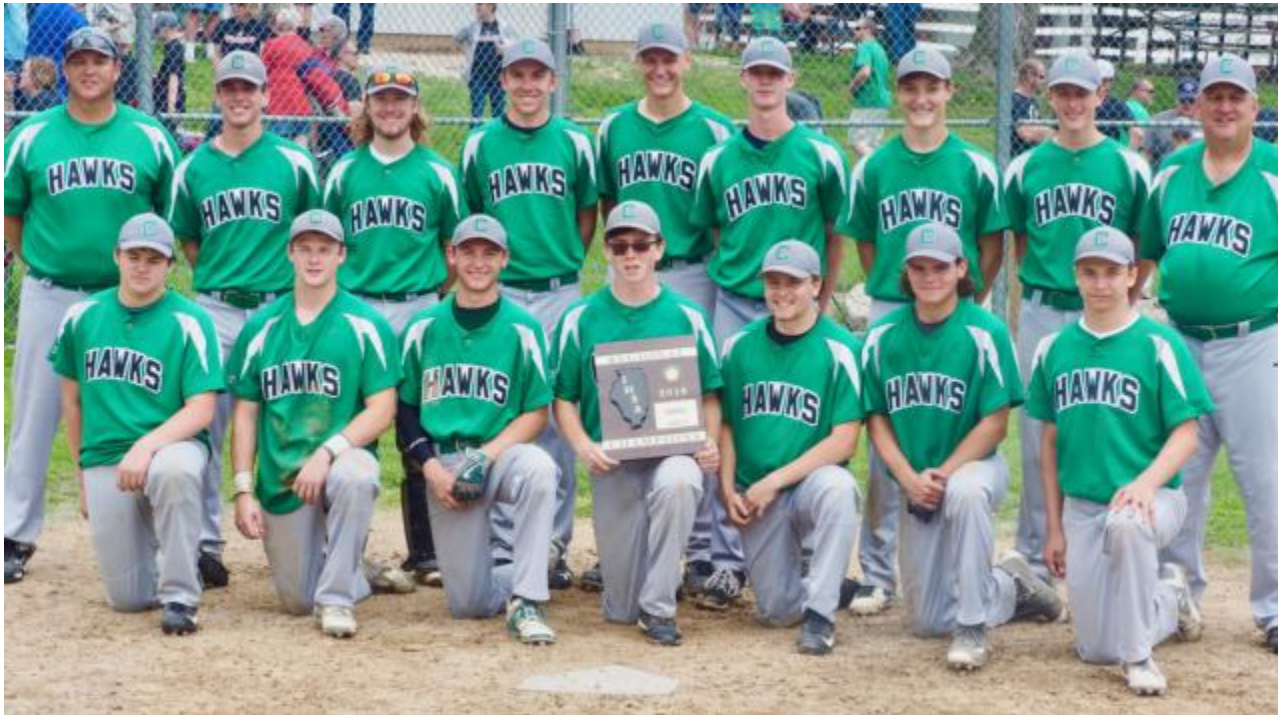


Nine-run fifth inning lifts Hawks past Calhoun to claim fourth straight regional baseball championship

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - The Carrollton Hawks senior class can now say they've won every regional championship they've encountered.

They defeated the Calhoun Warriors 11-4 in the IHSA Class 1A Calhoun Regional Championship and advance to the Greenville Sectional Semifinals on Wednesday at 4:30 p.m.

The Hawks climb to 25-8 and the Warriors season ends at 15-20.

"We had a goal all year, and this is just the start to it," Carrollton coach Jeff Krumwiede said. "We got key hits and good at-bats and good production from our bottom of the order today."

"It feels really good four regional championships. Some people don't even get to experience one and getting to experience four has been amazing," Carrollton pitcher Kolten Bottom said.

Bottom pitched five innings allowing three runs (two earned) and seven hits while striking out seven and walking nobody.

Ethan Brannan reached base all four times going 3-for-3 and drawing a walk. Leadoff hitter Alex Bowker was 2-for-4 with a home run and an RBI double.

“Coach K said from the beginning that we gotta get hyped for this game,” Brannan said. “Beating Morrisonville was a big win for them, and they came out taking infield pumped up. Coach K said that we had to succeed that and that’s what we did. I’m just glad we won.”

For Calhoun, the cleanup hitter, A.J. Hillen finished 2-for-3 which included two home runs, and Conner Gilman was 2-for-4.

Calhoun came into the game having upset the Morrisonville Mohawks 1-0 in extra innings. They previously lost to the Hawks 6-1 and 18-3 a month ago, so expectations were slim. However, the Warriors had momentum and home-field advantage with nothing to lose.

