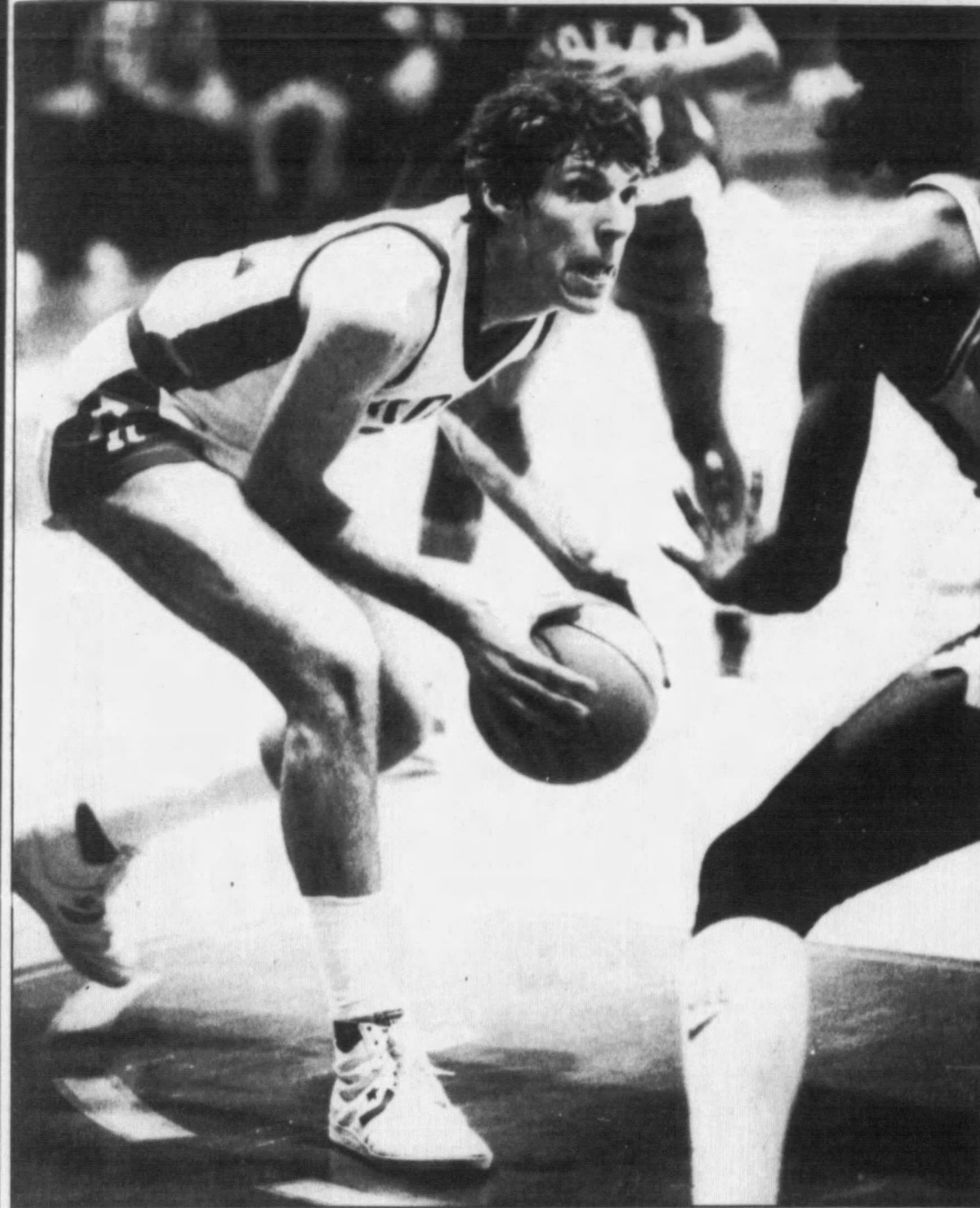


Mansfield halts Ross's season 68-63 in OT



News-Messenger/Bill Kennedy

GREG BENDER of Ross has the ball in the key against Tyron Buck of Mansfield during action Tuesday.

