



Smith, Watson lead Carrollton to signature 65-60 win over West Central

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - Before the game on Friday night against West Central, the Carrollton Hawks basketball season has looked pretty good on paper.

Their record was 18-5 and undefeated in conference play, but lacked a signature win all season long.

An opportunity was given to topple the solid West Central Cougars and topple them they did with 65-60 win in Carrollton on Friday.

“We talked about how we have no signature win.” Luke Gillingham said. “They’re (West Central) a great team and undefeated in conference for a reason.”

Carrollton improves to 19-5 and 7-0 in the WIVC.

“It was a great ballgame by two undefeated, WIVC teams and two teams fighting for high seeds in the sub-sectionals,” **Carrollton head coach Jeff Krumwiede** said.



For the second consecutive game **Jerrett Smith** was the top scorer and tallied 20 points for the Hawks.

“It comes down to the team coming together,” Smith said. “We’ve been working hard all year and we’re finally clicking.”

Tyler Watson finished with 19 points and converted on a couple of crucial buckets down the stretch.

Cole Brannan added 15 and **Gillingham** finished off the Carrollton scoring total with 11 points.

“It was a great feeling,” Luke Gillingham said. “It was a packed house and a great atmosphere.”

“It’s not the greatest thing that we only had four people score, but I’ll take it,” Krumwiede said.

Colin Slagle led the Cougars with 18 points and **Kobie Hoover** followed up with 16.

“Slagle is a beast,” Krumwiede said. “I thought their other guys stepped up and made some big buckets when we tried to take Slagle away.”

West Central fell to 17-9 and 8-1 in the WIVC.

West Central hosts Payson Seymour Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.

For the majority of the game it was tight and close, however the first six minutes and 45 seconds was all West Central as they led 17-4.

Slagle, Hoover, and Jacob Hurrelbrink crashed the boards and got easy buckets while Carrollton couldn’t by a bucket.

“We all know we’ve been struggling offensively,” Krumwiede said. “We started off 3-13 and we ended up shooting over 50 (percent) the rest of the game.”

The Hawks ended the first quarter on a 6-0 run with a buzzer beater from Brannan and would stretch that run to nine into the second frame, which got the Hawks back up to their feet mentally.

“I’m very excited for the most part about the 17-4 deficit and being able to come back,” Krumwiede said. “We scored the last six of the quarter and thought that was tremendous motivation for us to say we can do this.”

During that critical stretch the Hawks defense made adjustments and got in front of Slagle when ever he penetrated to the basket.

“We had to double up to stop him because he’s their main man,” Tyler Frye said.

The six-foot, four-inch forward scored the first four point of the game, but made only two more field goals the rest of the half.

The Hawks scoring run reached its peak at 19-4 when they tied the game up for the first time at 23 all late in the first half.

Though for most of the game, West Central answered the Hawks threats with a basket and led 30-28 at halftime.

The third quarter was like a classic battle between two boxers.

Slagle missed two straight free throws at the free throw, but got the rebound and scored.

Moments later Jerrett Smith scored inside, which he's making a living out of now.

Later, Hoover nailed a triple to give the Cougars a four-point lead, but Gillingham swiftly replied with a three of his own to cut the West Central lead to one.

While the Cougars held such a stiff resistance on their lead, the Hawks kept a firm grip on them by never letting the deficit get out of reach.

With less than two minutes to play in the quarter, Brannan scored on a layup, while being fouled and made the free throw to give the Hawks their first lead of the game, a lead that they wouldn't give up.

Immediately after, Gillingham ignited the Hawks surge when he picked Slagle's pocket off of a double team.

"Coach told us to double off on people," Gillingham said. "Slagle spun off, I stole it, and I laid it in. It got us jump started."

The fourth quarter started out with the roles being reversed from the majority of the game.

West Central threatened to take the lead back, but Carrollton never wavered.

Near the midway point of the fourth quarter, the Hawks burst out to a 59-50 lead on an 8-0 run with 4:54 left in the game.

"That was a great minute in the game," Krumwiede said. "Not only did we make two or three shots but we forced a couple of turnovers too. The kids executed really well there."

Coach Jeff Abel calle



d a timeout for the Cougars, which seemed to calm them down.

Two and a half minutes later, West Central was within a point of the Hawks on an 8-0 run of their own.

