

Boys basketball: District semifinal

Tygers' rally stuns Little Giants

Mansfield wins in double OT

By MICHAEL PIDANICK
Staff writer

WILLARD — With 43 seconds left in the second half of Wednesday's Division 1 district semifinal, things were looking good for Fremont Ross. The Little Giants held a 10-point lead and Ross fans were raucously chanting, "It's all over."

Reggie Jones knew better. The Little Giants' senior had seen the Tygers pull out miracles against his team

before, and he was about to see it again.

Mansfield went on a 12-2 run in the final 43 seconds, tied the game on a 40-foot shot at the buzzer by John Brooks, and held off the Little Giants for a 72-69 win in double overtime in a battle for the ages at Willard High School.

"I think a couple guys thought it was over," said Jones. "But all I kept thinking about was the last two times against them, with them coming back in the last minute, and sending the game to overtime."

For the third time in four

Wednesday

Mansfield	72
Ross	69

years, the Little Giants met the Tygers in the district tournament, and for the third time it was an overtime classic.

Brooks, a 6-foot junior guard, carved his place in the Mansfield basketball history books with one of the most dramatic shots in school history. After Jones hit a pair of free throws with 3.2 seconds left, Brooks brought the ball just past half-court and let fly as the buzzer sounded. His shot hit nothing but net,

sending the game into overtime and the Mansfield crowd into hysterics.

The Little Giants had the big play in the first overtime, as Jones scored off an offensive rebound with seven seconds to play to tie the game.

Ross almost had one miracle left, but Juan Vela's 3-pointer at the second overtime buzzer bounced off the front of the rim, and the fourth-ranked Tygers escaped.

"I'm definitely very proud of my team," said Ross coach Mark Gedeon. "They laid it all on the line. We wanted them to have to hit a



"I'm definitely very proud of my team. They laid it all on the line. We wanted them to have to hit a prayer at the buzzer, and their prayers were answered."

— Ross coach Mark Gedeon

prayer at the buzzer, and their prayers were answered. But both teams had opportunities and both teams made big plays, unfortunately we came out on the short end."

The Tygers (21-1) advanced to the district final at

11 a.m. Saturday against No. 7 Lima Senior at the University of Toledo's Savage Hall. The Spartans beat Celina 77-68 in a district semifinal Wednesday at Liberty Benton High School.

See ROSS, B5

Ross loses thriller to Mansfield

Continued from B1

The Little Giants (17-5) saw their season ended by the Tygers in a district semifinal for the second year in a row. Mansfield rallied late in regulation and beat Ross 81-77 in overtime last year. In 1997, Ross overcame a 3-pointer at the buzzer by the Tygers' Marquis Sykes and posted a 73-68 district final win.

"It does add to the chapter," Gedeon said. "You're seeing two great teams and programs that really have kids lay it on the line. I can't think of a better place in Ohio to watch a basketball game than to watch a Fremont Ross-Mansfield Senior game."

For Ross, it spoiled a spectacular upset bid. The Tygers had won 20 of their first 21 games entering Wednesday's big clash, with their only loss coming to No. 1 Toledo Libbey.

"Numbers really don't mean anything right now," Ross wing Steve Dagg said. "It's just who plays hard, who executes better, that wins."

Vela led the Little Giants, as he scored 21 points and added five assists. But more importantly, he filled the void at point guard, left when starter T.J. Hammer suffered a season-ending ankle injury in the sectional tournament. Ross turned the ball over 24 times, but 14 came in the first half before Vela became the primary ballhandler.

"I was really concerned about their man pressure," Gedeon said. "With T.J. being out, who was going to step up? And I'll tell you Juan Vela was just incredible. In that fourth quarter, it was very hot in here, he had lost a lot of water, he was very tired, but he made some incredible shots off their pressure."

The Little Giants hit all seven of their field goal attempts in the fourth quarter to open up the big lead. A pair of free throws by Alfonso Vann gave Ross a 53-43 lead with a little over a minute left.

Joe Allen hit one of two for the Tygers with 42.5 seconds left. Rick Minard followed a Ross turnover with a 3-point shot that bounced off the rim twice and fell in with 30 seconds to play.

Ross missed two free throws and Aurre Shaw hit a 3-pointer with 14.9 seconds left. After two more Ross misses from the free throw line, Herman Davis scored off an

offensive rebound to slice the gap to one with 10 seconds to play. Dagg was fouled, but missed both shots, Reggie Jones grabbed the rebound and was fouled. He made both, but Brooks followed with his miracle trey.

"Truthfully, I thought it was over," Brooks said of the 10-point deficit. "But I had it in the back of my mind that I was going to fight back myself if I had to."

