

New coach, new team: Young, talented Hawks ready to surprise and keep up tradition

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - Life throws challenges at everyone all the time and the Carrollton boys basketball team has gotten several since the season ended last March.

A season ago, when you looked at the roster and saw that there was one junior, Kyle Waters who didn't see a whole lot of playing time and a handful of sophomores below him.

In late June, renowned head coach Jeff Krumwiede resigned after 23 years in charge. Out goes one of the best basketball coaches you can find in Illinois.

Assistant coach Matt Goetten was hired soon after and has brought a positive influence since with a young, but the talented team he believes the Hawks have in store.

Unfortunately, a decent portion of his key players play football and are pretty darn good at it. Carrollton's football team made it all the way to the quarterfinals, but as far as Goetten's basketball coach in him is concerned, that's one week of no practice without half of his team, but he's just as big a fan as anyone else watching them advance through the playoffs.

"Coach Krumwiede has been dealing with this since Coach Flowers has been so successful since the last several years," Goetten said. "When we did our three-week practice plan we kinda anticipated this. Plan A was we have everybody. Plan B was we're probably not going to have everybody. All the guys that are here get extra work on the things they need to work on and the football guys come in not in basketball shape, but in good shape nonetheless. Strength and conditioning wise Nick does a great job with those guys."

With two weeks to go until the season starts, the Hawks finally have all of their players available and are ready to hit the ground hard.

At first glimpse, this year's Hawks will be very inexperienced, but talented nonetheless.

"We have five upperclassmen, but a lot of freshmen and sophomores. Out of the 13, all 13 that played last year are back, so I didn't scare any off," Goetten said with a laugh. "We had a decent summer, and a lot of the guys were lifting during the football season after school, and we feel pretty good about where we're at."

In practice, Goetten challenged some players during drills if they wanted a black jersey. That means if they wanted to work hard enough to earn a spot on the 12-man varsity squad.

"Depth is going to be an issue if I don't have a few more step up. I like the first six, seven guys, but after that, I tell these guys that there's a lot of black jerseys to be earned in this preseason. They're working hard. It's been fun so far."

A couple of players that look to be key players is Waters and junior Gabe Jones, who have both heavily improved their games.

“Gabe has improved physically. He’s really improved and took to the offseason strength training for the first time in his career. He added muscle and has gained 15 pounds since last season,” Goetten said. “Kyle is the glue guy. There’s no one on our team that compares to his basketball IQ. As a senior, I’m hoping he steps into that leadership role.”



Senior left-handed pitching star and SIU-E signee Blake Struble is a potentially huge add-on for the team after not playing at all in his time in high school. He’s listed at 6-6 and will add much-needed height and strength.

“He’s the physical specimen. I’m not sure we’ve had a guy with his strength,” Goetten said. “He’s raw because he hasn’t played for the last three years, so we’ll see how much he improves and the next three weeks will determine how much playing time he gets. I think he will contribute at some point.”

There are some players who played decent minutes during last season, including a couple of then freshmen. Ethan Brannan played as a point guard and sometimes a shooting guard late in the season and even started in a couple games. He’ll add a bit of starting experience, including his athleticism and shooting abilities he showcased.

“Ethan Brannan had a couple starts last year, and people forget that and gave us some good minutes. Out of all the people returning I think Ethan was the leading scorer.”

With their success on the football field this season, Goetten thinks Hunter Flowers and Nathan Walker have taken a step forward in their mental and physical growth.

“I’m hoping Hunter Flowers grew up and he seems to, watching him on the sidelines. He’s had a good football season,” Goetten said. “Nathan Walker grew up last year in the basketball regional, and he’s not stopped. went to baseball and becomes all-state and is knocking on all-state for football I would think. I hope he keeps carrying it on because we need Nathan to step up as a leader.”

Height has been an issue for Carrollton basketball teams for many years, but this year will be different. Struble (6-6), Jones (6-3), Flowers (6-2), Cade McAdams (6-5), Nathan Cummins (6-2), and Ryan Graner (6-2) will all get minutes and bring height to the table.

The Hawks certainly have a fountain of youth, but that doesn’t mean they’ll downplay their chances for success. Goetten acknowledges that there definitely could be some early season struggles because of the inexperience, but he believes the talent is good enough to overcome that if everyone comes together possibly.

“They could come in and be great or lay an egg, and that may be night to night. They have that goal in mind, and I think once everybody comes together as a unit I think those goals they set are attainable,” Goetten said. “We’re not going to lower our expectations because we have young guys. I think we can get it done; it’s up to them.”