

Hawks looking for revenge as they take on powerhouse Tuscola in the quarterfinals

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - If you mention the name Tuscola around the vast WIVC area, then there's a good chance negativity creeps into their minds, from a football perspective that is.

Since 2000 the Warriors are 13-2 against WIVC opponents, and the two losses came to Calhoun last year and in 2008 to Triopia.

The Carrollton Hawks football program is one of those WIVC schools who are utterly tired of the Tuscola Warriors because history has not been kind to the Hawks when they've come up against the Warriors. However, the players and coaches are anxiously awaiting them.

They'll meet again in the IHSA Class 1A Quarterfinals at Tuscola High School on Saturday at 2 p.m.

Although Carrollton sports a 10-1 record, and a WIVC South outright championship, Tuscola comes into the game ranked No. 1 and owns an 11-0 record and the CIC championship. It's the third season in a row they finished the regular season undefeated. On paper, they're heavy favorites.

"I talked to a coach last night, and he said, "congratulations on the season, but you guys have to play Tuscola now." I thought about it and the way he said it I didn't like the way it felt," Flowers said. We're ready for this. We get to go play Tuscola, that's how we're looking at it."

The teams defeated two WIVC North schools in the second round last week, Brown County and Camp Point Central. The Warriors traveled to Mount Sterling and dispatched the Hornets 50-13.

Junior quarterback Luke Sluder threw for 154 yards and completed 8-of-12 passes, and threw three touchdowns. He rushed for 85 yards on 10 carries with two touchdowns. Additionally running back Andrew Erickson scored on two rushing touchdowns. Despite scoring 50 points, Tuscola gained 263 total yards mainly because they created short field possessions as they stopped six Brown County fourth down attempts, including one instance at the Hornets 3-yard line.

The Hawks had to do it the hard way against Central as they held on for a 20-18 victory by a two-point conversion stop with under a minute to play in the game. Carrollton's victory over Central was revenge for their Week Nine 34-28 loss to them. The Hawks have the same attitude coming up against the Warriors.

"Our boys were waiting on that game and are looking at this as a similar situation because Tuscola knocked us out last year in the playoffs. We're wanting a bit of revenge not just because of last year, but in general," Flowers said. "We feel like for our program to be titled an elite program, we have to beat elite programs."



Time for a history lesson:

Carrollton and Tuscola have met up in 2006, 2007, 2010, and last year. Every time Tuscola has come out on top, and every final score indicates there have been blowouts.

2006: 34-8

2007: 42-0

2010: 35-0

2016: 55-28

“In we were just trying to build our program. Our boys thought they were playing the Pittsburgh Steelers whenever we went over there to play,” Flowers said. “our boys are having fun and happy to be 10-1 and playing in the quarterfinals being eight quarters away from the state championship. That’s how we look at it.”

Last year was different.

That was the first time the Warriors came to Carrollton, and the Hawks gave the visitors everything they could handle. Early in the fourth quarter, the score was 34-28 Tuscola, but the Warriors line wore down the Hawks’ and ended up tallying 21 unanswered points. One thing to remember was Carrollton’s passing attack led by Wade Prough and Jerrett Smith who combined for 463 yards.



“Our boys aren’t scared of them that’s for darn sure. We gotta play hard, catch some breaks along the way, and an occasional turnover or two go our way.” Flowers said. “What I do know is that we go over there and have to win the field position battle early on and put a score or two in, and have some defensive stands.”

“We know we have our hands full and go over there with a good game plan and give it 100 percent. If we can be the better team on Saturday, then good things will happen.”

The only other team that the Warriors have faced who has a similar offensive system like Carrollton’s is the Shelbyville Rams. They put up 44 points in a 47-44 loss to Tuscola all the way back in Week Four. Shelbyville isn’t your average team though, in fact, they’re still alive in the Class 2A playoffs.

“The more we watch film, the more I feel like we can play with these guys,” Flowers said. “We’re going to play field position football. We match up with them skill position wise real well.

On the other hand, the Warriors are big, athletic, and have plenty of depth in their linemen core.

“They’ll be coached up well and are a confident group. I know their coaches know that they have a big ballgame on their hands. They definitely have us on some height and a little bit of weight up front, and have some talent,” Flowers said.

As a team, Tuscola has averaged 46 points per game and have surrendered 12 per game. The Warriors line is headlined by six-foot, five-inch 285-pound offensive and defensive tackle, Hunter Woodard who just signed his letter of intent to play at Oklahoma State University. On offense, Sluder (6-2, 195 lbs) has passed for 1,636 yards with 19 touchdowns and seven interceptions. He leads the team in rushing with 724 yards and 13 scores. Erickson for just under 600 yards with a team-leading 19 touchdowns. Dalton Hoel is a small, but quick wide receiver. He’s caught 36 passes for 787 yards with 12 touchdowns. Other key receivers are Noah Pierce and Hayden Cothron.



Carrollton has every reason to be at least a little confident against Tuscola with what they’ve accomplished on offense this season. The Hawks average 39 points per game and allow 18 on defense.

Sophomore Hunter Flowers has completed 139-of-265 (52 percent) passes for 2,336 yards and broke the school single-season record with 32 touchdowns and eight interceptions this season, and counting. Running back, Byron Holmes has rushed for 918 yards on 159 carries with 15 touchdowns. Nathan Walker has hauled in 55

receptions for 1,080 yards and 14 touchdowns, which are all new school records in a season. Alex Bowker has caught 33 passes for 475 yards and five touchdowns.

“Defensively we’ll probably get some mixed coverages from them. I’m sure they’ll probably see a few games where teams got some pressure on us and made Hunter either scramble or rush some throws,” Flowers said. “If we can get Nathan in some 1-on-1 situations out there and get him the ball he can make plays. If we can play as one unit, I feel like we’re going to be able to move the ball.”

Carrollton is the only WIVC team remaining in the playoffs and will get plenty of support, even from some rival fans just to see a conference school take down Tuscola, who has broken plenty of WIVC hearts in the past. They’ll look to break some more on Saturday over the Hawks dead bodies.

“With Tuscola having the record that they do over the WIVC schools you would probably be a silly betting man if you pick us as far as the way the statistics are,” Flowers joked. “We’re going to make the long road trip over there and make the WIVC proud.”