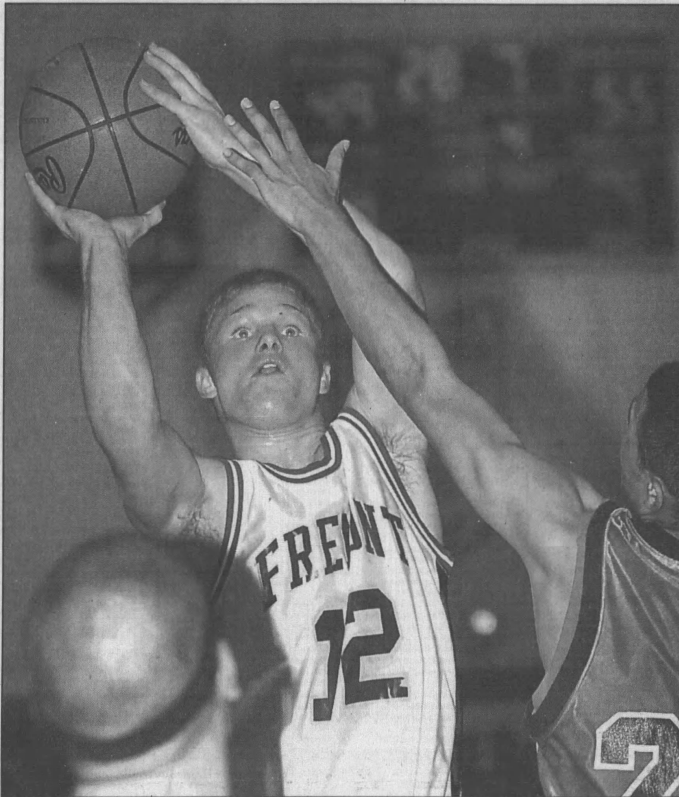


DIVISION I DISTRICT: Ashland 59, Ross 53

# Arrows pierce Ross season



News-Messenger photos/Ben French

LEE ROOT of Fremont Ross puts in two of his 10 fourth-quarter points Thursday as Ashland's Jerome Anderson, right, plays defense. Root led a furious comeback, but Ashland claimed a 59-53 victory in the Division I district semifinal at Willard.

## Ashland big men ground Little Giants

By TIMOTHY R. WOLFRUM  
Sports editor

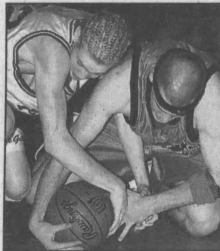
WILLARD — Fremont Ross had come to depend on its inside game to keep the team afloat when the going got tough.

But Ashland had an answer for Bryan Root and Alfonzo Vann, and it sank the Little Giants in the Division I district semifinal Thursday at Willard High School.

The Arrows' big front line held Root and Vann to a season-low seven points then held off a frenzied Ross comeback for a 59-53 victory and their first berth in the district final since 1977.

Ashland went on a 15-0 run over a span of 7 minutes, 35 seconds in the first half and never trailed thereafter. Root and Vann each sat out a large portion of the run with foul trouble.

"When we don't have our go-to guys inside, it's very difficult for us to get that natural offensive flow that we're used to having all year," Ross coach Mark Gedeon said. "You've got to give Ashland a lot of credit. I think their shot blockers affected some of our big guys inside. They tried to rush



JARRED STULL, left, of Ross and Mark Hess of Ashland play head games as they scramble for the ball Thursday at Willard.

their shots a little too much."

Said Ross senior guard T.J. Hammer, "We just dug ourselves too big of a hole and couldn't get out. We missed a lot of bunnies. Everyone was missing layups."

Without Ross's big guns, Ashland's 6-foot-8 center, Matt Schlingman, scored 13 first-half points on his way to a game-high 15.

Inside: Shelby downs Bellevue in Division II district. **Page B2**

Vann managed seven points, and Root, the Little Giants' leading scorer, did not score.

"We knew — and I think Mark (Gedeon) knew that, too — going into the game that the inside game was going to be the key to what happened," Ashland coach Chris Stokes said. "We challenged our kids. We knew they had a great team by beating (Mansfield) Senior. I thought our kids stepped up to the challenge."

Terrence Jones led Ross with 14 points and eight rebounds. Hammer had 13 points, and Lee Root scored 10 points, all in the fourth quarter.

Sophomore forward Mark Hess, another member of Ashland's front line, scored 13 points and pulled down seven rebounds.

The Arrows (18-4) advance to meet Toledo St. John's (19-3) in the district final at 5 p.m. Saturday at Bowling Green State University.

See GIANTS, B2

# Giants finish season at 16-7

Continued From B1

Ross trailed by as many as 18 points — at 38-20 with 3:45 to play in the third quarter — and still faced a 14-point deficit entering the final period.

But Lee Root, a junior bench player who clinched Friday's upset of No. 3 Mansfield Senior with two clutch free throws, led an impassioned comeback.

His double-pump 3-pointer from the right wing got the Little Giants as close as they would get, at 50-47 with 2:20 to play.

"We all thought we were going to get it. We thought it was ours," Hammer said.

Said Gedeon, "Lee had a great ending for us. ... He's a competitor. The whole Root family are competitors. He's just a microcosm of what I believe Fremont Ross basketball should be. He came up and made some big shots for us and gave us the opportunity to get back into this ballgame.

"I'll remember the way the game finished up, with our kids doing what they've done all year, playing with a lot of heart and energy."

Matthew Hess and Hammer traded short jumpers to keep the margin at three with a minute to play. But Ashland hit 5 of 6 free throws in the final seconds, and Ross finally ran out of shots.

Ashland hit only 1 of 12 free throws in the final period in beating Sandusky in the sectional final but did just enough from the line to stay ahead of Ross. The Arrows made 7 of 15 free throws in the fourth quarter Thursday and 11 of 22 for the game.

"We're going to Bowling Green. All you've got to do is win by one," Stokes said.

Ross missed its first seven 3-point attempts Thursday and finished 5-of-22 (22.7 percent). The Little Giants connected on only 20 of 59 (33.9 percent) field-goal attempts.

Ashland hit eight consecutive field goals in the first half and into the third quarter. The Arrows made 22 of 37 (59.5 percent) field-goal attempts.

"For us, the telling tale is our shooting percentage. When you shoot 34 percent from the field and you miss some bunnies, obviously there were three possessions you could have made up," Gedeon said. "It's disappointing to come this far and have your worst shooting game of the year."

But the Little Giants definitely put together a season to remember. They won the Great Lakes League, the first boys basketball league title for Ross in 47 years, and claimed the school's fifth consecutive sectional championship by getting past tourney nemesis Mansfield Senior. Hammer, Bryan Root and Vann are the only three seniors.

"We're all real close. We hang out together," Hammer said. "I'll remember just being together with those guys and winning championships."

NOTE: Ross guard Mike Price wore jersey No. 4 instead of his usual No. 10 Thursday. But it was not a tribute to Kelly Lytle, the senior point guard who once wore No. 4 before knee injuries ended his basketball career. Price forgot his jersey and had to wear the extra jersey, which happened to be No. 4.