Jackets sideline Streaks

By ROB BOUKISEN
News-Messenger Sports Writer

OLD FORT — Opportunity knocked several times for St. Joe Tuesday night, but the Streaks didn't answer, and the result was a 56-50 season-closing loss at the hands of the New Riegel Blue Jackets in the Class A sectional semifinal at Old Fort High School.

On three occasions in the final quarter, the Streaks had chances to turn the tide back in their favor after trailing the entire second half. But each time, they failed to convert.

The first and possibly most important time came with just under three minutes to go in the game. The Streaks had run off six straight points to trim their deficit down to two points, 45-43.

With 2:51 left, New Riegel's Scott Theis went to the foul line. He made his first free throw, but he missed the second. St. Joe's Steve Gabel grabbed the rebound in the middle of the key and was looking to pass it off.

But New Riegel's Rick Wank cleanly slapped the ball away, took it to the hoop, scored and was fouled. He made the ensuing free throw, and instead of the Streaks trailing by just three, 46-43, with the ball and a chance to cut it to one, they trailed by six, 49-43, with 2:42 left.

"I'll probably see that play a couple times in my sleep tonight," St. Joe Coach Biz Paeth said about Wank's steal and ensuing three-point play. "That was a big play. The momentum was going our way and we had a chance to cut it to one, but it was like a five-point turnaround.

"And I don't think he (Gabel) got fouled. Wank just made a good play. That was the turning point, at least until the last 40 seconds."

In the last 40 seconds, the Streaks came up with their other two missed opportunities to get back into the game.

After St. Joe's Dave Dick hit two free throws to trim it to 54-50 with 42 seconds left, the Streaks fouled Greg Rumschlag with 33 seconds left. He missed the front end of a one-and-one and Tom Gonya rebounded for the Streaks. But their chance to cut it to two failed when Randy Wammes missed a running 10-footer from the right side.

Still, the Streaks had one more chance to cut it to two when Gonya rebounded another missed free throw by New Riegel with 20 seconds left. But this time Bret Pavlica missed a 15-foot jumper from the left corner.

The Blue Jackets finally put matters to rest when Theis made two free throws with 10 seconds remaining for the final margin.

"We had two chances to cut it to two points in the last 40 seconds and we got a couple good shots, but they wouldn't fall," said Paeth.

Those three late mishaps wasted an otherwise solid performance by the Streaks. They shot 49 percent from the field (23 of 47) and committed just seven turnovers.

But the Blue Jackets were just as effective on their offensive end, hitting 61 percent of their shots (22 of 36), including an unbelievable 81 percent (13 of 16) in the first half when they went up 27-21.

New Riegel also held an advantage at the foul line, hitting 12 of 19 to St. Joe's four of five.

Randy Reinhart was the hottest New Riegel shooter, drilling a perfect nine of nine from the field in the first half. He had 19 of the Blue Jackets' 27 first-half points and finished with 21 on the night after taking just two shots in the second half.

Reinhart's first-half display came about mostly as a result of Gabel's solid defensive play on the Blue Jackets' leading scorer Wank. Gabel, at 5-10, was fronting the 6-5 Wank, forcing the Jackets to look elsewhere for their shots. They found them in Reinhart.

"Gabel did a real good job on Wank," said Paeth. "That's what we wanted to do, front him. But we sure let 23 (Reinhart's number) have fun."

Wank still finished with 17 points to support Reinhart's strong showing. He had seven in the final quarter.

The Blue Jackets are now 11-10 and will play Fostoria St. Wendelin, 13-8, in the sectional finals Friday night at 6:30. St. Wendelin beat Woodmore 80-63 in the first semifinal last night.

Gonya led St. Joe with 15 points, Pavlica added 14 and Kevin Yeckley had 10. The Streaks bow out with an 8-13 record.

Turnovers are costly to Giants

By BOB MARKER
News-Messenger Sports Editor

ASHLAND — Ahmed Kent scored seven points in overtime to lead Mansfield Senior to a 68-63 win over top-seeded Fremont Ross in the Class AAA Boys Sectional Basketball Tournament Tuesday at Ashland College.

The Little Giants were victimized by key turnovers and the opportunistic Tyger defense in absorbing their sixth loss in 21 games. Ross had 20 turnovers, including two in the final quarter and another in overtime which cost the Little Giants dearly.

