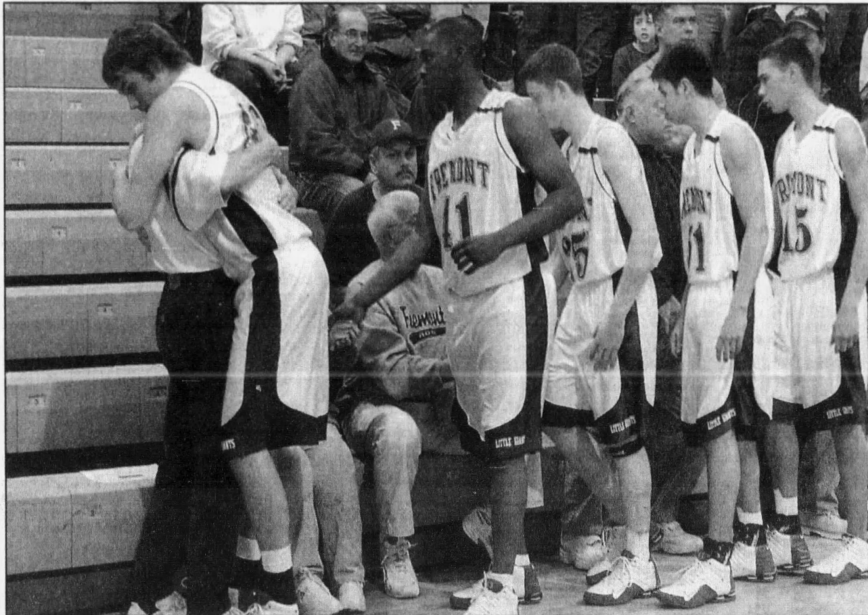


# 'About Billy'



**FREMONT ROSS SENIOR** Fred Shearon hugs Bill Stierwalt during introductions in the Little Giants' Division I sectional opener against Mansfield Madison. Stierwalt's son, Billy, was the team manager for Ross the last three years. Billy died Tuesday after a long battle with Muscular Dystrophy.

News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

## Emotional victory follows the loss of a good friend

By **NICK MATHEWS**  
Sports Editor

**WILLARD** — Before every home game for the last three years, the Fremont Ross boys basketball players sprinted to a corner of the gym where Billy Stierwalt watched from his wheelchair.

During pregame introductions, the Little Giants always hugged the 18-year-old Stierwalt, showing their love and appreciation for their team manager.

On Tuesday, Stierwalt died after a long battle with muscular dystrophy.

On Wednesday, the heavy-hearted Little Giants traveled to face Mansfield Madison in a Division I sectional opener.

On the bus ride to Willard, Ross coach Mark Gedeon received a call on his cell phone from Stierwalt's dad "I'm coming to the game," Bill Stierwalt said. "Can you save me a corner spot? Let's take care of Billy."

They did. The Little Giants used a 15-0 second-half run to cruise to a memorable 65-49 victory over Madison.

**"The way Billy conducted his life and how he did everything with all of his power — to be the best that he could be — was an example for all of us."**

— **Ross coach Mark Gedeon**

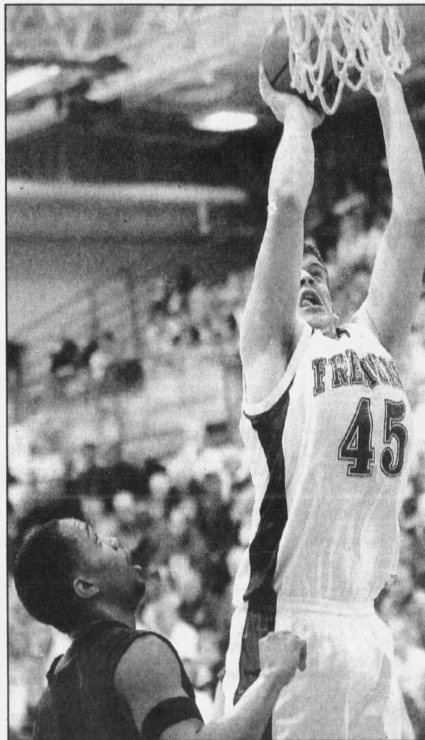
Joe Diller matched a career-high with 21 points and Fred Shearon tallied 17 points, 16 rebounds and 11 blocks — the first triple-double in Gedeon's 10 years at the helm — as the Little Giants notched their first tournament victory since 2001.

Diller scored eight consecutive points to start the key run that gave Ross a 52-34 lead with 6 minutes, 6 seconds remaining in the game, and the Little Giants improved to 9-12 and advanced to face Tiffin Columbian in Friday's sectional final.

"I think they just totally outplayed us," Madison coach Rob Peterson said. "I haven't seen them play like that before. I think they really came out and played with intensity and maturity."

"We didn't play poorly," he continued. "They just played so well. They deserved to win."

Peterson knew about the difficult week the Little Giants endured. He knew that his Rams (9-12) were simply in the way of incredibly motivated opponents.



**FREMONT ROSS** senior Joe Diller takes a shot during the Little Giants' 65-49 victory over Mansfield Madison in a Division I sectional opener Wednesday. Diller scored a team-high 21 points.

News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

See **SHEARON, DILLER, 83**





News-Messenger/Diane Cebula

**FREMONT ROSS** coach Mark Gedeon gives instructions to his players during the Little Giants' 65-49 victory over Mansfield Madison in a Division I sectional opener Wednesday. Gedeon's squad endured a difficult week. Team manager Billy Stierwalt died on Tuesday.

## Shearon, Diller lead Little Giants to emotional victory

### Continued From B1

"They shoved us out of the way pretty easily, too," he said.

With 45 seconds left, Gedeon substituted for Shearon. The Ross senior received a rousing applause from the Little Giant fans.

"That was an all-Ohio performance," Peterson said.

Added Shearon: "Any time you lose someone that close to you, it's tough. It's something that you have to use to stay focused. That's something we did tonight."

Shearon tallied six points, four rebounds and four blocks in the first quarter as the Little Giants built a 14-8 lead. They never trailed.

Madison got within 33-32 midway through the third quarter. The Rams trailed 37-34 before Diller took control and started the huge

run.

"Diller really hurt us offensively," Peterson said. "We just couldn't get a key stop when we needed it to get us over the hump. Diller was a big part of that."

Soon after Shearon was pulled, Diller was substituted for and received a huge applause.

A pregame substitution was the most touching moment of the evening.

During introductions, the Little Giants ran to Bill Stierwalt, sitting in the corner.

They gave him a hug.

"An incredible family," Gedeon said of the Stierwalts. "Incredible people."

Billy Stierwalt was Gedeon's manager for the last three seasons. He ran the clock during practices, keeping them organized.

"Billy always wanted to be a part of a team, and there is no question that he was part of this team for three years."

Added Diller: "He was a blast at practice.

We would tease each other in practice. He likes Michigan, and I like Ohio State. I always gave him a hard time. It was fun having him around. He was great for us.

"He was a good guy," Diller added. "It's sad to see him go."

The Little Giants wore black tape on their jerseys in honor of Stierwalt.

Gedeon, though, said he steered away from a "Win-one-for-the-Gipper speech."

"We weren't trying to win this game for Billy," Gedeon said. "We were trying to win the game about Billy. I think there's a difference.

"The way Billy conducted his life and how he did everything with all of his power — to be the best that he could be — was an example for all of us," he continued. "We as people and basketball players have to have that same attitude. When you get that opportunity to do the best you can with the best attitude possible ... that's what Billy was about."