

# Gabe Jones steps up and shines for Carrollton on the court

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
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CARROLLTON - Question marks were all over the place for the Carrollton Hawks.

A team full of underclassmen with hardly any varsity experience made it a growing year during 2017-2018 regular season with an 8-15 record.

One question that has been answered is the emergence of Gabe Jones.

Back when he was an assistant under Jeff Krumwiede and JV head coach, Matt Goetten had perhaps the most confidence for Jones when he was a skinny freshman. Still, he noted his athleticism and height that Jones possessed a high ceiling.

“The first time I saw him when he walked into the gym he kinda blew me away with some of his talents,” The Carrollton head coach said. “It’s a progression. He’s got a lot of basketball talent, and he loves the game. He’s committed to the team and everything you want in a player.”

Jones, a six-foot-three junior forward, has enjoyed personal success in what otherwise has been an underwhelming season for Carrollton standards.

Jones came into the season like everyone else an unknown player with little to no varsity experience. Through 22 games he’s emerged as the leading scorer and the go-to-guy for points in a season where the Hawks have struggled to score in bunches.

“It’s pretty nice . Obviously, we had some high expectations coming into the season, but we’re still really young and inexperienced,” Jones said. “I think that’s the biggest thing coming into this year that hurt us and we tried to do too much.”

Carrollton’s best form of the season was a three-game winning streak. The Hawks beat Pleasant Hill (80-59), Midwest Central (72-51), and Rushville-Industry (50-49). Jones has enjoyed his best basketball of the season since.

“Coach Goetten was stressing defensive pressure, and you could see that with how many turnovers we had in that three-game stretch. We turned over a lot of people and scored on those turnovers,” Jones said. “On the defensive part, I think we’ve done a good job of listening to him.”



He averages 13.8 points a game and also leads the team in rebounds with 5.4 per contest. Jones has averaged 17 points in the last nine games.

Jones was rewarded for his consistency in the Beardstown Tournament where he tallied 71 points in four games and was the top scorer.



“He’s stepping into that role, and we need him to explore that. I think he can be a double-double guy,” Goetten said. “We’re trying to encourage him to get to the rim more. He’s a guy that can finish at the rim. He’s sometimes struggling through the contact, but again he’s a first-year varsity player, we’re working on that.”

Throughout the season Jones has displayed, he can attack the basket, knock down mid-range shots off the dribble, and occasionally rain in three-pointers. He can also dunk and has proven it with teammates filming him in practice, but hasn’t gotten the proper chance to throw one down yet.

“Goetten’s always telling me I’m a matchup problem. I’m tall and lanky, so it’s kind of hard to know whether I’m gonna drive or shoot the three,” Jones said. “If they give me enough space, then I’m gonna hit the three, and if they get up right on them, then I’m gonna have to drive past them.”

Carrollton initially struggled to get defensive stops and rebound.

“I remember it was after the Triopia game (12/15/17). It was some ridiculous number they out-rebounded us by, and it was especially on the offensive rebounds. They had a ridiculous amount of second-chance points,” Jones said. “We stressed rebounding and getting a body on someone in practice.”

As a result, coach Goetten instilled a system called “Matrix Points” in practice to build competition. If you lost, then there would be a physical punishment.

“For every offensive rebound you got plus five, and for every defensive rebound, you got plus one. If you didn’t get a rebound and you were on the court, then you were minus one. Every point that you were minus you had to do a calorie on what we call the puke cycle,” Jones said with a smile.

Ultimately the Hawks have improved their defense, but the offense has been the main problem. In the first half of the season, Carrollton averaged 52 points a game. However, in the second half, they’ve managed to score an average 50 in 14 contests.

The Hawks have quite an athletic all-around team, but the long-range shooting has been a weakness. As a team, Carrollton is shooting under 25 percent from three-point range.

“A lot of teams keep throwing zones at us because they know we don’t have a lot of shooters, which is the hardest part. wants us to get something going downhill before we chuck up a three, but it’s tempting when they’re not pressing us. They’re letting us almost shoot the three.”

Throughout the season Jones has gotten more and more comfortable at the varsity level and credits coach Goetten for helping him adapt.

“I’ve had as our JV coach for the past two years, and I kinda know his system and what he wants to do,” Jones said. “Still I’ve never played that much varsity basketball, and it’s starting to get a lot more comfortable to me, and I hope it does for everyone else.

Jones points out the speed of the game and level of competition he’s had to face that have been the most significant difficulties of adjusting to varsity basketball. That probably goes for everyone else on the Carrollton roster.

“When you go from playing JV kids that are freshman and not as good athletes, the level of competition is a lot higher,” Jones said. “All the players you’ve never played against like Jonah Hopper and all of them. there tons of good athletes. The Hopper brothers are back. Winchester has Gabe Cox Drew Evans. Triopia has Zach Thompson and Shawn Bell.”



It would be easy for Jones and the rest of the underclassmen to mentally fall on their swords, lick their wounds and look ahead for next season which sounds promising given

all the talent and starters coming back. However, they're having none of it and want to keep progressing for the two seniors Kyle Waters and Blake Struble as well as continue to improve with regionals starting tonight.

"That's kind of what I've heard a lot of people say, but at the same time we don't wanna settle for that," Jones said. "There's always next year, but there is no next year for Kyle and Blake. We wanted to be good this year and not sit and wait."

Then there's also the looming baseball season, which Jones and several other players on the basketball team will be apart of. Baseball has been his primary sport for all of his athletic career and has even been preparing for the season during the basketball campaign.

"I've done baseball my whole life. I've done traveling teams ever since I don't even know how old. I go to pitching every Sunday," Jones said. "I'm going to camps and try to get looks. I had a decent season last year, and I'm looking to get back."

However, with Jones' newfound basketball talent, he might have a change of heart, but for now, putting things in perspective, baseball is Jones' primary sport and hopes to earn a scholarship somewhere eventually. Comparing basketball and baseball, he isn't sure which he feels better at concerning his skills.

"I don't know. I've had a couple people talk to me about basketball too, but my main focus is baseball because I don't see myself potentially to any good school for basketball at least as of right now."

As far as his talents on the hardwood go, Jones' basketball coach firmly believes that soon enough he could become better than what he thinks he could be.

"I think once he gets that confidence the sky's the limit for that kid," Goetten said.









