

Hawks get behind early, then fall in the first round of Waverly Holiday Tournament

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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WAVERLY - "The Nightmare Before Christmas" is a dark fantasy film.

The day after Christmas for the Carrollton Hawks in the first round of the Waverly Holiday Tournament turned out to be a dark nonfiction story against the one-seeded, and No. 7 state-ranked West Central Cougars.

The Cougars scored 22 consecutive points, led 24-4 after the first quarter and never looked back as they destroyed the Hawks 72-38 on Tuesday morning at Waverly Elementary School.

“The start was absolutely a nightmare. One team came to play at 9 a.m., and one didn’t. That was obvious from the start,” Carrollton head coach Matt Goetten said. You dig a 22-point hole for yourself against a top-10 team in the state it’s hard to dig out of that and anything we did we had no answer for. We got beat twice in transition on a dead ball. That tells you how ready we were to play.”

Gabe Jones led the Hawks in scoring with 11 points, and Hunter Flowers added seven, and Kyle Waters six.

The Cougars were led by Cole Howard’s 23 points, despite battling foul trouble throughout the majority of the game. Gabe Cox tallied 15, and Drew Evans added 14.

The Hawks play an up-tempo style, but so does West Central as they came out in a full-court press that produced a boatload of turnovers that led to points.

“Other teams should have a difficult time pressing us, didn’t. They had a very easy time and probably the easiest they’ve had all year I would guess,” Goetten said. “It’s not for lack of preparation; we did that. Their defense was good in transition, and they shot nearly sixty-percent, and we shot considerably less than that.”

The Cougars won the opening tip-off and scored on a layup within five seconds, but the Hawks answered quickly on a Flowers layup as they beat the full-court press. West Central came right back and answered on another close-range shot, but Carrollton would not for a long time. The Hawks guards were pressured with double-teams from every angle and never seemed to get a moment's rest when they brought the ball up the court, while seemingly getting fazed by them. When West Central wasn’t getting steals, they expertly worked their way inside and made several unselfish passes for easy baskets all game long.

“That first four minutes they came out, stepped on our necks and we were done,” Goetten said.

In the second quarter, Goetten made wholesale substitutions, and the Hawks played better. One of the positives Carrollton achieved was attacking the basket, drawing fouls, and getting the free-throw line. Had they not then the score would've much worse.

It was 44-19 at halftime, and things progressively got worse in regards to the score as the Cougars outscored the Hawks 22-10 in the third quarter.

“What we’re going to take from it is you gotta come ready to play from the opening tip. You can’t decide you’re going to playing four minutes into the game and it was too late today,” Goetten said. “We played a very good Triopia team, and we were right in that game in the fourth quarter and got away from us at the end. I thought we had learned some lessons in that game. This game became the opposite.

The loss drops Carrollton to 3-4, while West Central stays undefeated at 12-0. West Central faces the Auburn Trojans in the quarterfinals at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday.

The nine-seeded Hawks will play 13-seeded Lincolnwood at 9 a.m. again Wednesday in the consolation quarterfinals.

“I hope was an anomaly and we move on tomorrow and play a better game. The guys are very disappointed in their effort, so they know they laid a giant egg this morning,” Goetten said. “It’s up to them how they respond.”