

# Oilers to battle against high-scoring Carlinville in the playoffs again

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
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WOOD RIVER - East Alton-Wood River head coach Gary Herron has a difficult task.

The third-year football coach for the Oilers has done a remarkable job of turning around the program with a playoff appearance a year ago. This season he's done one better with a 7-2 record and a 12 seed in the IHSA Class 3A playoffs.

However, the Oilers will have their hands full as they travel north to face the Carlinville Cavaliers at 7 p.m. Friday. The Cavaliers come into the game with the No. 5 seed, an 8-1 record, and average 44 points and 428 yards per game.

This is the second straight year the Oilers and Cavaliers met in the first round, and it was Carlinville's rout in 2016. They beat EAWR 76-19, and one thing that Herron takes from that experience was the fundamental skills of tackling.

“We have to tackle,” Herron said. “If we don’t tackle like we did last year then it’s gonna be a pretty ugly game.”

Carlinsville was a game away from going undefeated last week but fell to Greenville 35-28. The Cavaliers have put up excellent numbers on offense this season and beat opponents in many different ways.

“I’m impressed with them offensively. They spread you out,” Herron said. “They throw screen passes outside and then run the ball inside. It’s hard to figure out where you want to stop them whether it would be through the air or on the ground. Chad kids play hard and they’re coached very well.”

“It’s going to be a tough game for us, but we have to cause some turnovers and put some points on the board to stick with them.”

It’s almost like the Oilers will have to pick their poison on defense if the Cavaliers are playing to their potential. Herron will go with focusing more on the Carlinsville passing game.

“They’re better through the air this year. We’re going to try to keep them contained in the throwing game, and hopefully, we can make some plays in the run game.”

Jacob Easterday has turned in one of the best seasons for a quarterback in Class 3A. He’s thrown for 2,004 yards with 22 touchdowns, four interceptions, and has completed 69 percent of his passes. The same can be said for wide receiver Kyle Dixon. He’s caught 62 passes for 871 yards and 11 touchdowns. Jake Ambuel, Donovan King, and Josh Hinzman are other targets that Easterday will look too and all have tallied over 300 yards apiece.

“Dad is obviously the coach, so he’s known the system probably for a while,” Herron said. “He can throw the ball on a dime and put it up for his receivers to go get it.”

Carlinsville is also dangerous with their run game and has several weapons. Tucker Hughes returned last week to face Greenville after sitting out for three weeks with an injury. He’s rushed for 450 yards on 79 carries with eight touchdowns. Ethan Wallace, who was not even a starter early in the season, but now a big contributor has attained for 400 yards on 45 carries with seven touchdowns. He averages 8.9 yards per carry. Garrett Campbell has scored seven touchdowns and Colton DeLong has four.

The Oilers have given up an average of 16 points per game this season. As a team, they’ve intercepted 13 passes. Zach Kincade leads the Oilers with 113 tackles, while Hunter Morales is behind him with 68 and leads the team in sacks with four.

“We’re trying to put our kids in the best position to get to their best players quickly and as often we can. Tackling and not giving them space are two of the biggest keys we’re working on.”

“Our defensive line has to put pressure on their offensive line. We’ll switch guys around. Our nose guard normally plays in for us, but he’s a quicker, stronger kid, so we’re going to try to disrupt what the center and the quarterback have going on. Hopefully, that’ll give us an edge.”

On offense, EAWR will look to pound the ball at Carlinville, but also establish a passing game to keep the Cavaliers guessing just enough. Quarterback Justin Englar has thrown 939 yards with 12 touchdowns and no interceptions.

“I think we’ll be able to run on them a little bit. We’ve had more of a passing game this year, which we had to do. Last year we rushed for just over 200 yards on them, but we could barely throw the ball,” Herron said. We’ll be able to keep them honest.”



Running back Zach Womack has rushed for 1,143 yards on 116 carries with 18 touchdowns and averages 9.9 yards per carry. Fullback Gage Grimes has 943 yards on 143 carries with 11 touchdowns and averages 6.6 yards per carry.

“I like our chances in the run game. runs a five-front and sometimes a six-front because they have the athletes in the back end to do that. If we can block off the center blocks we can get past that first level,” Herron said. “Depending what we’re running offensively they’ll have two linebackers who’ll be sitting there. If we can get past those two levels, then I like our chances against any team.”

