

1969 Ross football victory helped keep schools open

November 6, 2018

Sunday was the 49th anniversary of what undoubtedly was the most momentous election in the history of Fremont City Schools.

The election victory that helped prevent a temporary closing of the schools was the result of the efforts of an army of volunteers, community concern about the possible closing, and some would argue at least partially a victory by the Ross High School Little Giants on the football field in Sandusky.

It was 1969 and voters had rejected the combined 9.6-mill levy twice earlier in the year. The earlier defeats of the levy, which included a 4.5-mill renewal of operating taxes and 5.1-mill levy providing new funds, had led to school officials being forced to schedule the closing of schools from Nov. 14 to Jan. 2 when funds would be available for the new year.

On Nov. 4, the huge combined levy was approved by an amazing margin of 7,160 to 3,947.

The great margin was the result of extreme efforts by volunteers and school officials and many — seriously or not — also credited the Little Giant footballers for changing the community atmosphere with a stunning 28-27 upset of the state-ranked Blue Streaks, all but ending the Sanduskians' hopes for a championship in the rugged Buckeye Conference.

The Blue Streaks, led by All-Ohioan Elmer Lippert, who ran for 204 yards in the game, were heavy favorites and had been dominating Ross in recent years.

Sophomore running back Tom Liggins and senior fullback Robin Young combined for more than 200 yards for Ross and produced the game-winning touchdown/extra points total with 42 seconds remaining in the game. Liggins scored on a pass from quarterback Jim Werling and Young barreled into the end zone for the two extra points that provided the margin of victory. (It was a victory only after Sandusky missed a final-seconds field goal attempt.) The victory could be seen as opening the door to a new era in Ross football as well as whatever role it played in that dramatic victory at the polls. The years that followed were memorable ones for the Little Giants.

It must be pointed out

that while that levy success was crucial for the local schools, it did not immediately eliminate the problem of the planned closing of the schools.

Because the new money would not normally be available until after the first of the year, the schools were expected to be closed as planned. That problem was solved by a second response by the community. Spearheaded by Robert F. Wolfe,

industrialist and radio station owner, the community made more than \$600,000 in advance tax payments and kept the school doors opened.

It was important for the education process and the image of the schools.

Roy Wilhelm started a 40-year career at The News-Messenger in 1965 as a reporter. Now retired, he writes a column for both The News-Messenger and News Herald.



Fremont Ross running back Tom Liggins caught a key touchdown pass in the Little Giants' 28-27 victory over Sandusky in 1969. FILE