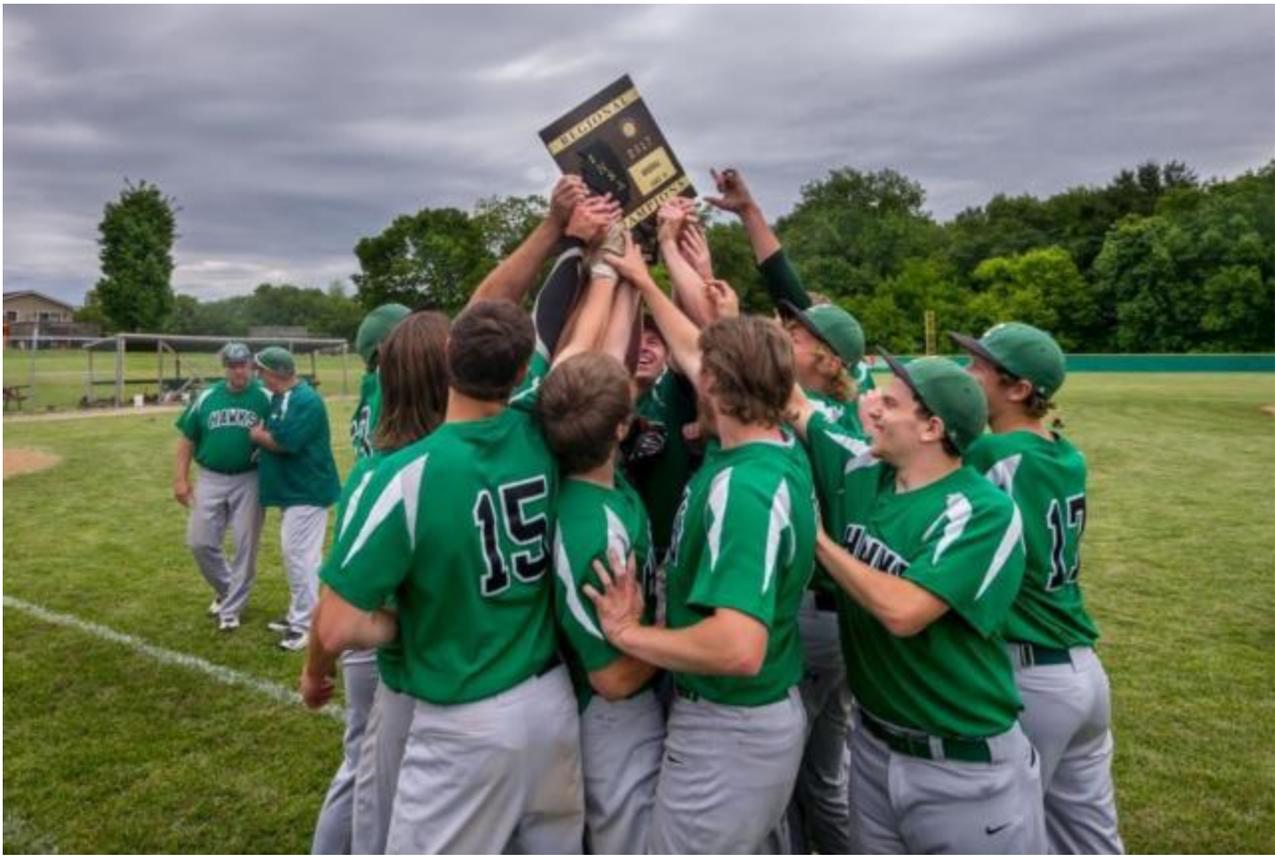


COMEBACK KIDS: Carrollton boys baseball team upends Nokomis 4-3 for regional crown

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - The Carrollton Hawks season was a strike away from being over against the Nokomis Redskins. However, with two men on base, Alex Bowker, who was 0-for-3 at the plate in the game, was hoping to make contact and keep the Hawks season alive.

“Obviously not feeling very good,” Bowker said. “I was just looking to put the ball in play. There was a ton of pressure coming up to the plate, but I was excited to have a chance.”

Down 3-2 and at one point 3-1, Bowker roped a 1-1 pitch that was fair by less than a foot down the third base line that scored the tying run. The next batter, Kyle Waters, who was also hitless at that point, wasted no time on the first pitch and roped it into left field to give the Hawks a walk-off 4-3 comeback victory over Nokomis to win the regional championship in Carrollton on Monday afternoon.

“I was already preparing before that because I knew Alex was going to get a hit,” Waters said. “I just tried to stay focused, and I knew I had to put the bat on the ball and good things would happen. I was looking for something on the outer half to take it to left, and luckily I put the bat on the ball. It’s an unbelievable feeling that I’ll never forget.”

