

# **Carrollton puts forth valiant effort against No. 1-ranked Tuscola in Class 1A playoff battle**

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
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## SEE LIVE VIDEO OF CARROLLTON-TUSCOLA PLAYOFF GAME:

**CARROLLTON** - Usually, the last game of a team's season sums up what they did all year long.

"They're a great football team, and we were a great football team," **Carrollton running back and linebacker Jerrett Smith** said. "We couldn't really stop their offense."

After a valiant effort by the **Carrollton Hawks** after going 0-3, winning their next seven games, and pushing **No. 1 Tuscola** to the limit, the Hawks didn't have enough left in the tank and fell to the Warriors 55-28 in the second round of the **IHSA Class 1A playoffs** in Carrollton on Saturday afternoon.

"We gave them fits out here at times," **Carrollton head coach Nick Flowers** said. "Physically, I felt like we matched for a big part of the game it's just they finished a little stronger than we did."

**Carrollton quarterback Wade Prough** enjoyed one of his best games in his career with **405 passing yards, three touchdowns**, and one interception. **Jeremy Watson** caught **three touchdown passes** and 174 yards on 12 catches. **Alex Bowker** had 124 yards on 12 snags, including an additional touchdown catch. As a result, 28 points is the most points Tuscola has allowed all season long

"They're the most physical team we played this year, and I think that's what took the toll on us the most playing that physical every single play," Smith said. We had 13 guys play the whole game, and that takes a toll going on both sides of the ball being that physical every single play."

Despite the adversity, Carrollton struck first on a one minute, 51-second opening drive with a 26-yard touchdown pass to the Watson on a diving catch.

Unfazed in the slightest, Tuscola answered by marching down the field three straight times and took a 21-6 lead with a Kaleb Williams run and two passing touchdowns from Williams to Dalton Hoel.

"Once they took the lead they played well enough to continue to keep the lead," Flowers said. "We would fight back and they would score."

After the Warriors had gone up by two scores midway through first half, Carrollton drove downfield and on a third down and nine, with Smith temporarily playing quarterback because Prough's helmet came off the play before. It didn't matter as Smith

lofted a 45-yard bomb down field and Watson came down with it as he jogged into the end zone to give the Hawks a lifeline at 21-14.

Tuscola just like a machine ran most of the time and would occasionally throw a pass during all of their drives. Williams ended up with 151 yards rushing and 221 passing yards with four touchdowns. Hoel finished with 138 receiving yards and three touchdowns. The last score of the first half was a 14-yard run by Lukas Hortin to give Tuscola a 28-14 lead at halftime. The Warriors finished with 510 total yards.

Carrollton dug deep in the second half and kept with Tuscola.

“Overall we did some great things out here today. We told the kids two things; We needed to play very physical football, and we need everybody's 100%. I really feel like our kids left it on the field today and they were that much better than us.”

The Hawks forced a Tuscola punt and on the ensuing drive, Prough hit Bowker for a 58-yard touchdown strike, and Byron Holmes caught a deflected pass for the two-point conversion in closing the gap to 28-22 with six minutes and 47 seconds to go in the third quarter. Tuscola would never let Carrollton get too close. The Warriors converted on several third downs all day long to keep their drives alive, and it paid off again with a Williams 1-yard keeper to up the score to 34-22.

Again, Carrollton responded with the help of some pass interference penalties.

“Penalties hurt us today as well,” Flowers said. “We would get a drive going and then all of sudden we would get a penalty, but several pass interference penalties kept our drives alive too. They were holding the snot out of us.”

Prough capped a two-minute and nine-second drive by finding Watson for a 23-yard touchdown pass and get to within six points once again at 34-28 just before the third quarter concluded.

That was the last bullet in the Hawks chamber. Pretty soon players would pick up cramps and have to be taken out. **Jayce Arnett** suffered an arm injury in the first half and was done for the day. Bowker and Smith had to excuse themselves for energy and cramp reasons. All the while Tuscola kept their engine going with their considerable depth and would go on to outscore Carrollton 21-0 in the fourth quarter, while finally containing the Hawks aerial assault.

Smith believes that a reason why the Hawks were able to stay in it for so long was their home field advantage. Coming into the game, Carrollton was 8-0 at home in their five-year playoff streak, which finally came to an end.

“Home field is something special in the playoffs, and that was huge,” Smith said. “We talked about that all week.”

For Flowers, this was a season that started off on the wrong foot, but it tested his team week after week, and it made the Hawks better game by game. However, they learned another lesson in playoff football.

“We felt like we got better each and every week. We got to replace some good seniors, but we’ll bring back some good underclassmen. What we found out in the playoffs is that we need some depth. was rotating in some offense and defensive linemen and keeping some guys fresh. We ran out of gas.”

Carrollton loses eight seniors, which isn’t a lot, but all of the seniors were key contributors. Watson ends the season with 14 touchdown receptions. Prough threw a hefty amount of 52 touchdowns in his two seasons as the starting quarterback and 4,759 career passing yards. Smith finished his Carrollton career with 41 total touchdowns and 3,159 total yards.

“We’re all proud of what we did this year, and we’re passing the torch,” Smith said.









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