Ross, according to Coach John Sawyer, got off on the wrong foot.

"I felt both teams were tight at the beginning," Sawyer explained, "but even though both teams were missing shots, I felt that Mansfield was setting the tempo.

"They were getting the ball out quickly after our misses and we were slow getting back."

That was characteristic of the entire game.

Ross led after one quarter 12-9 as Mark Miesle carried the Ross offense. The Little Giants' leading scorer, Greg Bender, was bottled up by the Mansfield zone during the first half, finishing with five points as the Tygers carved out a 29-26 halftime advantage.

The Mansfield lead climbed to eight in the third quarter, 43-35, before Ross began to claw its way back into the contest.

Two baskets by Shawn McCarthy got Ross to within six, 45-39, at the end of the third quarter.

Sophomore John Stierwalt and Bender got Ross rolling in the final eight minutes. The two hit on back-to-back baskets as the Little Giants cut the Tyger lead to 45-43. Eric Toddie made it 47-43 for Mansfield with six minutes to play before Ross ran off six straight points to take the lead 49-47.

McCarthy hit two free throws, Stierwalt hit from long distance and Bender hit two charity tosses to give the Little Giants the lead with just under five minutes remaining.

Robbie Andrews made two free throws to tie it for the Tygers but Bender sank a pair of free throws as Ross regained the lead 51-49. Kent answered with a pair of free throws to tie it a 51-51 before Stierwalt hit from the side for a 53-51 Ross lead with 3:30 to play.

The first of the key turnovers hit the Little Giants at that point. After a Mansfield turnover, Ross had a shot at going up by four, but a steal and Kent's layup tied it 53-53.

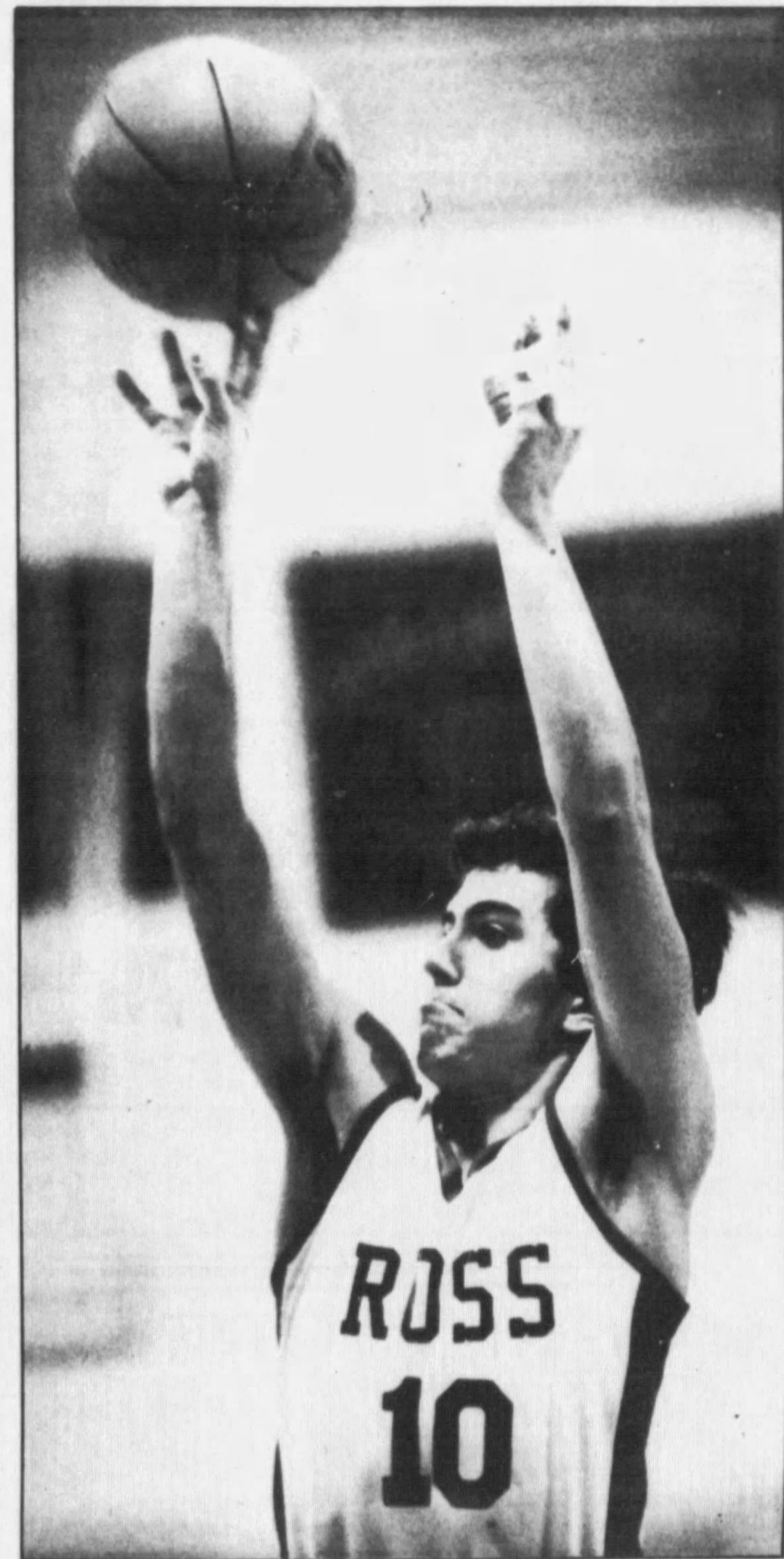
Stierwalt followed with a pair of free throws and Ross had a second chance to go up by four when Andrews was called for charging. Again, a Ross turnover followed by a Tyron Buck layup deadlocked the game 55-55.

