



JEFF GREEN of Fremont Ross grabs a rebound away from **Matt Fawcett** of Tiffin Columbian dur-

ing the Little Giants' 62-59 loss to the Tornadoes in the sectional tournament at Willard.

News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

Ross bounced from tourney

By **BOB MARKER**
Staff writer

WILLARD — Bob Nocton discounted any help from above, but the luck of the Irish was another matter.

Nocton said he had the luck and his Tiffin Columbian team benefitted Tuesday night, shocking Fremont Ross in the final 16 seconds for a 62-59 victory in the first game of the Division I boys basketball sectional tournament at Willard High School.

Columbian, 10-11, plays Sandusky Friday for the sectional title while Ross bows out with a 10-11 mark after losing its last nine games.

Mike Betz, who tied the game at 59 on a three-pointer from deep in the left corner with 16 seconds remaining, pushed in a soft one-hander from 8 feet away with two seconds left for the game-winner.

Betz's clutch basket followed a missed Ross free throw with 13 seconds remaining and came after two of his Columbian teammates had missed chances.

"I'm pretty much an Irish guy," Nocton said while relaxing with a soft drink. "I'm pretty much a lucky guy."

Ross coach Frank Gioffre said, "... they had a lot of opportunities and they were bound to make one."

Along the way, Ross lost leading scorer Chris Wolfe to fouls with 4½ minutes to play and 6-7 Jeff Green became saddled with his fourth foul late in the third quarter.

Green was Nocton's biggest worry.

"Green is so strong that we cannot block him out," Nocton said. "We tried to convince the ref that he was over the back which it looks with a tall guy on a smaller guy... sometimes it was and other times our guys just weren't doing a good job of rooting back, but he was definitely more trouble for us even though Wolfe is probably a more

complete player."

Ross assistant coach Jim Morgan said, "If there was one person who could not get into foul trouble, it was Jeff because we felt everyone else we could interchange and make some adjustments but with Jeff out, that was a problem."

Gioffre added, "Jeff played a nice game when he was in there moving to get the ball and Chris was the same way; they did a nice job on the glass but when they went out, they (Columbian) just took it at us and got a lot of second and third opportunities."

Vince Perrine, who shook off a "box-and-one" defense to score 28 points, had his jumper from the free throw line blocked by Nick Wolf to start Nocton's run of Irish luck. Jeff Fey grabbed the loose ball but his 5-footer bounced off the rim to the left where the 5-foot-11 Betz grabbed it and got his shot off from among a crowd of Ross defenders.

Perrine added the final point, sinking one of two technical foul shots when Ross attempted to call a timeout but did not have any timeouts left.

The game started with Todd Clark of Ross shooting a pair of technical foul shots when Nocton did not have his starting lineup in the official scorebook 10 minutes before game time. Clark made one shot, putting Columbian down 1-0 before a second had ticked off the clock.

"I like close games," Nocton said, "but I don't like to start my team out with a one-point deficit without the basketball."

"I'm proud of my kids because they have found ways to win — I mean the kids have found ways. We have called set plays, but they have found other things off the set plays to get themselves a score."

After the 1-0 gift, Ross threatened to blow the Tornadoes out

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Ross

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— racing to a 12-2 lead 5½ minutes into the game. Green scored six of his 11 points and Wolfe five, but Columbian cut the deficit to 12-7 at the end of the first period on a Matt Fawcett basket and the first of Betz's two 3-pointers.

After Mark Gottron put Ross up 15-7 with a three-pointer opening the second quarter, it was all Columbian. Perrine, a 6-foot-2 senior transfer from Findlay, scored 12 points, leading Columbian to a 30-27 halftime edge.

Ross opened the second half with a 10-2 run for a 37-32 lead but the Tornadoes bounced back, taking a 40-39 lead on Fey's 3-point bucket. Wolfe's free throw and Clark's three-point goal put Ross up 43-40 but Perrine tied it at the end of the period on a three-point play.

In the final quarter, Ross led by four points on three occasions and held a 59-56 lead when Clark and Green made one-of-two free throws each with Green's coming at the 27-second mark.

Betz followed with his long bomb.

After a Ross timeout, Perrine was called for holding Nick Wolf on the inbounds play with 13 seconds to play, but Wolf missed the foul shot, Perrine got the ball to set off the frantic final seconds.

Seconds that brought luck to the Tornadoes and despair to the Little Giants.

Clark led Ross with 15 points and Wolfe had 12.

It was a tough ending to a season that had started so well for the Little Giants and Gioffre.



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

MIKE BETZ (34) of Tiffin Columbian knocks the ball away from Ryan Zimmerman of Fremont Ross Tuesday night.

"We are just on that rollercoaster and we could not catch a break," Gioffre said.

"We had our opportunities tonight, but you've got to make them."