



Fremont Ross' McKenzie Schneider fights off the Sandusky defense Wednesday during a Division I girls sectional game. JONATHAN BREIDENWAS/MESSAGE

Ross can't get it going

By Kevin Shields
Sports writer

BUCYRIUS—Ross' girls basketball team never got in sync during Wednesday's 45-31 Division I sectional loss to Sandusky.

It started with the Little Giants (4-17) scoring three first-quarter points. And it only got worse when they relied too much on sophomore point guard Abbi Hasselbach for the offense.

Hasselbach tallied a game-high 16 points. No other Ross

SANDUSKY 45
FREMONT ROSS 31
Division I sectional tournament

player had more than four points. Meanwhile, the Blue Streaks (7-14)—cold from the field in the first half—heated up in the second half. Dorresha Green scored nine of her team-high 14 points in the second 16 minutes, helping

Sandusky quickly stretch a 19-12 halftime lead into what, on this night, was an insurmountable double-digit deficit for the Little Giants.

"The girls were tense and we just could never get any kind of flow together," Little Giants coach Juan Vela said. "We were missing a lot of bunny shots and because of that, we couldn't get any confidence going. I think if we would've finished some layups in the beginning, then that would've given us some confi-

dence and we would've started to roll. Green's jumper late in the third quarter brought Ross' deficit to 27-16. Ashele Smith-Crager and Caroline Estel each scored on drives to the basket in the final minute of the quarter as Sandusky entered the fourth quarter up 31-16.

The Blue Streaks lead got to as much as 17 when Green split a pair of foul shots for a 43-26 advantage

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with 3 minutes, 7 seconds to go in the game.

"We've had a long season, I'm just happy for the girls," Sandusky coach Nic Venerucci said. "Going against our arch-rival Fremont, who got us earlier in the season, I was happy we could find a way to win."

Ross got a career-night from junior post Sam Michael, who led the Little Giants with 30 points back on Jan. 31 for 56-54 win over the Blue Streaks at the Purple Pit. On Wednesday, Michael in her first game back from missing three games with an injury, was held to two points. She led Ross with an 11.4 points per game average during the regular season.

"We knew going in that she was beat up and I told Juan (Vela) I wanted to get them with her playing instead of sitting," Venerucci said. "You could tell she was a little bit limited tonight. We did a lot of things to confuse her. We doubled her. We zoned her. We made her shoot over the top instead of giving her easy lay-ups."

Michael had just five shot attempts for the game. She grabbed a team-high nine rebounds and picked up two blocks.

"Sam had an injury, but I thought she played hard," Vela said. "But they did a good job on her."

Ross went just 5-of-17 from the floor in the opening half, including 1-of-9 in the first quarter. Sandusky led 10-3 after one quarter.

"We stressed in our pregame talks that we wanted to prove a point that we didn't give our best effort the first time we played

them," Venerucci said of the start. "That start was a key."

The Blue Streaks went cold in the second quarter, going a period of 4½ minutes without a point. But the Little Giants couldn't take advantage. Michael's only basket of the game brought the score to 10-7, before Bria Simms split a pair of shots at the charity stripe.

Sandusky closed the half on a 9-4 run. Azia Smith-Crager hit two threes and banked in a shot in the lane just prior to the halftime-buzzer. Azia had missed nine straight shots to start the game. She finished with 12 points, six boards and four steals.

"I've told her that every open shot she gets, she has to throw it up there," Venerucci said.

Sandusky was 7-of-22 shooting in the opening half. It finished 17-of-45 (37 percent), Ross went 10-of-35 (28 percent).

Hasselbach scored 14 of her points in the second half. The rest of the team combined for three.

"Tournament time, you need the five girls out there to be playing good and the girls coming off the bench need to play good," Vela said. "Those are the kinds of teams you see down at state."

McKenzie Schneider, one of just three seniors leaving, tallied three steals and two assists for Ross.

The Little Giants ended the year with the exact win total they accumulated in under Vela in his first two seasons.

"We're averaging more points, and in a tough league like ours, we got two league wins," Vela said. "There's a lot of positives we're doing. But it's never enough. I want a lot more than what we're doing."

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