



FREMONT ROSS 62, BOWLING GREEN 61 (OT)

EVERY POINT MATTERS

Little Giants survive rough night at free-throw line in sectional opener

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TONTOGANY — As Fremont Ross continued to make one unsuccessful trip after another to the free-throw line Wednesday night, Little Giants coach Mark Gedeon could have been tempted to open his wallet to and buy his team a free throw, if he could.

Surely those wearing purple and white in the stands could have been convinced to start a collection plate. The Little Giants needed every point they could muster in their sectional tournament opener against Bowling Green.

Finally, after a torturous fourth quarter and overtime period that saw Ross make just 42 percent of its foul shots, Jarren Hampton made a pair of free throws to give his team a four-point cushion with under a second to play. Good thing he made both shots, because Bowling Green's Trent Hinton drained a half-court desperation heave bringing the Bobcats within one, 62-61, as the final horn sounded, sending Ross on to the sectional championship.

"We just couldn't buy one," senior Grant McConnell said. "I don't know what it was but we could not make a free throw. I don't even know how to describe it. It was crazy.

"We finally found a way to make two of them, then the kid hits a half-court shot. Thank God Jarren made both of them."

Ross (8-15 overall) advances to play Three Rivers Athletic Conference rival Lima Senior (19-3), a team that defeated the Little Giants twice this season, Friday night at 6:15 at Otsego High School.

"We play Lima, we've seen them twice already but we're confident," Hampton said. "We have to execute. It's all about execution and defense."

Though Ross entered its game against Bowling Green as the favorite with nearly twice as many wins as the Bobcats, the Little Giants struggled to find an offensive rhythm. Despite shooting just 33 percent from the field, Ross led by as



Ross' Jarren Hampton puts up a shot against the Bowling Green defense.

DOUG HISE/NEWS-MESSENGER CORRESPONDENT

many as seven points in the fourth quarter. Bowling Green however (47 percent shooting) came back to tie the game at 46 with under two minutes to play.

Then Ross' free-throw trou-

bles began. The Little Giants held a two-point lead with 29 seconds to play. Hampton made 1-of-2 charity shots to put his team up three points but still within one possession of Bowl-

ing Green. After the Bobcats missed a 3-pointer to tie, Grant McConnell missed two foul shots, keeping the lead at three.

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Hampton was soon fouled, only he too missed both of his shots. Ross' Chris Liggins grabbed the rebound, but fell to the floor with the ball and was called for traveling, giving the Bobcats new life and the ball with 9.4 seconds to play.

Bowling Green rushed up-court and Aiden Mackey hit a 3-pointer at the top of the key as the buzzer sounded to send the game into overtime.

Ross entered the game shooting 67 percent from the line as a team. Wednesday night the Little Giants made just 23-of-45 (51 percent), and just 11-of-26 in the fourth quarter and overtime.

"I think any coach there would go through and (want to) put out some dollars there," said Gedeon, a 1986 graduate of Bowling Green. "This is one of the best free-throw shooting teams I've had in 20 years here in Fremont. You get this type of situation, March Madness, we could made things a lot easier on ourselves and knocked down some free throws."

While Bowling Green ended regulation on the high note, Ross came out of the gate in overtime and seized the momentum back. McConnell opened the extra session with a 3-pointer, followed shortly by a pair of free throws by Hampton and then a Hampton out-back of his own offensive rebound. Ross took a 56-49 lead midway through the overtime period.

Then the bricks at the foul line returned. The Little Giants made just

four of their next 12 shots from the line over the next 1:18 as Bowling Green whittled the Ross lead down to 59-58 with 7.9 seconds to play.

Finally, it was Ross' turn to benefit from missed free throws. Trailing by two points with 2.8 seconds to play, Bowling Green's Mitchell Gardner had a chance to tie the game at the line but missed his two foul shots.

Hampton was fouled with less than a second to play and made both shots to secure the victory even after the Bobcats buzzer-beating half-court shot.

"It was real tough knowing we could have put the game away a lot earlier than we did," Hampton said. "We just couldn't finish our free throws. We practice that every day. I think at a point it got to be mental."

Despite not making a field goal in the first half, McConnell rebounded, scoring 14 of his team-high 16 points after halftime, including a 3-for-3 mark from 3-point range. Hampton and Brody Chudzinski each added 11 points while Tavarious Simms added seven points with eight rebounds playing a sound game on both ends of the court.

Ross now is faced with the task of upsetting Lima Sr. on Friday. The Spartans defeated the Little Giants by scores of 76-63 on Dec. 23 in Lima and 76-54 in Fremont on Feb. 6.

"It's a tough match-up," Gedeon said of Lima. "We've got to make sure we value the basketball. That was one of the things at our place we did not do as good a job as we did down there. We had a lot of unforced turnovers."

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