“The momentum was our way when we had second and third,” Jeremy Watson said. I’m like “Kyle’s got this in him,” and he got the hit.

“That’s a great job by Alex stepping up, and then Kyle Waters has been one of our hottest hitters over the last couple of weeks, and I felt good then, but it’s so much easier when the game is tied, and the pressure’s off,” Carrollton head coach Jeff Krumwiede said.

This regional title is the Hawks third straight, and for the junior class, it’s five if you count the two regionals they won in middle school.

“The tradition we have started here is amazing and to be a part of it is great,” Watson said.

Bowker was coming off a solid performance against Brown County when he allowed one run and threw a no-hitter through the first five innings. Against Nokomis, he pitched five and two-thirds innings and allowed three runs on seven hits striking out four and walking two. His counterpart, Andrew Herpstrieth was no slouch either. He went six and one-thirds innings of work allowing two runs on three hits with six strikeouts and two walks.

“He’s a bulldog and a competitor,” Krumwiede said of Herpstrieth. “You can tell by watching him, and he’s that kind of a player. We didn’t make that much noise against him.”

In the top of the second, they put together a two-out rally with three straight hits and got on the board first. However, Carrollton swiftly replied when Hayden Stringer brought home Jerrett Smith on a sacrifice fly after Smith had doubled into right field.

For the next two innings Bowker and Herpstrieth held serve on the mound, but in the top of the fifth inning, the Redskins got a pair of runs all with two outs again. A two-run single to left field brought in the runners on second and third base to give Nokomis a 3-1 lead, which felt like a bit of cushion the way Herpstrieth was dealing. That’s when Carrollton’s bats woke up, and at the time they had only produced two base runners.

Jones, who couldn’t handle a diving catch with two outs in the top half of the inning, redeemed himself with a base hit and then scored on a RBI double by Blake Struble to cut the lead in half.

After allowing two more men on base, Krumwiede inserted the lefty Struble to face the Redskin batters and successfully got out of the inning. He would do so again in the top of the seventh.

With a record of 24-6 and a WIVC conference title season slipping away late in the game, the nerves started to creep in for some of the Hawks, but like Watson, they never gave up on themselves and didn’t stop believing.

“It was a little scary, but we have some great pitchers in Blake and Bowker,” Watson said. I knew when we were coming in the seventh inning down one we had a good chance to score and that’s what we did.

After recording his sixth strikeout of the game, Herpstrieth walked Jones on five pitches and was then relieved of his duties as his pitch count was nearing its end.

“He was in the mid-90s going into the seventh inning, and I don’t know what he finished at, but that was because we had long at-bats,” Krumwiede said. I was hoping he was getting close to the end.”

Struble flew out to center field for the second out, and it was up to Watson to keep the Hawks alive, and after the count had gone to 1-2, he didn’t get fazed as he worked the count and ultimately drew a walk.

“I was confident that I would work the count hard and I thought was low enough to be called a ball, so I laid off it,” Watson said.

Carrollton’s belief of victory never hindered, which is what the players picked up on after they came back from a 12-1 deficit against Staunton a week ago.

“You hope that all of your players think that way,” Krumwiede said. “When Watson was down in the count 1-2 if you had confidence and faith at that point you’re always going to have it.

“That’s the best thing we’ve done all year I think,” Jones said. “It was one of the best moments of my life winning this game. I don’t know what everyone else thought, but I thought we were going to win the whole time.”

Carrollton (25-6) moves onto the Greenville College Sectional semifinals on Wednesday at 4:30 p.m. to play Bunker Hill who defeated Marissa 2-1. Nokomis ends their season at 18-10.

“We made our share of mistakes, but when you overcome that makes everybody feel good about what happens,” Krumwiede said. “I think a lot of people would’ve rather had a 7-0 final, but this will make memories for these kids they’ll have forever.”





Nokomis 010 020 0—3—6—0

Carrollton 010 010 2—4—6—2

Pitching: Nokomis—Herpstreith (6.1IP 4H 3R 3ER 2BB 6K), Archibald LP (.1IP 2H 1R 1ER 1BB), Carrollton—Bowker (5.2IP 5H 3R 0ER 2BB 4K), Struble WP (1.1IP 1H 1BB)

Hitting:

Nokomis—McDowell 1-4 (R), Archibald 2-4 (2RBI), Friesland 1-2 (R), Tosetti 1-2, Fesser 1-3

Carrollton—Bowker 1-4 (2B RBI), Waters 1-3 (RBI), Walker 1-3 (2B), Smith 1-3 (3B R), Jones 1-2 (2R), Struble 1-3 (2B RBI)