

Ross drills No. 8 Tygers

Saturday

Ross64
Mansfield Sr.42

Thursday

Ross vs. Defiance, 8:30 p.m., district
semifinal at Hopewell-Loudon

By **MICHAEL MOHR**
Staff writer

SHELBY — Saturday night's girls Division I sectional championship game between Fremont Ross and Mansfield Senior could be looked at on paper in one of two ways.

On one hand, the Tygers were ranked No. 8 in the state, had an 18-2 record coming in, and had the coach's choice for district 6 player of the year, Dionne Goodwin, back in the lineup.

On the other hand, the Little Giants have been playing really well lately, while Mansfield had lost two of its last three games. In addition, Ross only lost to Mansfield by nine points (50-41) the first time the teams met.

As they say, that's why they play the games.

And oh how the Little Giants played the game. Ross started the game with a 10-2 run, finished the first quarter leading 17-4, and never let the Tygers any closer than eight points posting a convincing 64-42 win over Mansfield at Shelby.

The win improved Ross's record to 17-5 overall. The Little Giants advance to the district semifinal where they will take on Defiance in the second game Thursday at Hopewell-Loudon High School.

The Bulldogs, coached by Rod Hersha, are 20-2 after defeating Wapakoneta 77-41 and Bowling Green 60-22, in the sectional tournament.

Ross wing Alison Decker, who had a game-high 19 points and 11 rebounds, said she knew if the Little Giants could get out of the gate quickly, they could win the game.

"We knew we had to shut them down right away," Decker said.

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Ross rolls to sectional final win over No. 8 Mansfield in Shelby

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"If they get ahead, then we knew we would have to play a catch-up game and instead, we got ahead and they had to try to catch up with us. They only had 13 points at the half and that's pretty good playing the No. 8 team in the state, I thought."

Mansfield coach Andrea Thompson attributed the Tygers first half play to nervousness.

"We didn't show up," said Thompson, who's team fell to 18-3.

"I think that we had the jitters, being our first game of the tournament. We had already beaten this team before, but it wasn't that we underestimated them. Our girls didn't come to play, the shooters that

should have shot didn't shoot tonight, out man-to-man wasn't great, and we didn't execute.

"It wasn't that we didn't have the heart or that they didn't want to be there, but we didn't execute Tyger basketball, it's as simple as that."

The Tygers' lack of execution could also be blamed on Ross's full-court pressure and half-court defense, as the Little Giants forced Mansfield into 16 first half turnovers.

"Their pressure affected us," Thompson said. "We needed to adjust, we wanted people to go to the middle, but it seemed like the communication thing wasn't there tonight. It's like Murphy's Law, what could possibly go wrong, went wrong. We played the best we could, but tonight, our best wasn't good enough."

Ross Coach Sue Wolf said, "I think we played pretty good defense tonight. I told them they had to stay in front of their player and not have to have somebody else come over and take their player,

which leaves another player open. I told them 'Keep them in front of you because I know how much they want to penetrate to the basket.' We worked on finding your player, getting a body on them, and then going to get the ball. Usually we go to the rim before the ball even hits and we don't make contact."

Ross guard Sashay Price played a big role in the first half on both offense and defense, as she scored seven of her 16 points and forced several Tyger turnovers with good ball pressure.

"I thought Sashay did a nice job of getting to the ball tonight," Wolf said. "That's what her job is, to get the ball. I'm counting on her to get to the ball and she did it."

With the score at 33-13 early in the third quarter, the Tygers broke out on a 10-2 run of their own to cut the score to 35-23, but Ross, without calling a timeout, got a layup from Laura Wilson, a Decker jumper, and three free throws to stretch the lead back to 17.

"They are a young team," Wolf said. "We're a young team, but they are a young team also. We kept our act together, they tried hard, they made some runs at us, but we kept it together. We started to give a few points up, but then somebody would step up and say no, we're not going to let that happen."

You could see it on the faces of the Ross players when they came out of the locker room to start the game.

"We knew what we had to come out with to win," Price said. "And that's what we did. We came out with the attitude that they may be ranked No. 8, but we had something to prove, and I think we did that."

The attitude Ross conveyed on the court and after the game was that Mansfield may have gotten

them the first time, but they learned from it and they were ready to play them this time.

"We played them earlier this season," Wilson said. "We knew we could beat them. If we could just take charge in the beginning, then we knew we could beat them."

Jumping out to the huge lead was even a shock to the Ross players.

"I was really surprised," Decker said. "I thought it was going to be a really close game through the whole game, but we just got out on a good run. We we're playing against guys this whole week, and they were pushing so hard, and tonight we just came out and it was just like a completely different ballgame. Everyone played to the best they could tonight and it really showed."

It did show, as the Little Giants used a balance scoring attack — with four of Ross's six scorers in double figures — and made some key free throws when they needed them, to score 20 points in the fourth quarter, and ice the win.

"I'll tell you what," Wolf said, "We worked hard all week, we had some guys come in to play against us, and they did a great job of making the kids work harder and they knew they were prepared for the game. We went through everything, I told them before the game started 'You know exactly what you have to do, we've worked on it, if you go out and you try your hardest and we get beat, then there's nothing we can be ashamed of, because you know you were ready to play this game.'"

For Ross, Price had 16 to go with Decker's 10, Sam Schneider had 12, and Wilson scored 11. Schneider also pulled down seven boards and Wilson six.

Tyanda Hammock led the Tygers with 14 points and seven rebounds. Goodwin's minutes were limited due to the knee injury she suffered early in the year, but she did make the most of her time on the floor, scoring seven points and pulling down eight rebounds.



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