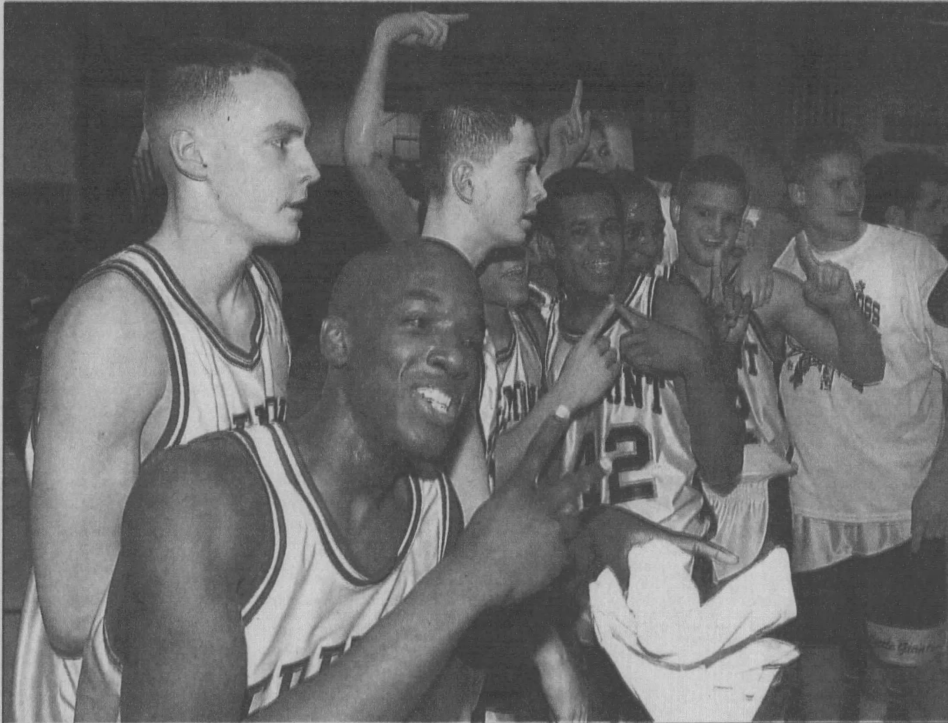
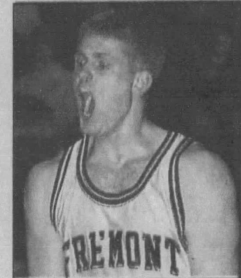


A throne at last



News-Messenger photos/Ben French



Countdown to a GLL crown

At right is the magic number for Ross to clinch its first league title in 47 years. The number dwindled with each Ross victory or losses by its nearest competitors. When the number was 1, the Little Giants clinched a title tie. When it hit 0 Saturday, Ross became the outright champ.

0

ROSS PLAYERS, from left, T.J. Hammer, Mike Price, Luke Lyle, Gabe Sanchez, Bo Martin, Terrence Jones, Lee Root, Bryan Root and Luke McElfresh celebrate the school's first Great Lakes League boys basketball championship Saturday at the Purple Pit. Above, Bryan Root revels in a positive play during the game.

Little Giants end 47-year title drought by clinching GLL crown

By **TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM**
Sports editor

There was an eerie tinge to the way Fremont Ross clinched the Great Lakes League championship Saturday night.

It almost seemed too easy.

As the Little Giants put the finishing touches on a 72-57 victory over Toledo Whitmer with an 11-0 run late in the fourth quarter, the crowd started a steady chant of "G.L.L., G.L.L."

If you didn't know better, you'd think this kind of thing regularly occurred at the Purple Pit. Ross was about to maintain its three-game lead with only two to play.

Do 47 years of futility melt away so smoothly?

Well, yes. But as the celebration erupted with the Ross play-

ers spilling onto the court, there was no mistaking the relief and utter ecstasy that accompanied the school's first boys basketball title since the 1953-54 team won the Buckeye League crown.

To the strains of Queen blasting over the public-address system, the Little Giants donned their commemorative T-shirts, cut down the net at the east end of the gymnasium and indulged in what looked like a team line dance — only hipper — to the final bars of "Another One Bites the Dust."

There to enjoy it with them were hundreds of fans and the stars of the recent Ross boys resurgence. Joell Heidelberg, Reggie Jones, Steve Dagg and Juan Vela were all under the basket as the Little

Giants and coach Mark Gedeon enjoyed their moment.

"I was pretty surprised," senior center Bryan Root said. "I didn't know all those people were going to stay. It was exciting."

Said senior guard T.J. Hammer, "There were a lot of people that stuck around. We want to thank the fans. They're a big part of it."

The Little Giants (14-4, 11-1 GLL) didn't flinch at the edge of the championship. They jumped out to a 7-0 lead Saturday and never trailed.

