

Ross win ends district drought

By MICHAEL BOSI
Staff writer

WILLARD — It's nearly springtime. The smell of baseball is in the air. The days are getting longer, the shadows getting shorter.

And the Fremont Ross boys basketball team is still playing.

Sounds kind of nice, eh?

What has an even nicer ring to it is "sectional champions."

That's what the Little Giants (14-7) are calling themselves after riding the 20-point effort of Joell Heidelberg and using their bench depth to suffocate Tiffin Columbian, 62-50, Friday night.

In the City of Blossoms, the Little Giants earned their first trip to the Bowling Green State University district semifinals since George Bush was president and Pat McGhee first roamed the sidelines, 1987.

"It feels great," said Derrick Hershey, one of eight Ross seniors. "It's been one of my dreams to go to Bowling Green all my life. I'm just excited and I feel good for the whole team. Hopefully, we can go farther."

Findlay, which edged Celina, 63-62, will have something to say about that Thursday (8:30 p.m.) when the teams tangle at Anderson Arena.

Ross senior Rob Liggins was the only other Little Giant in double figures, but eight different players scored. Sam Root was again a do-it-all point guard, scoring six points, dishing eight assists and making four steals.

Harry Liggins had five rebounds and Reggie Jones had

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Tiffin Columbian50

Thursday

Fremont Ross vs. Findlay
Division I district semifinal at
Bowling Green State University
8:30 p.m.

four.

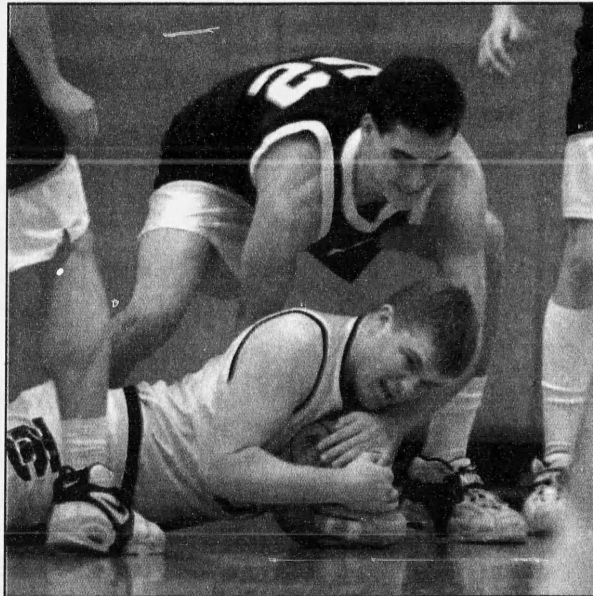
"We now have a championship here," beamed Ross coach Mark Gedeon. "It was definitely the goal going into the beginning of the year. To win the Great Lakes League would have been nice, we were five points short there (against Whitmer), but it just goes to show what happens when you have a group of kids who dedicate themselves year-round to play together as a team.

"We could not have won if it were not for all 10 of our players. We're not physically big and we need to play all 10 to play the style that we need."

That must be why the coach ensured all 10 players got a crack at the ceremonial scissor-snipping of the hoop. But you could tell Ross is new at this championship stuff; some of the players weren't sure how to go about the celebration.

"It feels great, it's the first time in a long time," said Rob Liggins.

Tiffin Columbian was not the same team Friday night that the Little Giants had come to know and love when they barreled over the Tornadoes, 84-74, Jan. 25 at the Purple Pit. The Tornadoes regained the services of 6-foot-7 sophomore Beau Carmen and 6-3 senior Chris Hill, who followed



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison
KEVIN MOSSER of Fremont Ross attempts to tie up Tiffin Columbian's Nate Hoerig during the first half of the Little Giants 62-50 win Friday at Willard.

his 18-point effort against Sandusky with a 14-point, 12-rebound performance.

Columbian was also without star Kaene Runion, who was kicked off the team for drug use.

Still, observed Liggins, "They got better."

Eric Slosser is one Tornado who has picked up his game. Slosser, who Gedeon previously referred to as "the roly-poly one," scored 13 points, with a pair of 3-pointers.

The Tornadoes took the high

road to disaster in the first half, turning the ball over 14 times as Ross jumped to a 36-21 lead. At one point in the first quarter, Columbian had more turnovers than points, as Heidelberg gave Ross a five-point lead, 11-6, with 1:14 left.

The speedy Heidelberg, who had only attempted six 3-pointers in the first 20 games, hit four triples in the first half and had 14 points.

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Ross reaches districts

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Heidelberg followed a John Overberg 3-pointer with a trifecta of his own 1:19 into the second quarter to give Ross a double-figure lead, 20-10. Ross nursed that cushion throughout the quarter and took a 13-point lead, 34-21, on another 3-pointer from Heidelberg with 34 seconds left.

"I came in here hoping we could execute, and they left me open and I just shot the ball," Heidelberg said.

Columbian stayed in the game with a 16-6 rebounds advantage in the first half (they had a 35-30 overall advantage), with Hill snagging six of them and scoring six points.

