

Carrollton prepares for Camp Point Central Panthers with undefeated season on the line

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - 1999 and 2014 are the years when the Carrollton Hawks have finished the regular with a perfect 9-0 record. The 2017 Hawks are a game away from becoming the third unbeaten team in school history, and the opposition that stands in their way is the Camp Point Central Panthers.

“These are the weeks you look forward to,” Carrollton head coach Nick Flowers said.

There is plenty of recent history between the two schools.

Through 2012-2013 the Panthers were responsible for the Hawks only losses in the regular seasons. However, in 2014 Carrollton ended Central’s 24-game WIVC winning streak with a 30-12 victory on the road. Five weeks later the two teams met up again in Camp Point in the IHSA Class 1A semifinals the Hawks bested the Panthers in a hard-fought 22-7 game. This past season, yet again in Camp Point, Carrollton faced off against Central this time in the first round of the playoffs. It was another win for the Hawks, a decisive 46-0 rout.

Flowers believes the Hawks and Panthers have developed a friendly cross-conference rivalry between the two recently successful programs.

“I think we have formed a nice rivalry with these guys. To be quite honest it’s about football only when we get together,” Flowers said. “We’re not going to mouth one-another. Coaches and players respect one another. It won’t be a cheap-hitting ball game; it’s going to be physical and all-out football. That’s what it’s all about.”

The Panthers come into this game with a 6-2 record, including losses to Beardstown (26-22) and Calhoun (16-14 OT). Both of those teams lost to Carrollton; however, those came in weeks two and three, which feels like a season ago compared to now. In Week Six, Central defeated the previously unbeaten Brown County Hornets 28-8, which opened up a lot of eyes across the state.

“They’re on a high right now from beating Brown County, got a part of the North (share of the conference title), and an automatic bid,” Flowers said. “Coach Dixon has got them prepared. They’re big up front. We’re going to have to go up there and play focused football and use our speed.”

Junior Cole Williams has rushed for 852 yards on 85 carries with nine touchdowns. He's averaging an astonishing 10-yards per carry. Chayse Houston, another junior running back has racked up 580 yards on the ground on 79 carries and five touchdowns. Fullback Noah Strohkirch has compiled 364 yards on 71 carries with four touchdowns. Wilson Stotts and Chase Norfolk are two additional running backs that have tallied over 200 yards for the season.

“We have such opposite styles once again this year. It’s going to be neat because what we do compared to what they do is so much different,” Flowers said. “They run the ball and we’re going to spread things out and mix it up.”

The Hawks defense will undoubtedly be tested, but if the season has told us anything, then so will the Panthers.

Carrollton's quarterback, Hunter Flowers has thrown for 1,650 yards with 23 touchdowns and four interceptions, including a completion percentage at 54 percent. His main target, Nathan Walker, leads virtually every statistical receiver category in the WIVC. He's 38 passes for 831 yards and nine touchdown receptions. Alex Bowker and Tyler Barnett each have five touchdown receptions and over 250 yards. If the passing game isn't working, then the Hawks can turn to running back, Byron Holmes. He leads the entire WIVC with 14 rushing touchdowns and 118 points. Additionally, he's rushed for 642 yards on 103 carries.



However, if Central has their way on offense then Carrollton may not see much of the ball.

“What stands out to me about this late season Camp Point team is their explosiveness on offense as far as their push that they’re getting,” Flowers said. “They’re getting off the ball really well, and their backs are following blocks and hitting holes. The biggest thing in my mind is their ball control. We’re probably going to get limited offensive series because they’re going to play keep away.”

Flowers stated that his team is healthy and ready to go, but more importantly, the Hawks realize the opportunity to play a tough opponent in the last week of the season to prepare them for the playoffs.

“We don’t want to just make the playoffs, we want to make the playoffs and do well,” Flowers said. “That’s something I think we’ve elevated our program where we’ve won a lot of playoff games in the past. This is a great game to get us ready for the playoffs. We’re wanting to win for playoff positions, but we’re wanting to win to get better. That way when we get into the playoffs, we’ll be used to playing four quarters a quality opponent.”

If you’re a Carrollton supporter and want a good omen then here’s this: In 2014 when the Hawks beat the Panthers in Week 8 on the road they were undefeated and ranked No. 4 in the state. That is the same case for Carrollton right now.