“I was happy with the effort from the kids,” Calhoun coach Casey Longnecker said. “They fought all the way to the end. They gotta learn to play with high energy all the time 35 games during the regular season, not just wait until the regionals and do it.”

Bottom got through the first, and Alex Bowker led off with a home run off Corey Nelson that landed several feet over the left field fence.

It seemed like it was going to be a walk in the rose garden for the Hawks, but Nelson had other ideas.

The 6-foot-6 lefty freshman shook off the round-tripper and got out of the inning unscathed with the Hawks leaving a couple of men on base.

Through the next few innings, Bottom kept the Warriors lineup relatively quiet while Nelson did the same with getting the Hawks hitters to pop or fly out using mostly his curveball.



In the top of fourth, the Warriors broke through.

Hillen launched a two-run home run over the left field fence to give the Warriors a shock 2-1 lead. Two more runners got on base, and with one out, freshman Colby Clark drove in Trenton Buchanan with a base hit to left field to up Calhoun's lead to 3-1.

"I didn't throw a curveball until the third inning, so I think they started sitting on my fastball and that one inning they started hitting well," Bottom said. "They did a good job of hitting me and getting on base however they could."

Now on the ropes, Carrollton needed a big inning to save their season, and like all good teams, they did so in the fifth.

It started with a bit of fortune as Bowker hit a soft ground ball down the right-field line, but it was misplaced, and he was safely aboard. Kyle Waters poked a single to center field, and Nelson proceeded to throw eight straight balls to walk the bases loaded with no outs. After a mound visit, Bottom drove in Bowker on a sacrifice fly tying it up at 3-3.

Nelson would not survive the inning as he issued another walk and Drew Baalman relieved him.

“Regional championship putting in a freshman out there, I thought did a pretty good job. Corey’s going to be a good one for us,” Longnecker said. “Today was kinda microcosm of every time he pitched this year. He faced some tough competition but had that one inning where things go south. Once he gets older he’s not going to let that get to him; he’s got a bright future.”

Brannan came up with the bases loaded again and drove in the go-ahead run with an RBI single. It was 5-3 after Baalman plucked Tyler Barnett in the back. With the Hawks sensing game-breaking hit, Garrett Settles delivered with a three-run double that just landed fair down the left field line. That gave Carrollton an 8-3 lead.

“Just make contact,” Brannan said on his approach to the at-bat. “Those guys did their jobs of getting on base so it was my job to get a run in, put this lead-up and that’s what we did. After that, we kept rolling.”

Next up was Bowker and nearly went yard, but he’d settle for an RBI double. Two batters later Walker drove him in with an RBI triple.

“Last year against Nokomis we were down in the last inning, and we came back and won. I think we kind of thought about that and how we could come back. All year we’ve been hitting well, especially these last few games,” Carrollton pitcher Kolten Bottom said. “We trusted our bats and ourselves, and I think we all knew we could come back and win.”

Gabe Jones came in to protect the 10-3 lead in the top of the sixth but started out shaky giving up another home run to Hillen, which just got over the center field fence. Buchanan and Nelson reached base, but Jones would retire the next six batters to close the game.

Carrollton’s opponent on Wednesday is the 2017 1A Runners-up the Valmeyer Pirates. The Pirates eliminated the Hawks last season at Greenville in the sectional finals by a score of 7-4. Both teams will see familiar faces because most of their rosters featured juniors who are seniors now.

“We may have as a tough opponent as we’ll have in the entire postseason, but bring them on,” Krumwiede said. “We want to play the best to be the best.”

















THURSDAY AREA REGIONAL BASEBALL SUMMARIES

IHSA CLASS 1A BASEBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

HARDIN-CALHOUN REGIONAL SEMIFINAL

HARDIN-CALHOUN 1, MORRISONVILLE 0 (8 INNINGS): Hardin-Calhoun scored the game's only run in the top of the eighth as the Warriors eliminated Morrisonville 1-0 in eight innings. The Warriors moved into the final at 15-19 on the year.

Ty Bick, Trent Buchanan, Grant Gilman, Colby Clark and A.J. Hillen went 1-for-3 for the Warriors on the day; Chandler Sievers went the distance for the win, striking out 10 and conceding four hits.

METRO EAST LUTHERAN REGIONAL SEMIFINAL

METRO EAST LUTHERAN 5, BUNKER HILL 4: A Darion Brooks single brought in Daniel Shimkus as Metro East Lutheran advanced to the final of their IHSA Class 1A regional Saturday with a 5-4 win over Bunker Hill Thursday. The Knights went to 9-13 on the season with the win, while the Minutemen were eliminated at 5-11.