

# Rams upend Giants in final

Ritchie heroics sink No. 1 seed

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Sports editor

SHELBY — Carrie Ritchie began Saturday's Division I girls sectional final on the Mansfield Madison bench because she took an ill-timed trip to Las Vegas.

But when the chips were down, Ritchie's number came up for the Rams.

Madison's best player banked in a tiebreaking 10-footer with a minute to play then salted the game with two free throws as the Rams defeated Fremont Ross 37-33 and ended the Little Giants' tournament run before it began.

The Rams (14-8) advance to meet Celina on Thursday in the Division I district at Hopewell-Loudon. Mansfield Senior defeated Tiffin Columbian 60-53 in the other sectional final Saturday and will meet Findlay in the district.

Ross, the sectional's top seed, finishes at 16-5. The Little Giants started the season 13-1 but dropped four of their final seven games.

"If you're talking numbers, most people would say it's a great season," Ross coach Sue Wolf said. "I'm sorry, but I don't think we did everything we were capable of doing. We didn't stay together as a team like we should have."

Madison coach Andy Booth benched Ritchie, a District 6 Coaches Association first-team selection, for Tuesday's sectional opener against Sandusky after she missed three practices because of the family trip to Las Vegas.

The 5-foot-11 senior, who has signed to play volleyball at the University of Michigan, didn't start Saturday and entered the game with 3:39 to play in the first quarter.

As the game wore on, Ritchie took over ballhandling duties against Ross's pressure defense. She ended the game with 10 points, nine rebounds and six assists.

"Without her, I don't think we win this game," Booth said.

Sophomore center Brooke Brafford led Madison with 14 points. She scored six points in the first three minutes of the third quarter as the Rams took control.

Junior point guard Laura Wilson led Ross with 13 points. Sashay Price, one of six seniors who played their final game, added nine.

Ross never led in a game that turned into a defensive war. The Rams committed 25 turnovers. But the Little Giants couldn't capitalize. They hit only 13 of 49 field-goal attempts (26.5 percent).

"This was a low-scoring game," Wolf said. "I don't think either team shot the ball very well. When you force a turnover, you've got

See ROSS, B3

# Ross offense fails in loss to Rams

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to do something with it. We needed to push the ball up the floor a little harder, and we didn't we do that."

Said Booth, "That was probably the best defense we've seen all year. It wasn't so much the press after a bucket; it was the pressure after a rebound, double-teaming, roaming the court. ... I don't know that we actually won the game. We just kind of survived the game."

Madison jumped ahead 8-2, but back-to-back 3-pointers from Kira Wojdyla and Wilson allowed Ross to creep within 12-8 after one quarter.

The Rams led 16-10, but the Little Giants held them score-

less for almost six minutes and tied the game at 16 on a 15-footer from Price. Two Wilson free throws countered a Brafford deuce to tie the game at 18 at the half.

Ritchie fed Brafford, who at 6-foot-1 had her way inside against an undersized Ross front line, for three buckets early in the third as Madison grabbed control again. The Rams led 29-24 late in the quarter before Price swished a trey to get Ross to within two heading to the fourth period.

After Madison took a 33-27 lead, the Little Giants held the Rams scoreless for 5:40 and went on a 6-0 run. Taneshia McKinstry's layup with five minutes to play tied the game at 33.

Neither team scored again until Ritchie banked home what turned out to be the game-winner. Wilson tried to tie the game in the final seconds, but her inside shot was blocked away. Ritchie nailed two free throws with 15.6 seconds remaining to end Ross's hopes.

Madison got its eighth win in nine tries. The Rams began the season 0-4 but won their first game of the season in overtime at Shelby.

That began a comeback that saw Madison upend Mansfield Senior and Lexington, each of which finished 17-3.

"We did say after our (first) game that we get to play two more games here," Booth said. "You jokingly say this is our home away from home."

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— Andy Booth,  
Madison coach

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"Obviously, Fremont has had a great season. We were very wary of them, but I didn't sense that our kids were nervous facing them."

Madison outrebounded Ross 34-22.

Senior Sammantha Schneider led the Little Giants with five boards.