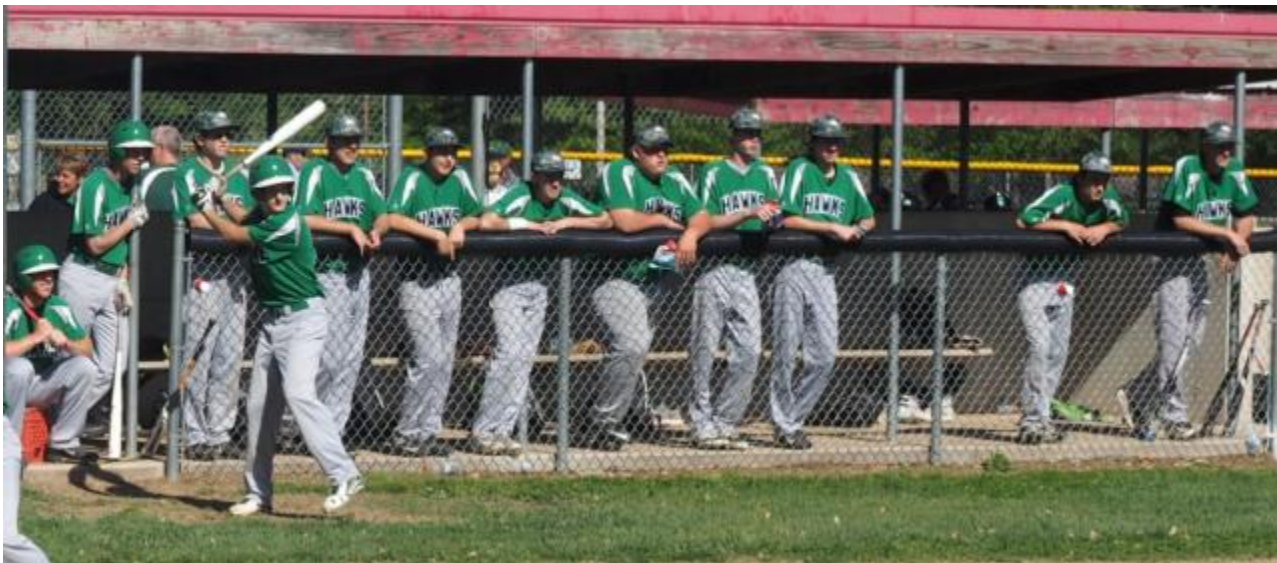


Carrollton's baseball team has storybook season so far

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - It isn't easy to do what the **Carrollton Hawks** has accomplished in the 2016 baseball season.

The Hawks are 24-4 and have clinched a share of the WIVC South title.

More importantly they've earned the No. 1 seed in the IHSA Class 1A Carlinville B Sub-Sectional.

Carrollton is undefeated against 1A competition and their only losses have come to Class 2A schools Athens, Beardstown, Illini West, and perennial powerhouse, Pleasant Plains.

Key wins include Carlinville, Pittsfield, Calhoun, Triopia, and Auburn.

“It’s like I’ve said all year long, these kids just work hard,” **Head coach Greg Pohlman** said. “They’re a group that comes to practice and they work. It’s paid off.”

The offense has tallied a total of 269 runs and has been potent since their first game of the season, an 11-1 win over Triopia.

In fact, for the first 11 games Carrollton failed to score in double digits once.

“I’m loving it,” Blake Struble said. “Feeling good, having a great year. Everyone is so competitive and is working hard.”

Ten batters with over 25 at bats are hitting over .300 for the season.

Cole Brannan leads the team with a .425. average, with four home runs, and 38 RBI’s.

Midway through the season his average peaked at .600.

He has improved upon his junior season when he batted .247.

“We come to practice, get the work done and get out of there, and we’re focused,” Brannan said, “That’s a good thing to have.”

Sophomores **Alex Bowker** (.384), **Kolten Bottom** (.361), **Kyle Watters** (.364), and **Hayden Stringer** (.352) have enjoyed big seasons at the plate.

“Last year I could see the ball as a freshman and it gets better as you get older,” Bowker said.

The same thing can be said for all the others as they all have improved from a season ago.

“It’s been a ride,” Watters said. “I don’t want it to end. I want to go far this year.”

Nathan Walker and **Gabe Jones** are turning into freshman phenoms at the rate they’re going at.

Walker has been a consistent threat all season long batting .337 with two home runs, 32 hits, and 32 RBI’s.

Additionally he’s scored 39 runs and has struck out just nine times in 105 plate appearances.

Jones started out slow, but has been on a tear as of late.

His average was as low as .111 but it's soared to .340 as the season has gone on.

Tyler Watson and Jacob Lovel have hit the ball well too.

Watson is batting .325 with 25 hits, 23 RBI's, 33 runs scored.

Lovel has a .362 average with 17 hits and 17 RBI's.

On the mound the Hawks are just as lethal with plenty of pitching depth and youthful.

"We're eight and nine deep and we're young," Pohlman said. "Cole and Ben (Dewitt) are seniors and everybody else is freshman and sophomores."

Brannan, their ace has established himself as one of the best pitchers in the area.

The senior is 7-1 with a 1.20 ERA and has logged 52.2 innings with 93 strikeouts.

"It's good to stay confident and hopefully we'll keep this going," Brannan said.

Brannan has thrown three no-hitters so far this season, including a perfect game.

Blake Struble has a record of 5-1 with a 1.54 ERA and has three saves.

The southpaw sophomore has given up eight earned runs in 36.1 innings pitched.

Another super sophomore, Kolten Bottom has had a season where you could argue a place for him to be one of the best pitchers in the area.

His record is 6-1 with a rock solid ERA of 0.66 and has a strikeout-to-walk ratio of 49 to 6.

Jones hasn't featured as much as the latter, but has six appearances and garners a 4-1 record with a 3.56 ERA.

As a team, Carrollton has given up 64 runs and their team ERA is 1.68.

"They love the game and that makes it easy as a coach," Pohlman said.

Carrollton is currently on a 10-game winning streak after beating East-Alton Wood River, 12-6 on Thursday and taking two in a double-header on Saturday.

“We’re just taking them one game at a time because if you look ahead then you’re in trouble,” Pohlman said.

Looking ahead, for noteworthy purposes, this upcoming week Carrollton will finish out the season with a game every day starting with a makeup game with Calhoun on Monday.

The IHSA Class 1A playoff schedule is confirmed and Carrollton will take on the winner of Lincolnwood vs Morrisonville on May 18. at (Raymond) Lincolnwood High School at 4:00 P.M. in the regional semifinals.

