

Fighting back: Senior plays through pain

Ben Gordon, suffering back problems since summer, pulls off double-double

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With the pain he has been through, Franklin senior Ben Gordon refused to let a hard fall take him out of the boys basketball sectional final game Saturday against Center Grove.

Gordon was driving to the basket with 1:37 remaining in the game with Franklin leading 59-55. Trojans senior James Nussbaum fouled Gordon, which caused his legs to give out from under him, resulting in a fall on his back.

Grizzly Cubs coach Dave Clark thought Gordon would be done for the game, especially since Gordon had an existing back injury from the summer that had flared up during the past two weeks.

Gordon said he could feel the back spasms immediately. Sitting out the rest of the game would have seemed normal to anyone, except Gordon, who had other plans.

"I figured he was done for the night at least, and I hoped it wasn't going to be any worse than that," Clark said. "He said, 'Hey coach, I'm ready to go. I want back in there.' I think that just shows the toughness of him. He kind of sucked it up during a sectional championship game."

After staying out for 45 seconds, Gordon came back in with 52 seconds left in the game.

"I can't miss that," Gordon said. "It's my senior year."

He recorded a late rebound and two free throws to help give Franklin the 66-60 win and its first sectional championship since 1999.

"It's awesome," Gordon said. "Ever since middle school, when the big games come around, we play tough, but never win. It's awesome to pull out a sectional championship in my senior year."

Gordon finished the game with 11 points and 10 rebounds.

"(Gordon) is the toughest kid I



Franklin senior Ben Gordon had a double-double in Saturday's sectional championship victory against Center Grove.



CLARK

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Ben Gordon
Senior on Franklin Community High School boys basketball team

know," Franklin junior Adrian Moss said.

Maybe that's because Gordon played through pain during all three sectional games.

Gordon fractured a vertebra in his back last year. The injury hasn't healed and can cause muscle spasms. The injury likely is permanent.

"I've been having so much trouble," Gordon said. "They can't do anything surgically to help it. I just have to fight through in the long run."

He takes ibuprofen for the spasms, and stretches help limit the flare-ups. He ices his back after every practice and when he gets home. He also uses electrical shock treatment for the pain, but that also leaves him sore.

Gordon had a bad flare-up after Franklin's senior night win against Martinsville on Feb. 18.

"I went up into the bleachers, and hit (my back) pretty hard on the bleachers," Gordon said. "Ever since then, it has been acting up real bad."

The pain got worse last week. After a win against Jennings County on Feb. 24, he missed the next two practices.

He was limited during practice Feb. 28, one day before Franklin's sectional opener against Decatur Central.

His practice time was limited again before Franklin's sectional semifinal game against Franklin Central on Friday. But foul trouble gave Gordon some time to rest on the bench.

Clark appreciates the measures Gordon has taken to contribute to the Cubs' success despite his physical pain.

"Sometimes you have to take a tough pill sometimes to get through it," Clark said. "Gordon's whole mentality has been that way. He is pretty hard-nosed."



Franklin's Adrian Moss steals the ball from Center Grove's Corey Gray during the Cubs' 66-60 sectional championship victory on Saturday at Southport.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SCOTT ROBERSON/sroberson@thejournalnet.com

• Cubs

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Franklin senior Cody Long had 15 points, and senior Todd Price led Center Grove with 15 points.

To win their first sectional title since 1999, the Grizzly Cubs (14-10) had to beat Decatur Central, Franklin Central and Center Grove, all teams that beat them during the regular season. Also, seven of their season losses were by five points or fewer, including three overtime defeats.

"We had a little extra motivation there," Clark said. "The tough losses that we took I thought really made us a little bit tougher down the stretch."

In the county title game, Franklin gave up a late five-point lead with poor offensive decisions.

Moss ensured that Franklin would not repeat another fourth-quarter collapse.

Center Grove (13-9) had the ball, trailing 61-57 before Moss stole the ball. He hit three of Franklin's five free throws in the final 39 seconds of the game.

Franklin shot 29 of 33 from the free-throw line with Moss hitting 15 of 17 free throws, which was especially impressive considering he has been struggling from the line all year.

"I shot 100 free throws before the sectional game Friday against Franklin Central before



we came over (to Southport)," Moss said. "I'm just glad I could knock them down for my team when it counted."

The Trojans also knocked down their shots, hitting 8 of 12 from the free-throw line and 24 of 59 from the field. They even made nine more field goals than Franklin.

But the Trojans fouled too much, giving the Cubs too many chances from the free-throw line, Center Grove coach Cliff Hawkins said.

"That is tough to counteract," Hawkins said.

"Franklin deserves it. (Moss) is a great player. I love their team.

They are very, very deserving."

Hawkins, in his second season with Center Grove, has made progress in the program's success. The most recent Center Grove boys basketball sectional championship was in 1994.

This season, the Trojans had their first winning record since 2002. They won the county tourney, improved on last year's 7-14 record and were competitive in the Metropolitan Interscholastic Conference.

But Hawkins still has his sights set on the future. He loses four seniors but returns scoring threats



Above: Franklin's Chris Hawkins scores over the defense of Center Grove's Tyler Kitchel. Left: Franklin's Cody Long yells to the crowd after cutting down a piece of the net following the Cubs' sectional championship victory Saturday.

in sophomore Corey Gray, who had 14 points, and junior Tyler Kitchel, who scored 13 points.

"All of us are best measured in how we respond to adversity," Hawkins said. "I think our players will see an even greater commitment to change history here."

Clark applauded Hawkins' efforts this season.

"Both teams played their hearts out," Clark said. "Hawkins has done a great job with Center Grove. Our kids were motivated. It's tough to play somebody three times, especially when both games came down to the end."

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