, scored eight points, six in the third quarter when the Little Giants got a little breathing room, grabbed six rebounds and had a steal.

Simmons effort, coupled with Jim Hufford's 18 and 13, to go with five assists, by Mark Miesle offset a 13-point effort by Ross's leading scorer Greg Bender. The 6-4 Bender was eight below his average and never seemed to get into the flow of the game.

Sawyer sat Bender down for the last two minutes of the third quarter and the first two of the final quarter. When Bender came back in, he

responded with three straight buckets that kept Galion at bay when the Tigers were showing signs of getting back into the contest.

Galion crept to within four—48-44 and 50-46— but each time Bender connected to put the Little Giants up by six. His third straight bucket gave Ross a 54-46 lead with 4:15 to play.

"It was really a strange game," Sawyer insisted. "We shot poorly in the first half, yet it seemed like we were swapping buckets back and forth.

"We got beat horribly on the boards; we were fighting each other for rebounds and we did not move defensively but we still led at the half (31-29).

"We were slow getting back," Sawyer continued. "It wasn't a pretty game, but we won. We showed Mansfield quite a bit but we did not show them we could do it very well.

"We are in the finals, though, and we are going to defend it to the best of our ability."

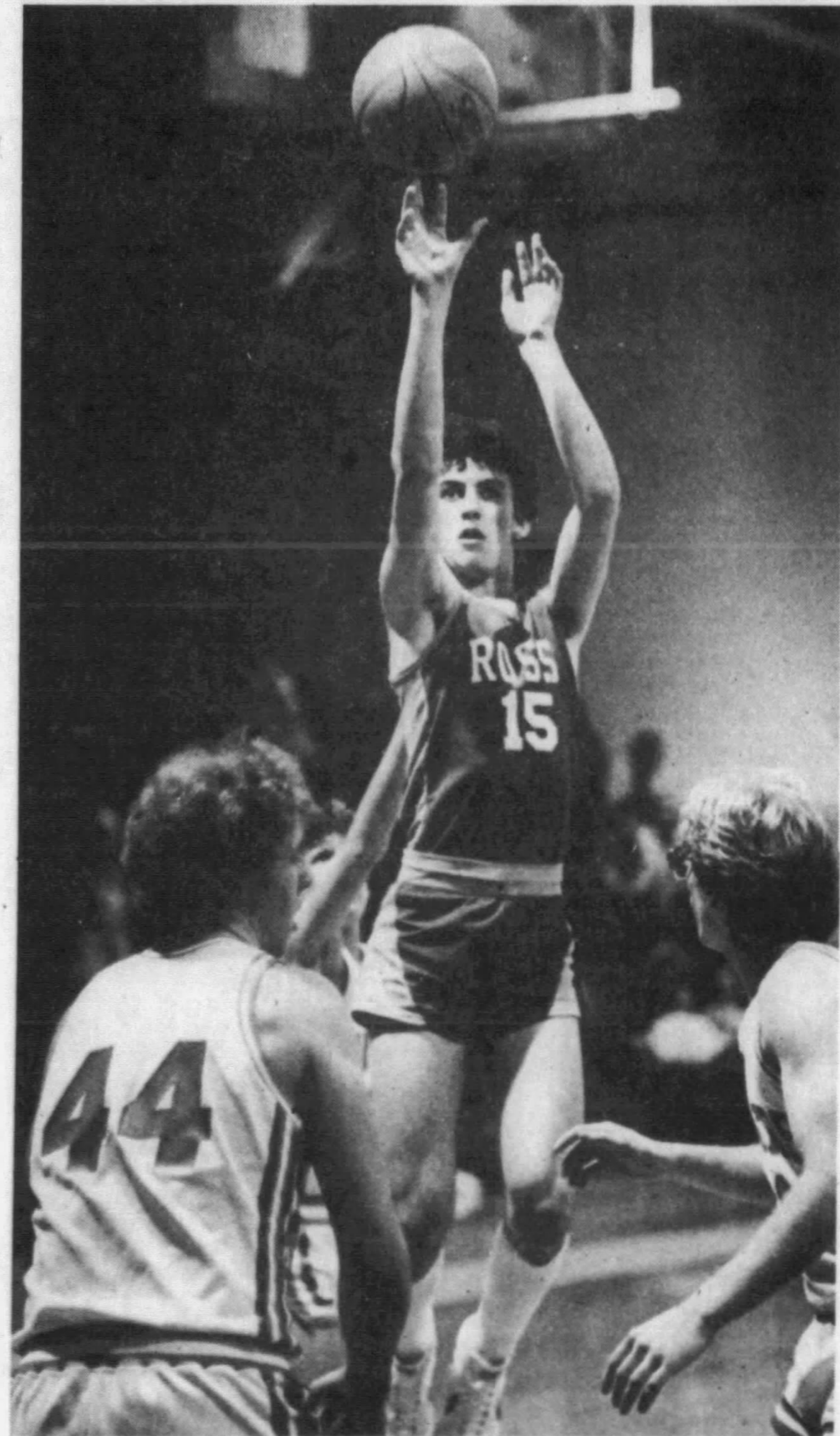
Ross was 12 of 38 from the floor in the first half while Galion was 11 of 26.

The Little Giants, after leading 13-5 at one point in the first quarter, had a 13-12 lead at the end of that period. That lead was biggest until the Little Giants held a 67-56 edge with 27 seconds remaining.

Galion led five times, the last at 24-23 when Kris McCarthy, the game's high scorer with 22 points, canned a layup with 3:20 to play in the first half.

Sawyer had his team showing a press and using "2-3", "1-3-1" and man-to-man defenses. The press worked fairly well with the majority of the Tiger's turnovers coming on some type of Ross pressure.

Ross had only eight turnovers, nine less than Galion. The Tigers had a 41-37 advantage in rebounding with 6-4 Steve Miller grabbing nine. Dave Kovalski's seven rebounds led Ross.



(N-M photo by Bill Kennedy)

MARK MIESLE of Ross lets one fly during the Little Giants' sectional semifinal against Galion Saturday night at Ashland College.