

Ross falls in OT

Mansfield wins semi

Thursday

Mansfield81
Ross.....77

Saturday

Mansfield vs. St. Francis, 11 a.m.
District final at BGSU

By **SCOTT TAPPA**
Sports editor

WILLARD — It wasn't a mirror image, but Thursday's Division I district semifinal between Fremont Ross and Mansfield Senior was eerily similar to the district final the teams played two years ago.

One big difference: This time the Tygers won, 81-77 in overtime.

After an exciting back-and-forth final 31 seconds of regulation left the two teams tied at 70-70, Mansfield out-executed Ross in the extra session and advanced to meet Toledo St. Francis, an upset winner over Toledo St. John's, in Saturday's district final.

"In the overtime, they executed better than we did," said Ross coach Mark Gedeon, whose team finished 18-5. "Two years ago we scored on every single possession of overtime, and we shot foul shots a lot better two years ago."

The overtime was made possible by a frantic final 31 seconds of regulation. With 31 seconds remaining, Ross held a 68-66 lead, but missed two free throws.

Marquis Sykes, Mansfield's award-winning guard who led all scorers with 27 points, tied the game several seconds later on a tough bank shot from the right side of the lane. Ross then turned the ball over against the Tygers' full-court pressure, and after several missed shots and offensive rebounds, Sykes was fouled and went to the free throw line with eight seconds left.

Sykes made both free throws to give Mansfield a 70-68 lead.

"It was exciting," said Mansfield coach Gregg Collins, "but as soon as we got the ball back, I kept thinking, dang, I wish there was only four sec-



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

ROBB RITZMAN drives to the basket against Mansfield's Rick Minard during second half action in the Tygers' 81-77 overtime win Thursday at Willard.

onds left."

His instincts proved correct, as Joell Heidelberg raced the length of the court and hit a layup under pressure as time expired.

"I just wanted to push the ball up the court, get to the basket," said Heidelberg, who had 13 points in his last high school game. "It felt good when I hit that shot."

For Collins, it conjured up memories of the game two years ago, which Ross won at Bowling Green State University's Anderson Arena.

St. Francis stuns No. 6 St. John's to reach district final

When word that Toledo St. Francis had upset Toledo St. John's at Toledo Waite started to circulate around the Willard High School gym Thursday night, there were two typical responses:

"Are you sure?" and "Is that a final?"

It was indeed a final, as the No. 6 Titans fell 54-45 in the district semifinal, with St. Francis meeting Mansfield at 11 a.m. Saturday at Bowling Green

State University's Anderson Arena.

"The mindset is that St. John's is the No. 1 team in the state, and if somebody beats them, that's like somebody beating Duke," said Mansfield coach Gregg Collins.

The winner of Mansfield-St. Francis advances to meet the winner of Celina-Toledo Central Catholic in the regional semifinals.

— SCOTT TAPPA

See ROSS, B3

Ross falls in overtime

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"I had a flashback there in the last 10 seconds," said Collins, whose team improved to 19-3. "Two years ago, we were up two in overtime, and Heidelberg comes down and hits a 3, a big-time 3, and we could never recover from that. As soon as he made the running right-hander, I thought jeez, I can't wait for that guy to graduate."

In overtime, Mansfield made sure Thursday's game would be the last high school game for Heidelberg and fellow Ross seniors Tyson Liggins, Robb Ritzman and Andrew Diller.

After Reggie Jones won the tip for Ross, the Little Giants turned the ball over, and Ali Thompson responded on the other end by making 1-of-2 free throws. Sykes added another jumper before Ritzman's free throw cut the lead to 73-71.

Thompson hit another free throw, and Rudy Wolf added a pull-up jump shot in the lane to make it 76-71. Ross did not get closer than three points the rest of the way.

The Little Giants did not help themselves at the foul line, making just one of their last six attempts in regulation, and hitting just three of their first eight attempts in overtime.

"Every possession counts," said Gedeon. "People are going to focus on a couple foul shots here and there, or a couple turnovers here or there, but it's really the scope of the whole ballgame. What if in the second quarter we didn't give up an offensive rebound or a turnover? That could have made that much more of a difference."

Ross had a sliver of a chance with four seconds remaining in overtime. Trailing 80-75, Ross missed a shot and fouled Jereme Butts after he came down with the rebound.

Yet as he walked to the free throw line, Butts was called for a technical foul, meaning that two Butts misses and two Ross made free throws would have put the Little Giants down three points, with possession of the ball, with four seconds to play.