Bender's two free throws with 2:25 left gave Ross a two-point lead but Kent's jumper tied it again 57-57 at the 2:15 mark.

Sawyer sent his team into a delay game after that bucket, but with 57 seconds left, Miesle was called for a five-second violation and Mansfield had the ball for the final shot.

That did not work out as two Mansfield timeouts later and a Toddie air ball sent the game went into overtime.

Bender missed the first shot of the overtime and Kent wound up



News-Messenger/Bill Kennedy

JOHN STIERWALT of Ross fires up a jump shot from the corner during action against Mansfield Tuesday night at Ashland College.

with the ball at the left sideline after a wild scramble.

Kent drove to the baseline and ran into Ross's Dave Kovaleski while putting the ball up. The shot went in as Kovaleski was called for the foul. Kent hit the free throw and the grease was on the skids beneath Ross.

Bender canned a shot with two minutes to go and Ross got the ball back a few seconds later on Tim Harless' missed shot.

After a timeout, Stierwalt drove the right baseline but traveled. Mansfield jumped on that chance, running the clock down to 1:02 before Miesle fouled Buck.

The 6-5 Mansfield senior hit both shots to put his team up 62-59. A Bender miss was followed by two free throws by Toddie with 34 seconds to play and the game was nearly out of reach for Ross.

Miesle's bucket was followed by Kent's two layups which iced the contest.

"We knew that we could not play Ross a half-court game," Mansfield Coach Joe Prats said while admitting the start of the game helped get the tempo of the game where he wanted it.

"We had to get out quick and get going; that was the only way that we were going to beat Ross," Prats said.

"We knew we had to play a

good game to beat them," Sawyer said outside the quiet Ross lockerroom, "and we really did not have that good of a game.

"We took a couple of charges that went against us I felt," the Ross coach said, "and that hurt us.

"Mansfield is a good team. We were surprised that they shot free throws so well because we felt that they were weak there. Down toward the end, they showed they could play disciplined ball with the passing game.

"The only other thing I can say," Sawyer concluded, "is these kids have nothing to be ashamed of this season."

Mansfield was 14 of 18 at the foul line and 27 of 49 from the floor. Ross was 15 of 18 and 24 of 48 from the floor.

Kent's 25 points led all scorers with Toddie getting 13, Buck 12 and Harless 11. Bender finished with 22 for Ross with Miesle hitting eight of 11 shots and finishing with 18. Stierwalt had 13.

Mansfield had only 14 turnovers. Ross had a 25-23 advantage in rebounding.

Mansfield, 14-7, will play the winner of tonight's Ashland-Tiffin Columbian game for the sectional title at 6:30 p.m., Friday.