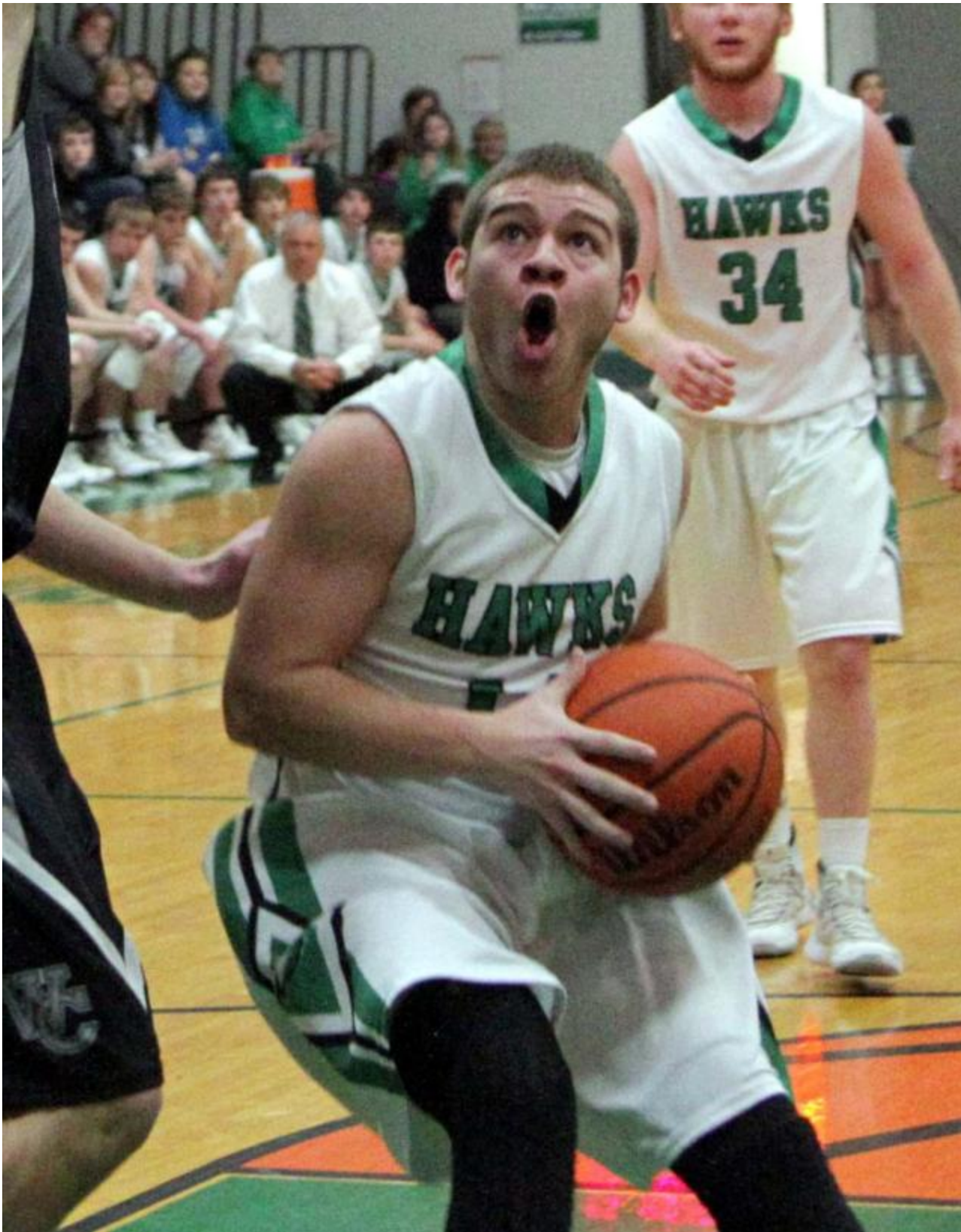
During that span the Hawks possessions were as they opted to shoot quick shots if the players were open.

“We took a couple of bad shots and part of it was we were feeling so good about ourselves,” Krumwiede said. “Everybody thought they could hit a shot, but that’s because shooting is contagious and unfortunately we were thinking with our heart for a little bit instead of our brain.”

With less than two minutes to play **Jeremy Watson** was left alone and buried a three-pointer, which is perhaps one of the biggest shots of the season for the Hawks given the circumstances that go with it.

The Cougars cut it to 62-60, but Watson came up big again with a layup to get the lead back up to four with under a minute to go.

On the ensuing West Central possession, Gillingham drew a charge that gave Carrollton the ball and used it to melt the clock.



West Central a couple of chances to get the lead down to one possession but failed to do so in the dying seconds.

This was another memorable game between the Hawks and the Cougars.

“I have a lot of respect for a lot of respect for the West Central program,” Krumwiede said. “They do things the right way and it’s a pleasure to compete against them.”

A win for the Hawks was not only important for the WIVC race, but in terms of down the road meetings.

Carrollton hosts Class 3A Jerseyville this Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.

Later that week the Hawks travel to Calhoun on Friday, then host Brown County on Monday, and finish up with Illinois School for the Deaf on Feb. 19.

“We needed this to get off on the right foot with these next four games,” Krumwiede said. “If we can get through here and get a couple more we’re going to have some more signature wins.”



[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)