

# Hawks' hot bats topple Minutemen 15-4, sectional championship game next

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GREENVILLE - It's a strange, exciting feeling when you get another chance to live after thinking you were going to die. After the Carrollton Hawks' near-death experience against the Nokomis Redskins by finding a way to win in the bottom of the seventh inning, they couldn't have been more thrilled.

The Hawks showcased their bats and pummeled the Bunker Hill Minutemen 15-4 in five innings at Robert E. Smith Field in Greenville on a rainy Wednesday afternoon. They advance to play Valmeyer in the IHSA Greenville Sectional Finals at 11 a.m. Saturday.

“This team kind of had its amazing beginning and then rough middle stretch, and now we’re clicking again,” Jerrett Smith said. Now our bats are alive again, and I honestly think that’s what it was.”

Smith enjoyed a 2-for-3 day while driving in three runs. Kyle Waters, Tyler Barnett and Kolten Bottom all went 2-for-3. The person most relieved of the offensive outburst was starting pitcher Blake Struble, but he was a big part of the production by going 3-for-3 with an RBI double at the plate.

“That’s what happens when you come ready to play,” Smith said. “You see the ball, and you hit the ball well. We knew we could hit their pitchers.”

Six Hawks had multi-hit games. Eight produced at least one RBI and a hit, and everybody who came up to bat got on base.

“We’ve seen signs of this early in the season, but it went away for awhile and glad to have it back,” Carrollton head coach Jeff Krumwiede said. “We were a tough team to beat today by anybody.”

Struble started out slow by walking Dannenbrink and Chase Williams, and things looked promising for the Minutemen when Stormy Coffman roped a triple to left field that scored Dannebrink, but Williams was thrown out at home plate. That seemed to calm down Struble as he struck out the next two batters.

“Blake responded. I had to go out there after he walked the first two hitters and explain what needed to be done and he did it,” Krumwiede said. “He threw strikes the rest of the time and worked ahead of hitters.”

Drew Whitworth started for Bunker Hill but lasted through only two batters as he threw eight straight balls to walk Alex Bowker and Waters. Whitworth was replaced by Dane Sellars, and that’s when the Hawks lineup took action. Kolten Bottom knocked a double into the right field corner scoring Bowker and Waters, and Smith followed with a RBI triple and barely beat the throw from the cutoff man. The Hawks weren’t done. They scored two more runs on RBI’s by Tyler Barnett and Gabe Jones.

For Struble, it was a huge relief to get five runs in the first and confidence that more would follow.

“It was awesome,” Struble said. “I gave one up in the first inning, and we came back and scored five, and that hurt them. It really helped our team out today.”

After Struble’s only scoreless inning of the game, the Hawks put four more runs on the board in the bottom of the second with the help of the wind that causes a couple of errors in the outfield by the Minutemen that gave Carrollton a 7-1 lead. Stringer drove in Smith with a RBI single, and he was driven in by Barnett on a groundout that made it 9-1 Carrollton after two innings.

Bunker Hill put a little dent in the Hawks lead when Stormy Coffman drove in his second run of the game and was followed by another RBI single by Braden Morris. Coffman finished the game at 2-for-3 with three RBI. Sean Yates was hit by a pitch to load the bases for Austin Yates, but Struble got out of the mess by getting Yates to ground out.

Nathan Walker who batted third for Carrollton got his first hit of the game, which drove in Bowker to make it 10-3 and the next batter, Bottom hit an RBI double to left center. The Hawks added three more runs before the inning was over and led 14-3.

Walker relieved Struble in the top of the fourth and gave up a run, but the Hawks lineup got it back in the bottom half. Jones took over for the fifth and final inning and shut the door on the Minutemen to end the game in a ten-run rule.

This is the first time since 2012 the Hawks had made it to the sectional finals when they lost a 7-6 heartbreaker to Marquette. It was also Carrollton’s third attempt at reaching the sectional finals when they lost out to Okawville the past two years, but that’s hardly on their minds now.

“ great, but we’re still hungry,” Smith said.

“You just don’t want to lose,” Struble said. “You get that good feeling it feels like we can win it all.”