

# Madison slips past Ross 61-60



MARK SHEIDLER (32) and Justin Perry (10) of Fremont Ross show the effects of Brian Hicks' game-winning shot, which gave Mans-

field Madison a 61-60 Division I tournament victory over the Little Giants Tuesday night at Willard High School.

News-Messenger/Andrew Morrison

## Little Giants finish 11-10

By BOB MARKER

Staff writer

WILLARD — Brian Hicks made the most of his only basket of the game.

Hicks' jump shot from 15 feet out with five seconds remaining in the game hit nothing but net Tuesday night, giving Mansfield Madison a 61-60 victory over Fremont Ross in the Division I boys sectional tournament at Willard High School.

Ross, 11-10 after winning eight of its final 11 games, forged back after falling behind 48-33 late in the third quarter. The Little Giants took a 60-59 lead on Mike Patterson's 3-point basket with 31 seconds left to play.

After a timeout 11 seconds later, Madison's time was running out when Rob Whitfield found Hicks all alone to the left of the foul circle for the game-winner.

Madison, 13-8, will play Mansfield Senior for the sectional championship Friday night. The Tygers edged Ashland 60-59 in the other semifinal.

Hicks was the hero, but the role was not intended to be his.

"It (Hicks' shot) was our third option," Madison coach Dennis Bartlett said about his play call in the Rams' huddle during the timeout with 20m seconds remaining. "We wanted to try to get the ball down low to (Don) Blakley and if that was not there, look for (Jamie) Johnson coming off the double screen at the top. But our point guard (Whitfield) did not see either one of those guys open."

At that point, the tight Ross defense victimized itself.

With Whitfield penetrating, Little Giant defenders came up to help out, freeing Hicks. Whitfield dished off, and Ross was out of the tournament.

"Robby is a good penetrator and disher," Bartlett said, "and Hicks was wide open; he just hit

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**MIKE PATTERSON** of Fremont Ross drives to the basket past Mansfield Madison's Rob Whitfield during the fourth quarter of the Rams' 61-60 tournament victory over the Little Giants.

was a difference in the game early." Damian Wise sank two foul shots with 2:14 to play and two "We shouldn't have had any trouble with that press. We could have dribbled through that press

## Ross

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him and he knocked in his 15-footer for us."

Ross coach Frank Gioffre said Ross got caught after doing a good job defensively.

"We did a nice job of helping out," he said, "but then we got caught up on the pick; the kid was wide open and he had a long time to see the basket. He made the shot, so it's a great shot."

Hicks' shot saved the Rams from self-destructing. With Ross fouling in the final two minutes, Madison missed five straight free throws.

"That really hurt us," Bartlett said, "but the kids hung tough and when they threw the three in down at the other end, the kids did not give up and that was important."

Ross was unable to get off another attempt after taking its final timeout.

"We wanted to get the ball into Mikey's hands," Gioffre said about his final seconds strategy to get the ball to Patterson, "but we were unable to do it. It was just one of those things."

Joel Holland scored six points, Jamie Johnson five and three other Rams knocked in two buckets apiece as Madison took a 22-14 first-quarter lead.

Nick Wolf, playing after missing the final two regular season games because of a sprained ankle, tossed in seven points in the second quarter but Ross still trailed 34-26 at halftime.

Ross closed the gap to 34-31 two minutes into the second half on Wolf's 3-pointer and a Patterson jumper, but the Rams outscored Ross 12-2 in the next five

minutes as the Little Giants missed four layups for a 48-33 lead. Madison took a 48-37 advantage into the final quarter.

Ross quickly fell behind 53-40 in the final quarter and trailed 56-45 before going on an eight-point run, trimming the deficit to 56-53 with 3:17 to play. Two baskets each by Justin Perry and Mark Sheidler accounted for the points.

Holland's 3-pointer put the Madison lead at 59-53 before Ross took advantage of the Rams' foul-line famine.

Patterson hit a jumper with 1:30 remaining and Sheidler sank a pair of free throws with 40 seconds to play and Ross trailed 59-57. After Hicks missed a free throw with 39 seconds to play, Patterson canned the long bomb from left of the circle, putting Ross up 60-59 with 31 seconds to play.

Patterson's 16 points led Ross with Wolf adding 15, Sheidler 13 and Damon Walker 10. Johnson had 17, Holland 11 and Blakley 10 for Madison.

"The first half, you could tell we were not ready to play," Gioffre admitted. "It's tough to have a 10-day layoff and expect to come out and not be rusty. We definitely showed it in the first half."

Ross last played Feb. 22 when it defeated Tiffin Columbian 67-45.

"... It is like it has been all year," Gioffre said. "I have been proud of these kids; they have never quit on us. They have overachieved all year and they proved in the second half that they are a great basketball team. Even after a big deficit, they fought back."

But Hicks ended the fight.