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Ross D comes up big against Spartans

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FREMONT -- While the Fremont Ross offense stalled, the Little Giants' defense rose to the occasion.

Linebacker J.J. Moreno had an interception that set up a Ross touchdown and defensive tackle Rob Heberling fell on a fumble in the end zone for another Little Giants TD.

Their efforts led to a 24-7 Fremont Ross victory against Toledo Start in a season-opening non-conference game Friday at Don Paul Stadium.

"Defense is our philosophy," Ross coach Derek Kidwell said. "We're not going to allow an offense to dictate what we do. We have to line up by formations, but we're going to be aggressive. We're not going to let a quarterback sit back in the pocket and survey the field, because we're going bring people off the edge at him."

The Ross defense forced Start to punt nine times and sacked Spartans quarterbacks Aaron Newman and Rob Giles six times.

With the game tied at 7, Moreno stepped in front of a Newman pass inside the Start 35-yard line with 1:57 left before halftime. Five plays later, Victor Layton's 25-yard field goal gave Ross a 10-7 at intermission.

With the Little Giants (1-0) leading 10-7 at halftime, Start (0-1) ran three third-quarter plays before punting. On its ensuing drive, the Ross offense was stopped near midfield, where Mike Showman's 39-yard punt and the Spartans' penalty for an illegal block during the return placed Start at its own 10-yard line.

In the span of eight seconds, Ross increased its lead to 17-7. Linebacker Rueben Saldivar came off the right edge to sack Newman, who fumbled the ball on first down. Heberling, who saw the ball hit the turf after it bounced off his knee, came out of a pile of Little Giants with the ball after it had rolled into the end zone.

"I had a call to fire on a blitz," Saldivar said. "I know (Start's Deonte) Rozier is a good running back, but he was a little tired and I was able to get around him. Then, I saw (Newman's) back to me. I blindsided him and knocked the ball out."

Ross defenders raced to the end zone.

"We just all fell on it and I came out of the pile with the ball in my hands," Heberling said. "I grabbed it and took off running."

James Aaron Spencer helped Ross seal the victory in the fourth quarter with a 35-yard touchdown run with 4:52 left. He finished the game with 21 carries and 150 yards.

Spencer ignited the Little Giants' ground game, which outrushed the Spartans 197-26.

But Start drew first blood.

Devon Price handed the Spartans a 7-0 lead at the 6:11 mark of the first quarter, catching a 37-yard touchdown pass from Newman after Little Giants' cornerback Greg Brown nearly had a two-handed interception that slipped out of his hands and into the hands of Price.

Newman was 9-of-21 for 126 yards, while Giles added a 3-of-5 effort for 33 yards.

After being intercepted two times in his first three passing attempts and three times in the game, Cody Foos completed 6-of-14 passes for 57 yards and a touchdown.

"I think, when Cody was hit on the first play of the game, that was a pretty hard hit," Kidwell said. "I don't know if he gathered his bearings after that play. He was having trouble breathing and he said he was seeing dots."

As Ross trailed 7-0 with 2:15 left before halftime, Mikel Stanley caught a 24-yard TD strike from Foos as the Little Giants tied the score. Foos had a 43 percent completion rate after missing his first four passing attempts.

Hank Oswald intercepted a Foos pass and recovered a fumble by Spencer. Price and Rodney Ross also made interceptions for Start.



Fremont Ross' Greg Brown breaks the tackle of Toledo Start's Marcus McGowen. (Doug Hise | News-Messenger)