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Little Giants disappointed with nightmarish ending

BY JEFF ARENZ
Sports writer

MANSFIELD -- Fremont Ross baseball coach Mark King wanted his players to remember how they felt after a 10-1 loss to Ashland on Monday in a Division I sectional semifinal game at Mansfield Madison Comprehensive High School.

"That's what we talked about," King said. "I want them to take in how they feel ... how disappointed they are right now. They can use this as a learning experience and be able to grow from it."

Even though seniors Brad Woleslagel, Josh Mendoza, Stephen Stout and Jay Cominsky played their last playoff game in a Ross uniform, King is looking for his younger players to build a fire of desire heading into the 2010 season.

For four innings Monday, the Little Giants (8-12) and Arrows (10-15) were extremely even. The contest was tied at 1, Ross had a 3-2 edge in hits, both teams were playing solid defense and both starting pitchers had thrown 66 pitches.

However, the final three innings were a nightmare for the Little Giants, who committed six of their seven errors during the fifth, sixth and seventh frames. Ashland erupted for nine runs, five of which were unearned.

Josh Gangi hit an RBI double in the top of the fourth to send home pinch-runner Derrick Yetzer, who handed the Arrows a 1-0 lead. Yetzer replaced Derek Ward, who led off the frame with a single, on the basepaths before stealing second base.

But, in the bottom of the fourth, Ross answered quickly. With one out, Derek Aldrich sent a double into right field before Jake Hiestand delivered an RBI single to center field after Tyler Hasselbach had been retired on strikes.

Hiestand's hit was the third for the Little Giants, who were shutout in runs and hits the rest of the way by Ashland pitcher Evan Dix.

"You know how it is in baseball ... a pitcher can have a shaky first inning and, if he gets out of it, he'll get stronger as the game goes on," Eichhorn said. "I think that was the case with Evan."

In the bottom of the first, Dix walked the bases loaded with two outs. But he was bailed out of trouble when Aldrich sent a screaming liner into foul territory, where right fielder Adam Schaly ranged more than 10 steps to make a diving grab.

Eichhorn said Dix had walked only four hitters during his first 39 innings before Monday. Dix finished with a complete game victory, allowing one run on three hits with three walks and seven strikeouts.

Ross pitcher Dexter Foos avoided first-inning damage with Arrows at first and second when he got Ward to ground into a 4-6-3 double play. Then, with Ashland leading 1-0 and the bases loaded in the fourth, Steve McDaniel lined the ball back to Foos, who threw to third baseman Mendoza to complete

another inning-ending double play.

During the final three innings, when the Arrows put a runner aboard, Ashland executed fifth- and sixth-inning bunts that moved runners along, including a suicide squeeze by No. 5-hitter Logan Adams who made it 3-1.

"We got a little more patient at the plate and were able to execute things bunt-wise," Eichhorn said. "We got some hits ... and that has been a problem for us this season. It's good to see because this is the time of year to do it."

The floodgates opened on Ross's infield defense, which committed two errors in each of the last three innings.

"We got what we wanted in the situation that we were in ... a ground ball," King said. "It just happened to go under the leg of our defender. We got a little fly ball that was hit into shallow left-center field that our defender didn't get in on to make the play. When you are playing a team in the tournament and you have a chance to make a play, you need to make it."

Brandon Nalley added an RBI triple in the sixth and an RBI single in the seventh for Ashland, which received an RBI double from Schaly in the seventh.

Foos lasted 5 1/3 innings before King brought in reliever Cory Rohrbacher. Foos allowed six runs (three earned runs) on five hits with one strikeout and six walks.

The Arrows advanced to play Sandusky in an upper bracket Division I sectional championship game at 5 p.m. Thursday in Mansfield.

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