Mansfield hit 3-of-4 from 3-point range and forced two turnovers in the season-saving run. In the end, poor free throw shooting doomed the Little Giants. Ross hit 16-of-31 from the line, including 2-of-8 in the final minute.

"The only thing we're thinking is, just give a great effort to the very end," Mansfield coach Gregg Collins said. "Do whatever you can. Obviously when you're down by that much, that late, you're going to need to hit some 3s, and you need to make some stops defensively. Obviously, they're not going to force the issue, so we wanted to try to create some turnovers and foul. Fortunately, they missed some free throws and we hit some shots that we don't normally hit. They aren't in our offense, I'll tell you that much."

The Little Giants had the miracle at the end of the first overtime. Down by four, Dagg hit a pair of free throws to slice the gap to two, and Mansfield's Maurice Bradley traveled on the ensuing inbound pass. Terrence Jones took a pass from Vann and launched a 3-pointer that missed long. But Reggie Jones grabbed the board and put it back in with seven seconds left. The Tygers didn't get a shot off and the game went to double overtime.

"It wasn't designed for Terrence," said Gedeon. "We weren't looking to win the game there, we were looking to go to a second overtime. We made sure we ran an out of bounds play that had several different options, with Reggie being the first option. Terrence inbounded the ball to Alfonso, and was smart enough to go outside for the 3. He had a real good look to win it, and Reggie was thinking ahead and thinking miss, which you have to do an offensive rebounder, and he finished the basket."

Ross missed on its first four shots of the second overtime, and Mansfield opened up a five-point lead and had possession of the ball.

Reggie Jones came up with a steal for Ross, and Vela hit a 3-pointer to cut the gap to two.

"We had a huge opportunity to put the game away," said Collins. "We had the ball and a five-point lead late, and they did a great job. They come down here, Vela hits a huge shot on their third attempt. You can't give anybody that many shots, especially a team as good as Fremont with shooters as good as Vela."

After a Brooks free throw, the Little Giants had a last chance to tie, but Vela's 3-pointer bounced off the front of the rim as time expired.

"When I released it, it felt good," said Vela. "But then I looked up and it looked a bit short. But that's the best I could do."

In the first half, Minard showed why he was named the District 6 Player of the Year. The 6-foot-3 senior easily drove to the basket en route to 16 first-half points. Meanwhile, Ross struggled offensively, hitting just 9-of-20 field goals in the first two quarters and committing 14 turnovers. The Tygers seemed to be a step quicker throughout the first half and held a 28-22 lead at the break.

But Minard picked up his third foul early in the quarter and sat for the next five minutes. Shortly after his return, he picked up No. 4 and returned to the bench. He finished the game with 25 points, before fouling out with 1:30 left in the first overtime.

"We figured out what they were doing," Vela said. "No. 24 (Minard) got the ball and went baseline. Once we cut down the baseline, we were able to stop them. They were quicker, but not that much quicker."

Without its leader, Mansfield missed its first five shots and committed eight turnovers in the first 5:33 of the third quarter, and Ross went on a 12-0 run to take a 34-28 lead.

"We hit some shots we don't normally hit. They aren't in the offense, I'll tell you that."

— Gregg Collins
Mansfield coach

"We knew they were going to come out and try to put us away in the third quarter," said Dagg. "They put Sandusky away in the third quarter (in a 94-62 sectional final win Friday), so we knew they'd want to do that to us too. So we wanted to get into the game, try to not let them put us away, and we did a good job of that."

The key to Ross's comeback in Gedeon's eyes was the Little Giants' increased offensive efficiency. In the second half and overtimes, Ross hit 15-of-33 field goals.

But Mansfield turned on its man press late in the third and scored the final seven points of the game. Ross committed three turnovers in the span.

"We had a nice lead, and went up by six, but we got a little happy with that," Gedeon said. "They go down and hit a layup and they come right back and turned it into a ballgame. So instead of being up by six, we were down one going into the fourth."

Mansfield struggled from the floor throughout most of the game. The Tygers hit 24-of-73 (32.9 percent) from the floor, including a 5-for-28 effort from behind the 3-point arc.

The Little Giants controlled the boards in the second half. After being out-rebounded in the first two quarters, Ross grabbed 29 boards in the second half and overtimes, compared to 22 for the Tygers. Mansfield scored just two second chance points after halftime.



VELA



R. JONES

March Markdowns!
Skateboards & Skateboard Accessories
20% off

New Car Rates
7.50%
*APR Fixed
FINANCE

Fuji
\$10 OFF with this Ad
Open 24 Hours
7 Days
GLENDALE
FUJI HEALTH
RYAN SQUARE
www.fuji.com