

Hawks appear locked and loaded with talent, weapons for 2016 football season

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - Tradition never graduates and is alive and well in the confines of **Carrollton High School**.

It may be surprising to see how surprised many people were on how the Carrollton Hawks ended up in the IHSA Class 1A quarterfinals yet again. The Hawks graduated 15 players from their best ever team and returning just two starters didn't phase them one bit. The Hawks went 10-2, their third year out of four to win over 10 games, and made another deep postseason run.

This season the Hawks are expecting more.

“Our quantity is a little bit lower, but I feel like our quality is there,” **Carrollton coach Nick Flowers** said. “We really have a good core of kids.”

Going into last season with somewhat cold feet, 12 games and one off-season later, the Hawks have made big steps in the trenches. Virtually the the whole offensive and defensive lines return with two seniors, and three juniors.

“We are bringing a veteran type group back,” Flowers said. “I know it’s an old cliché saying, but it all starts up in the trenches. It’s like building a house on a decent foundation. I think when it comes to football teams when you can build your team football team around some guys up front you have a good start.”

Matthew Campbell, Logan Shaw, Cameron Blair, Emmett Harrelson, and Nathan Leonard will be the horses in the trenches.

With a solid offensive line setup, it allows Carrollton’s athletes to worry little of what they have to do, particularly quarterback, **Wade Prough**, who threw for 1,972 yards and 25 touchdowns in the 2015 season.

“He brings back playoff and conference championship experience,” Flowers said. “We definitely have high expectations for him and he’s got some good receivers to throw to.”

Carrollton’s spread offense is poised for another explosive year as the Hawks return almost their entire wide receiver core players.

The wide receivers will be Jayce Arnett in the slot, Alex Bowker, Jeremy Watson, and Brendon Settles. Tight end, Jacob Stendebeck at six-foot, four inches is another option.

Bowker was the most active out of the lot that’s coming back with 204 receiving yards and four touchdowns, but it’s his athleticism that is agitative.

“Very versatile. He’s one of those very experienced receivers and a put together kid,” Flowers said.

For Carrollton, it’s a good site that Arnett is back because his season was cut short with a knee injury in week three last season. At the time he was the Hawks leading receiver.

At running back there’s Jerrett Smith, a veteran three-year starter on offense. Coming off a tough summer with a handful of injuries, he’s all ready to go. Smith rushed for 649 yards and nine touchdowns on 124 carries last season. He will have company in the backfield with rising sophomore, Byron Holmes.

“We’re going to try to share the wealth between two or three guys, which is going to be hard to cover,” Flowers said. “We can run and throw the ball with a screen game, but our good defenses we’re going to face will do a good job scheming up against us, but we’ll give them trouble in a lot of ways.”

Flowers wants the Hawks to especially improve on their tackling as a whole on defense.

“We’re going to have to step up our run-stopping game and we do have some good size up front,” Flowers said. “We were disappointed with our overall tackling last year to start the season off. That’s our No. 1 defensive goal is to be a better tackling team.”

The majority of the defensive line returns and a handful of younger players will be rotated in as well. The linebackers will consist of Smith, Bowker, and Holmes, a newer group of players that will bring plenty of athleticism. Like the line, Carrollton brings back most of their secondary, with the addition of Prough and another sophomore, Nathan Walker to rotate in and out.

If the Hawks wanted a strong, acid early season test then they got it with Brown County and Mendon (Unity) in weeks one and two.

“We’re going to set the tone with Brown County and Mendon without a doubt,” Flowers said.

The Hawks lost to Brown County 26-14 and edged Unity, 28-21 on a last second touchdown to start off last season. Brown County went on to win the WIVC North and Unity made it to the second round of the IHSA Class 2A playoff, and graduated just four seniors.

Carrollton will surely know a lot about themselves heading into week three, but Flowers and the Hawks know that they can control their own destiny.

“Expectations are still very high and if we can keep everybody healthy things are going to be great,” Flowers said.



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