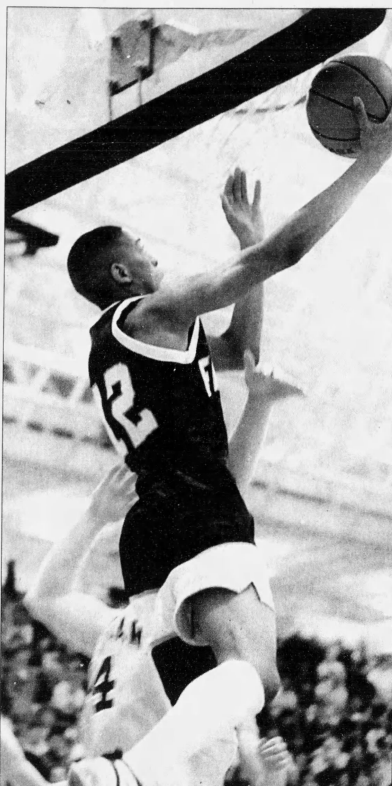
Ross's now trademark defensive intensity also was present, no more so than when Jones swatted down a Hill attempt on the baseline in the second quarter.

"I was worried fatigue was going to be a factor after playing so hard Tuesday," said first-year Columbian coach Matt Hutchinson. "And we had some guys who were pretty dead early."

The Little Giants sprung an 11-2 run to inflate their lead to 15 points, 36-21, at the end of the third quarter.

Columbian showed some survival instinct, starting the fourth quarter with an 8-2 run to close within 31-43 and forcing Ross to call timeout.

But David Losey missed an ill-advised 3-point attempt from the next time zone, and Rob Liggins followed with a 3-point play to put Ross back in control, 54-43.



JOELL HEIDELBURG of Fremont Ross goes up for two of his 20 points Friday against Tiffin Columbian.

News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

Heidelberg's the 'Man'

By MICHAEL BOSI
Staff writer

WILLARD — They call him "Man."

And Friday night, Joell Heidelberg indeed was The Man of the Hour.

On a Fremont Ross boys basketball team with established stars such as All-District 6 selections Derrick Hershey and Sam Root, along with six other proven seniors, Heidelberg, a sophomore, may be this city's next best-kept secret other than, of course, its hiring guidelines.

Tiffin Columbian was the latest to find out what's hidden inside Heidelberg's bag of tricks.

The 20 points Heidelberg scored are nothing new — he's had better.

But when the Tornadoes were looking for the razzle-dazzle moves that have made Heidelberg so successful this season, they instead got four smooth-sailing 3-pointers that were just as demoralizing as the 62-50 defeat they suffered in the Northwest Division I sectional final at Willard High School.

Columbian expected the Beastie Boys. Heidelberg gave them Mozart.

"I think mainly teams concentrate on me driving and dishing off," Heidelberg said after raising his season scoring average to 8.4 points per game. "Friday night, I proved I can also shoot the 3."

He also proved that no matter how far Ross advances in the district tournament, it'll have a solid future foundation despite the imminent loss of its eight seniors. Heidelberg and freshman Reggie Jones have gained plenty of important minutes this season, while at least three junior varsity players appear ready for fulltime varsity action.

"The future of this team is going to be really great," Heidel-

burg said. "We've got really good talent and some good young players."

But the current Little Giants want to believe the future is now, and they'll gladly accept any contribution from any player in the lineup.

Heidelberg stands 5-foot-9 and can't weigh more than 140 pounds soaking wet with an anvil strapped to his back. That, and the fact that his gazelle-like jumping ability leaves him airborne quite often, makes him prone to more than his share of bumps and bruises.

Even though he was playing with a sore shoulder and had to leave the game briefly in the third quarter after having his lip bloodied, he was on an unstoppable tear, missing only three shots all night.

"I was really psyched," he said.

Friday night, Columbian was happy to be tied 6-6 late in the first quarter when Heidelberg went on a personal 8-2 run to give Ross control.

He started it in typical fashion, drawing a foul after a steal.

But 30 seconds later, the role reversal started when John Overberg — he of the record-setting 3-pointers in a season — dished to Heidelberg, who made the trifecta on just his seventh attempt of the season.

And with 11 seconds left in the quarter, Heidelberg grooved another 3-pointer.

"Man did a great job," Derrick Hershey said. "Man was outstanding, he was just outstanding. He's shown us he has true athletic ability. We told him to shoot the 3 more, and he's started doing it so we're happy for him."

In the second quarter, Heidelberg hit another 3-spot to give Ross its first 10-point lead with 5:41 left.

No. 4 came with 34 seconds left in the half.

Could we have seen the last of Heidelberg's aggressive, challenging play?

Fear not, Heidelberg's Manhood hasn't taken a turn for the soft. In the second half he, tossed in a jumper before turning on the afterburners on a fourth-quarter give-and-go with Harry Liggins.

Saving the best for last, Heidelberg brought the violet-veiled Ross rooters to their feet with a slam dunk to account for the final 62-50 tally.

No one was happier than Ross coach Mark Gedeon to see Heidelberg deliver a complete package.

"He's just been outstanding," Gedeon said. "In the first half, I thought he really put a show on."

"Here's a player who's only taken six 3-point attempts all year, made three of them, and that was in our final two games of the year. He goes out and hits four 3's — that just shows you've got senior leadership rubbing off on the younger kids."

"He's worked very hard on improving his 3-point game, and we know he's very quick and he's very athletic."

Most teams haven't seen this side of Heidelberg, giving Ross the element of surprise.

"That's what's nice. Looking at the opponents were going to play (Findlay), we know each other very well, and we need to do something different," Gedeon said. "We kept preaching all week, 'We need people to do something different, they're not going to beat themselves.' We need people to do something special to beat them."

Heidelberg certainly was something special Friday night. Actually, he was rather super.

They call him Man right now. But "Super Man" would fit just fine.