

# Fast finish puts Ross in semis

By BOB MARKER

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ASHLAND — It started at a slow walk pace but ended on a dead run as Fremont Ross won round one in the Class AAA Boys Sectional Basketball Tournament Thursday at Ashland College.

The Little Giants, 8-13, will take on Galion, 4-16, in the semifinals at 8:30 p.m., Saturday, after methodically disposing of Ashland High School 63-47. It took awhile, an agonizingly long time, before Ross was able to become methodical.

"I cannot believe anyone got to 50 the way the game started," said a relaxed John Sawyer as he gazed over the statistics.

The Ross coach said he was surprised his team played so well after having a weather enforced vacation. The Little Giants' only practice since Sunday was one hour of shooting Wednesday.

The game had originally been scheduled for Monday but the snow storm that struck the mid-west forced a three-day postponement.

The one-hour shooting drill was taken to heart by the Little Giants. Ross was 19 of 38 from the floor and a torrid 25 of 27 from the foul line including the first 16 in a row.

"That's amazing," Sawyer said, "both teams made 42 of 46 free throws."

Only the torrid free throw shooting overshadowed the snail pace start. Five minutes into the game, Ashland held a 4-0 lead.

"For awhile, I thought the first quarter was going to end up 2-0," Sawyer laughed.

Ashland took the opening tip and took 43 seconds off the clock before Scott Shilling's shot from the top of the foul circle put the Arrows up 2-0.

Three straight Ross turnovers and the slow, deliberate play of Ashland melted another five minutes off the clock before Albert McKinney spoiled the 2-0 first quarter dream with a jumper from the left corner.

Greg Bender, who had a game high 22, shook the Little Giants awake with a three-point play at the 1:54 mark of the opening quarter. His bucket with 43 seconds remaining put Ross up 5-4 at the end of the period.

Ashland got its last lead of the game a minute and a half into the second quarter on two free throws by Chuck Ritchey.

Ross sophomore Shawn McCarthy canned two charity tosses 10 seconds later and Jeff Nossaman picked up a loose ball at midcourt and canned a jumper from the foul line for a 9-6 Ross lead.

By halftime, behind Bender's 11 points, Ross had a 23-16 lead. The Arrows came within six, 37-31, early in the final quarter but by that time, the Little Giants began to set their own pace.

Ross made 16 of 18 free throws and five of nine field goal attempts while outscoring the Arrows 26-18 in the final eight minutes.

"I thought we did well defensively," Sawyer said. "One thing about Ashland was they took advantage of every mistake we made defensively. They really hung in there and they are a very good passing team."

"If we had made many mistakes defensively, they would have made us pay for them," Sawyer continued. "We probably played one of our better games in that the whole team played well. Everyone contributed who came off the bench."

The only Little Giant who did not see action was Ryan Smith who is nursing a sprained ankle. The senior guard is doubtful for the Saturday game.

Dave Kovaleski had 10 points to back up Bender. Eight Little Giants scored but only two were in double figures. Nossaman came off the bench to score eight and starter Jim Hufford had seven. Chris Simmons contributed six with Dan Brudzinski and Mark Miesle getting four and McCarthy two.

Ritchey with 15 and Darrell Crall with 14 topped Ashland.



(N-M photo by Bill Kennedy)

JIM HUFFORD of Ross goes high in the air to get off this jump shot during second-half action of the Little

Giants' Class AAA sectional opener against Ashland High School at Ashland College Thursday night.