

MILLBURY — Fifth-ranked Notre Dame got a tougher-than-expected battle from Three Rivers Athletic Conference foe Fremont Ross, but the Eagles broke from a tie game midway in the fourth quarter to take a 53-45 victory Saturday in a Division I girls district basketball final at Lake.

Eagles senior guard Olivia Sims, who topped Notre Dame (14-1) with 15 points, broke the fourth-quarter tie with a 3-pointer. Then, after the TRAC-champion Eagles got a defensive stop, Sims hit a short pull-up jumper to give them a five-point cushion.

Notre Dame, which advanced to its ninth regional in 10 years, then iced the game by hitting seven of nine free throws in the final period.

“Obviously, any time you win at this point, you're extremely fortunate to get one,” Notre Dame coach Travis Galloway said. “They did a great job and had a great scheme coming in.

“They shot the lights out in the first half especially, and they played with a ton of confidence. We played a little tight, and we were very fortunate to get a win and continue to play.”

Grace VanSlooten, Notre Dame's two-time TRAC player of the year and a first team All-Ohio selection last season, had 13 points and 13 rebounds for the Eagles, who also got eight points each from senior Tialyn King and sophomore Dekota Smith.

Their combined work offset the upset effort from a young Fremont Ross team that put together northwest Ohio's best turnaround performance of 2020-21. After finishing 5-18 overall (0-14 TRAC) last season, coach Juan Vela's Little Giants ended this year at 18-6, 4-3.

Ross freshman Destiny Robinson led all scorers with 17 points, freshman Carma Johnson had nine points, and senior Brooklyn Baptista and sophomore Janiah Holmes added eight points apiece for the Little Giants.

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Ross led 13-11 after one quarter, trailed 26-25 at halftime, and entered the final quarter down 39-34 before pulling even midway in the fourth.

“Defensively, we were finally able to get some stops when we needed them,” Galloway said. “We were able to contain them on the perimeter better than we had the whole game.

“At the offensive end, when Olivia hit the big 3, it was off of a hustle play. We got a rebound and found her at the top of the arc, and she hit it. We had some toughness plays at the end that were big, and that was a bit of the experience factor more than anything else.”