After missing the first free throw, Butts made the second, rendering Juan Vela's free throws and Ross's two ensuing field goal attempts irrelevant.

"Down the stretch, we had a couple key turnovers, missing both ends of a couple double bonuses," Gedeon said. "If we hit those, or we take that time off the clock, that's definitely to our advantage."

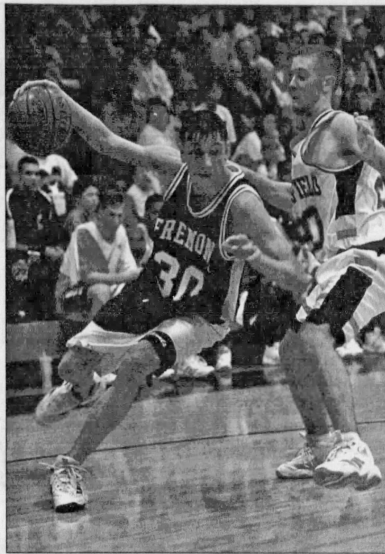
Ross had the advantage early, jumping out to a 10-2 lead on the strength of 3-pointers from Ritzman and Vela. But after a time out, Mansfield stormed back to take a 12-10 lead on a Butts 3-pointer.

"Our kids were really getting up and down the court well, and that gave us some opportunities to score, whether it was a post feed to Tyson or a 3," Gedeon said. "Those were the things we needed to do to win, and unfortunately, that part of our game started disappearing a little bit."

After Rick Minard's 3-pointer at the first quarter buzzer gave Mansfield a 19-18 lead, the Tygers went on a run to extend the lead to 29-25, with Minard hitting a layup to finish it.

With Sykes on the bench in mild foul trouble, Minard powered Mansfield in the first half, scoring 10 of his 16 points.

"Ricky Minard has played very, very well for us," Collins said. "He supplied some offense for us, which was very important for us, but he can also play at the defensive end."



News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

STEVE DAGG, above, drives past Mansfield Senior's Rudy Wolf during the second half of the Tygers' 81-77 overtime in Thursday. Below, Tyson Liggins buries his head in a towel near the end of overtime.



But Ross went on a 10-0 run near the end of the first half, with Steve Dagg scoring four points in the run, and held a 35-30 lead at halftime.

The third quarter was back-and-forth, with Ross leading by as many as six before Mansfield tied the game at 40-40. But Ritzman hit the fifth of his six 3-pointers at the third quarter buzzer to give Ross a 50-44 lead.

In his final high school game, Ritzman scored a team-high 25 points.

"That's outstanding for Robb," said Gedeon.

"We've had the shooting machine out all week in practice, and people like Juan and Robb have been very dedicated to working on their shot, and for Robb it certainly paid off tonight."

"Robb was really outstanding tonight. I really hope there's a college coach out there that saw this game and said, 'Boy, there's the kind of kid with the savvy that we like.'"

Sykes' put his savvy on display early in the fourth quarter, hitting consecutive 3-pointers to bring Mansfield within 52-50. Sykes scored 16 of Mansfield's 26 points in the fourth quarter.

"There's no question he's an outstanding player," Gedeon said. "We tried everything there in the fourth quarter. We played three different zones, we played a diamond-and-one, we played some man-to-man trying to deny him the basketball. But he's the type of player who can put a team on his back and say 'I'm going to carry you,' and Marquis did that tonight."

"That's one heck of a roller coaster right there. You have the opportunity to win, the opportunity to lose, the opportunity to play four more minutes."

— Mark Gedeon
Ross coach, on the last 31 seconds of regulation

Still, Ross led 67-62 after Liggins made two free throws with 2:09 left in regulation. Liggins and Vela finished with nine points for Ross, and Jones added 10 points.

"At the two-minute mark, we were getting ready to foul," said Collins. "But the goal was to get a defensive stop, and limit them to one shot."

Mansfield succeeded, setting up the wild final 31 seconds.

"That's one heck of a roller coaster right there," Gedeon said. "You have the opportunity to win, the opportunity to lose, the opportunity to play four more minutes."

"Those four minutes would be the final four minutes for Heidelberg."

"It hasn't hit me yet, but it'll probably hit me when I see other teams on TV playing for the regional or state titles, it'll probably hit me then," Heidelberg said. "I would have liked to go down state, or win the GLL title, or something, but it's all good though."



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