

Upcoming Carrollton junior Kolten Bottom shoots for stars after All-State baseball pick

by John Hough, Sports Writer
August 10 2016 4:32 PM



CARROLLTON - Baseball isn't necessarily the main sport of focus in Illinois, especially with football coming up in a matter of weeks.

However, in Carrollton, baseball is slowly but surely the sport that the community will be salivating over for the next couple of years.

One of the players that will most likely be heard from is **pitching ace, Kolten Bottom**.

If you don't believe it then he has the stats and rewards to prove it.

In the 2016 season, Bottom accumulated a 10-1 record with a microscopic 0.88 ERA. He also struck out 90 batters walked only 12 through the course of the season.

His performance ultimately led to an **IHSA Class 1A All-State team** selection and was one of two sophomores to be selected.

"It was a big honor," Kolten Bottom said.

"Going into high school that was one of my things, one year get All-State. I wasn't expecting it to be my sophomore year, but I'll take it."

As a special treat for being named all-state, Bottom and the rest of the members got to be honored and walk onto to the of **U.S. Cellular Field**, the home of the **Chicago White Sox**.

"It was pretty cool. I got to go out onto the field and it was unreal being there with some of the best players in Illinois. Just the experience is amazing."

Getting the privilege to step onto a Major League Baseball field by becoming an All-Stater started all from Bottom's mentality of setting the bar high.

He believes that setting himself high goals will only make himself more competitive by wanting it more.

"It was unreal getting it done in the first two years of high school and it was really great to get it off my back. You want to set your goals high so you can get there. If you set your goals low you're not going to play as good I think. Just look higher."

An inspiration for Bottom and other Carrollton Hawk baseball players is the rise of **Sammy Coonrod**.

Coonrod helped lead Carrollton to their only state championship, played for SIU-Carbondale, and was drafted by the San Francisco Giants in the fifth round of the 2014 MLB Draft.

He has since moved up the ladder and is currently playing for the Giants Double-A affiliate, the Richmond Flying Squirrels.

What does it say for someone like Coonrod, who was raised and nurtured in Carrollton, just like Bottom and company?

“It says that if he can make it then why can’t we? He came from the same place we did. It gives people confidence.”

If he keeps up his season-by-season form, Bottom could be the next best thing to come out of Carrollton, but the jury will be out on that matter for some time.

He’s also a different pitcher than Coonrod, who throws a mid-90s fastball.

“When I was younger my put away pitch was my fastball, but as I’ve gotten older I’ve developed more of an off-speed to put away people. I don’t really throw overly hard so I have to use my off-speed a lot to get people out.”

So far this summer, Bottom has played in over 50 games of summer baseball and has pitched in about 30 of them.

He says his development is coming along as he’s logged several innings during that time span.

“I think it comes naturally with growth and I’ve gotten a little bit stronger. It’s good if I don’t hurt my arm. (Summer baseball) gives me more innings, experience, and it makes me better overall.”

Once spring rolls around the Hawks will surely be a force to be reckoned with. under new coach Jeff Krumwiede. They return eight of their every day starters, who led the team to a 28-6 record.

“That’s why we’re so good.”

Carrollton will still be young with a few seniors, but the juniors will make up the bulk of the roster and they will be three-year starters.

The Hawks won't be a one-trick pony with Bottom. Left-hander, **Blake Struble** (7-1, 1.91 ERA), and **Gabe Jones** (4-1, 3.56 ERA) will return after having productive seasons.

With a heavy offense and a solid pitching unit, there's only one thing on the Hawks minds for expectations.

"Everyone on the team expects to go to state," Bottom said. "We know how good we are and I think we know how far we can make it."

Bottom and his fellow juniors have been there before, sort of.

In eighth grade, Bottom helped lead Carrollton Grade School to an undefeated regular season made it to the IESA Class 2A State Tournament.

"It was crazy, but we kind of expected it because we pretty much blew out every team in the regular season and we expected to go that far."

The Hawks lost to Illinois powerhouse, Teutopolis, 2-1 in the quarterfinals that year.

In that game, Bottom struck out 13 batters and allowed four hits.

"Going up against a powerhouse like that and playing along with them, losing only by one, it was a big confidence booster for us. It says that, hey it's possible that we can get here again."

A trip to Peoria and more so for the Hawks is they're expectation and it's a reward that Bottom will be striving toward this up-coming season.