Whitmer (8-9, 6-6 GLL), behind GLL Player of the Year candidate Dave Veres, got as close as four points at 54-50 in the opening moments of the fourth quarter. But Ross responded by scoring 17 of the next 19 points to ease to its fifth straight win.

"We knew they were going to want to come out and beat us be-

Inside: Heidelberg, Jones play at Owens. **Page B3**

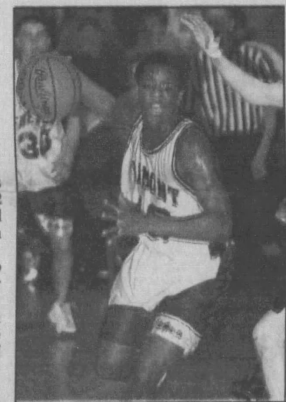
cause we beat them at their home," Ross sophomore Terrence Jones said. "They were ripping down our (GLL championship) signs down there. That just fired us up even more."

Jones led the Little Giants with 21 points. Root added 12 points and seven rebounds, and Alfonzo Vann came off the bench to provide 12 points.

Veres overcame foul trouble to score 20 points. Gerald Fletcher poured in 10.

Whitmer coach Bruce Smith declined comment after the game. He muttered a rebuff without breaking stride on his way to the team bus.

It was fitting response, especially from the coach whose



ALFONZO VANN of Ross circles toward the basket during Saturday's 72-57 victory over Toledo Whitmer.

See **ROSS, B4**



News-Messenger/Ben French

ROSS COACH Mark Gedeon triumphantly holds a piece of the net following Ross's 72-57 Great Lakes League-clinching win over Toledo Whitmer on Saturday night at the Purple Pit.

Ross beats Whitmer to win title

Continued From B1

team many picked to win the league because of the experience it had back from last year.

Ross has confounded GLL opponents all season with its dearth of standout players and abundance of team play.

"I don't know if there was a magical point," Gedeon said when asked when his team realized it could break the title jinx. "You go back to last spring, and our seniors thought we could do this. ... They'd been successful all the way through. They've all been in support roles on the last few teams and had varsity experience. I think it says something special about the seniors. They're flat-out winners."

The Little Giants led by as many as 14 points in the second quarter, but the Panthers stormed back behind Veres. The senior forward scored 10 straight points over a span of six possessions to pull Whitmer to within 37-31 with 2.8 seconds remaining in the first half.

Then Jones made what may have been the biggest single play of the game. He took a half-court pass, lost the ball momentarily, then launched a one-handed 45-footer that swished through at the buzzer. Ross led 40-31 at the intermission.

"I think that was huge," Gedeon said. "For him to nail that shot to get us back to that nine-point lead, our kids came into the locker room fired up, instead of thinking, 'Oh no, here they come.'"

Ross girls fall in OT to Mansfield Tygers

News-Messenger reports

MANSFIELD — The Fremont Ross girls missed three shots in the waning seconds of overtime and dropped a 62-61 decision to Mansfield Senior on Saturday afternoon.

"It wouldn't fall and they wouldn't call a foul," Ross coach Sue Wolf said. "It was a tough game. After playing five games in 11 days, it's hard on the girls. That showed a bit at the end. We played hard; we just had that disadvantage."

Alison Decker matched a career-high with 25 points on 12 field goals and a free throw to lead Ross (15-4). Sashay Price added 13 points, while Laura Wilson and Fallon Bailey scored seven apiece.

Tyanda Hammock and Canea Williams scored 19 points apiece for the Tygers (15-3).

Ross is at Whitmer on Thursday.

— Michael Pidanick

Jones scored buckets on consecutive feeds from Root and Bo Martin to open the second half, and the Little Giants regained a comfortable margin at 44-31.

But a five-point possession and a couple of Veres 3-pointers closed the gap to 51-48 with 1:30 left in the third quarter. A Lee Root trey gave Ross some breathing room entering the final period.

Unfortunately, the Little Giants missed their first six free

throws of the fourth quarter. But they held Whitmer without a field goal for almost six minutes, enabling Ross to go on the 17-2 run. Bryan Root scored half of his points during the streak.

"When we know we have to get something done, we do it," he said.

For his part, Jones enjoyed his most productive weekend of the season, scored 43 total points in victories over Clay and Whitmer. Could he be a consistent source for points down the stretch?

"Everybody has stepped up at different times," Jones said. "I'm just glad I'm being consistent. My shots are falling, but I'm not depending on that."

Said Gedeon, "People hit the shots when the scoring opportunities present themselves. All five players start with the opportunity to score. Terrence does have some special abilities, but so do Bryan and Alfonso and the list goes on and on."

NOTE: The Ross team was informed Saturday that the items stolen from its locker room during Friday's game at Clay have been returned. Clay athletic director Dave Scharer said the items — a compact disc player, several discs, a pair of pants and a small amount of cash — were returned to the locker room during a school dance after the game. The players were to get their belongings back today. Gedeon and Ross athletic director Art Bucci said they appreciated Scharer's concern about the incident and his efforts to return the items.