

# Ross girls program looks to the future

Little Giants lose first district game in 13 years to Ashland

By Kevin Shields  
Sports writer

**GALION**—Baby steps. All struggling programs need to take them. And in a 57-28 Division I district semifinal loss Thursday night to Ashland, the Ross girls basketball

squad, a fledgling program for the last decade, took its first steps forward to what coach Juan Vela is hoping will be some brighter seasons ahead.

For the first time in Vela's four years, the Little Giants (6-18) won more than four games. They also found themselves playing in the district tournament for the first time in 13 seasons after upsetting Mansfield Senior on Saturday for their first sectional title since 2000.

"This was a big step for us in building up this program," Vela said. "I'm proud of our kids for what they've done this season to get to this point. Things are definitely looking for the future of Ross girls basketball."

As for the game itself, the Little Giants came to play in the first four minutes. Abbi Hasselbach found Kiera Hall for a lay-up in the paint to tie the game at 2. Later she drove to the hoop for two points of her own, tossing up a one-handed shot before

finding Ariana Spencer on the left side, who proceeded to drive for two more to tie the game at 6 with a little over four minutes left in the opening quarter.

That's as close as it got. The Arrows (13-11) outscored Ross 15-0 the rest of the quarter and tallied 22 of the game's next 26 points. Once Ashland found its game, it played well offensively and defensively, trapping and limiting Hasselbach's touches, while offensively it dominated

the paint.

Junior 5-foot, 11-inch post Alexis Stoops tallied a game-high 14 points, adding nine rebounds. The Arrows out-rebounded the Little Giants 44-31 and forced Ross into 21 turnovers.

"We really got after them on the defensive end," Arrows coach Jason Snow said. "I thought we frustrated their guards a little bit and we took

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advantage inside."

Hasselbach, who had 28 points in Ross' 60-53 victory over Mansfield Senior, was held to seven points Thursday. She also contributed three assists and two steals.

"They did a good job of trapping her and getting her flustered," Vela said of Hasselbach. "Obviously, that took a big part of our offense away. But after the attention she got from that Mansfield game, we knew they'd pay extra attention to her."

Ross trailed 35-14 at halftime.

A give-and-go from McKenzie Colston to Pam Michael for a lay-in cut the Little Giants' deficit to 37-19 with under three minutes to go in the third quarter. Michael tied Hasselbach for the team lead with seven points.

Hall tallied nine boards on the inside.

Ashland's lead never dipped below 20 again, as it continued to get second-chance opportunities and easy points inside. Defensively, the Arrows limited Ross to 5-of-20 shooting in the second half and 11-of-46 for the game.

"(Ashland) had the momen-

tum and everything was going right for them," Vela said. "They outplayed us. I give all the credit to them. They came and played four quarters and they deserved to win."

Vela graduates two seniors — Spencer and Hall — from a team that got a lot of quality minutes in the second half from four freshmen.

"I had two freshmen that played absolutely huge against Mansfield to help us to get to this point," Vela said. "We'll have a lot of kids coming back next season. I'm excited for this program."

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