

# Ross leaps Tyger roadblock

## Giants even score, upset No. 3 Mansfield in another OT thriller

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Sports editor

WILLARD — Fremont Ross's Lee Root sauntered down the Willard High School court Friday screaming 'I love this.'

Root, a junior guard who hadn't attempted a shot all game, made sure everyone in the capacity crowd knew he was accepting the pressure of erasing two years of the Little Giants' pent-up frustration.

With 11.4 seconds left in overtime and Ross up 50-49, Root swished both free throws, winking confidently to teammates all the way, to put the Little Giants up by three points.

And, this time, the big one did not get away.

Mansfield guard Aunre Shaw's pressured 3-point attempt at the buzzer bounced high off the back rim as time expired, sending Ross players, coaches and fans spilling onto the court to celebrate a 52-49 victory and a Division I sectional championship.

Root had asked coach Mark Gedeon for the opportunity, even though he remembered how the Little Giants missed seven free throws to blow a 10-point lead in the final 43 seconds on the way to a



LEE ROOT

double-overtime defeat last season. "I walked up to him and said, 'Coach, I'm money.' I knew I was going to make them," Root said. "I've been visualizing it all week. I've been hoping that I'd get that opportunity. It came, and I just knocked them down."

Ross (16-6) upset the third-ranked Tygers (19-2) in the fourth consecutive overtime game between the two teams. Although the Little Giants won the first of those meetings in 1996-97, Mansfield won the past two seasons, scuttling the campaigns of talented Ross teams.

"We got over a big hurdle right there," said Ross senior forward Alfonso Vann, who led all scorers with 15 points. "We can go all the way."

The Little Giants advance to meet Ashland (17-4) at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in a district semifinal at Willard. Second-seeded Ashland survived a scare from Sandusky, 51-49, in the second game Friday.

"Our kids believed they were going to come out on top," Gedeon said. "Not too many people around did. A lot of people were questioning some of the decisions we made around tournament time. Thank goodness, our kids stayed tight. They had a lot of reasons to back down."

Said Mansfield coach Gregg Collins, "It's another game that goes into overtime. I guess people expected that, huh?"

See GIANTS, B3

### Friday's sectional final scores

- Division I**
- Ross 52, Mansfield 49
- Division II**
- Napoleon 57, Oak Harbor 45
- Bellevue 83, Norwalk 43
- Division III**
- Lib.-Benton 62, Woodmore 43
- Eastwood 93, Lakota 37
- Huron 61, Margaretta 52
- Division IV**
- Old Fort 62, St. Joe 52

- Ohio tourneys scores, B2
- Area roundups, B3

# Giants survive, best Mansfield Senior in OT

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Mike Price came off the bench to add 14 points, and Bryan Root poured in 10 points for the Little Giants. Shaw scored 13 points to lead the Tygers. Wayne Merriweather and Lance Hood had 12, and Terrence Davison pitched in with 10.

The Little Giants never trailed in the second half and led by as many as nine points, when senior guard T.J. Hammer nailed a 3-pointer with 2:20 remaining in the third quarter.

But Ross had to survive a scare just to get to overtime. That was no surprise to anyone on the Ross side.

"We've been in too many situations against Mansfield where we had the lead and they were able to come back," Gedeon said. "Both teams compete very hard and have high energy levels."

Merriweather nailed a 3-pointer from the right wing with 54 seconds remaining in regulation to tie the score at 46. Then Hammer tried to push the ball downcourt, but his pass to Vann was too high and sailed out of bounds.

After the Tygers got the ball back, Merriweather stood at midcourt as the clock wound down. Finally, with about five seconds remaining, Davison dribbled into traffic and found Hood, Mansfield's 6-foot-7 senior center, for an open 12-footer on the left baseline.



HAMMER

Hood's line drive rattled out as the buzzer sounded.

In overtime, Ross won the tip, and Price hit a 3-pointer to open the scoring. A Terrence Jones free throw gave the Little Giants a 50-46 lead.

But, after a Hood free throw, Shaw drove for two points with 1:10 to play to get the Tygers to within 50-49.

Mansfield then forced a five-second call in Ross's backcourt with 28.2 seconds, giving the Tygers the chance to take the lead. But Hammer blocked a Shaw shot, and Ross got the ball with 13.4 seconds when Shaw stepped out of bounds trying to save the rebound.

Enter Lee Root. He grabbed the in-bounds pass from Hammer, drew a foul from Mansfield's Dwaine Chapman and started striding toward the free-throw line.

On the way, he was met by Shaw, who tried to put doubt into his mind.

"He was sitting there, trying to talk some jive to me, saying 'You haven't touched the ball all night. You can't make these.' I was like, 'All right. I'm going to make these both,'" Root said.

Said Gedeon of Root, "That's exactly what he's there for. He's one of our best foul shooters. In that situation, you go offense-defense. You want to get the ball in the hands of your best foul shooters. He got the basketball, squared up and knocked them down just the way you would hope."

Ross had to overcome adversity from the beginning of Friday's game. Hammer, the seasoned point guard who missed last year's Mansfield game with an injury, picked up three fouls in the first 2:47 and sat out the rest of the first half.

## Price makes plays for Giants

Lee Root wasn't the only unlikely hero for Fremont Ross during Friday's 52-49 overtime victory over No. 3 Mansfield Senior.

Another junior guard, Mike Price, made several big plays that sent the Little Giants past the Tygers for the first time in three years.

Among them:

- The biggest, according to Price, was his 3-pointer to open the overtime period. It gave Ross a 49-46 lead, one it would never relinquish.

- The play that may have saved the day, though, was Price's tip-in of a Bryan Root miss with 1 minute, 55 seconds to play in regulation. The tip gave the Little Giants a 46-43 lead and staved off a furious Mansfield rally.

- Price's rebound bucket at the first-half horn gave Ross a 23-19 halftime lead and momentum entering the second half. The Little Giants eventually led by nine points in the third quarter.

Price's play surprised the Tygers.

"We knew he was pretty good, but out of so many players they have, he was one we didn't expect to step up like he did," Mansfield coach Gregg Collins said.

Price, who started several of the Little Giants' regular-season games, hasn't started either of Ross's tournament games. But his 14 points were huge on Friday.

"At first, I was a little upset," Price said of not starting. "But I think it made me play harder. I probably will tell coach not to start me."

Said Ross coach Mark Gedeon, "Mike came up huge for us. We went with a larger lineup hopefully to rebound and fill the gaps a little bit better. Mike came up with the offensive rebound putback there at the end of the first half. I thought he had some great dribble pull-ups there in the second half. Then the 3 to start off the overtime period was big."

— Timothy R. Wolfrum

The Tygers held their biggest lead of the game, 14-11, at the end of the first quarter.

"Obviously, they're not the same basketball team without him," Collins said of Hammer. "He's a quality point guard. ... He's such a heady basketball player and handles the show so well. We should have been able to take advantage of the situation when he was out, but we weren't."

The Little Giants hung around, thanks to some cold shooting by Mansfield. The Tygers hit only 2 of 12 shots (16.7 percent) in the second quarter and 8 of 29 (27.6 percent) in the first half.

"We've struggled with that a lot this season," Collins said. "We're not a juggernaut. They play very sound defense, and they don't give you second shots. We really thought the team that got the points in the paint area would win, and I thought they did that."

Said Gedeon, "Our defensive scheme was to try and keep them as far away from the basket as possible. They have great ability to get the ball to the basket. ... There weren't too many times they got to the rim, at least not as many as traditionally they have done. We wanted to force them to take that mid-range jumper as often as possible."