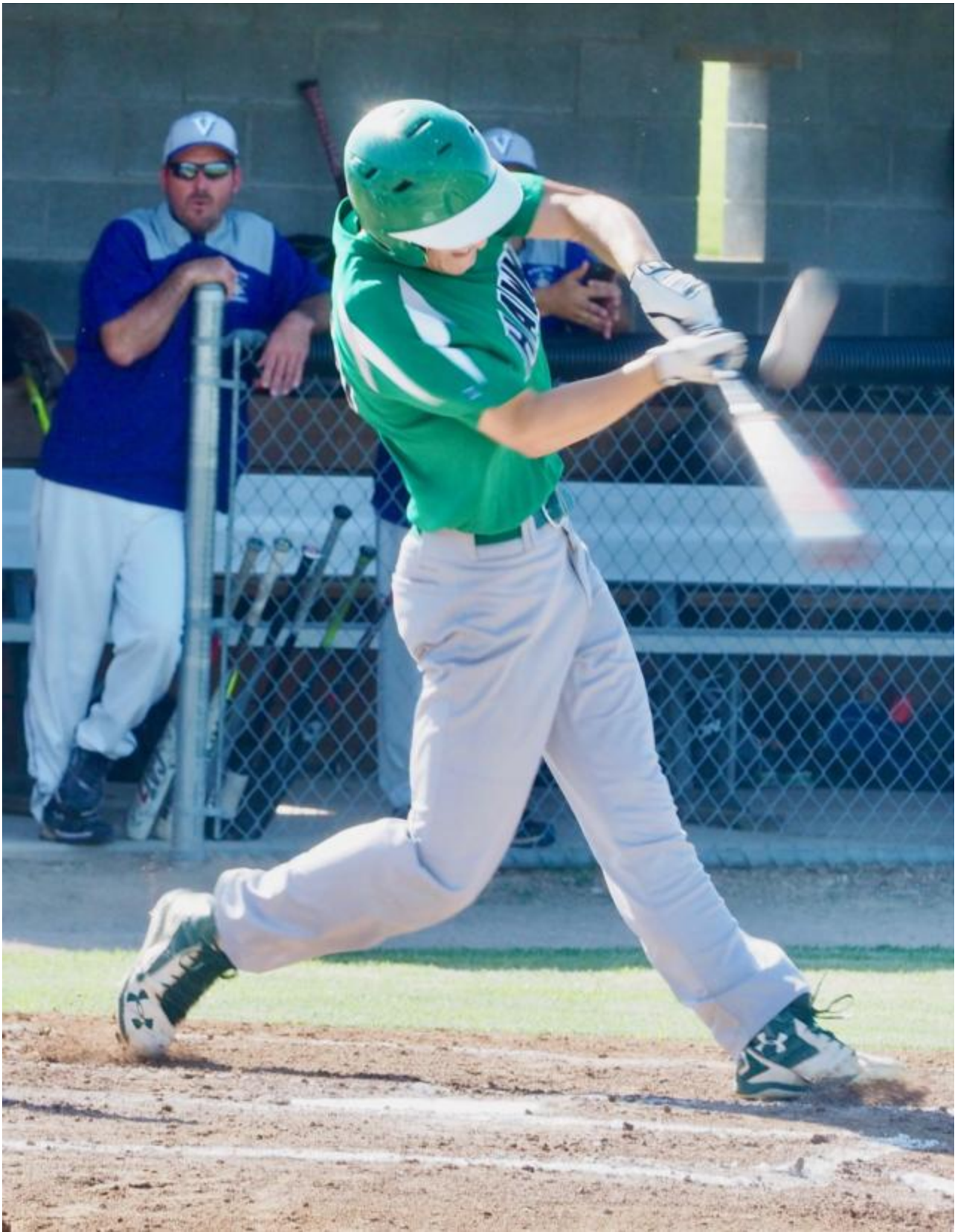


Three-run first inning dooms Carrollton in sectional semifinals loss to Valmeyer

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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GREENVILLE - Playoff baseball is a strange creature.

There are many ways to win or lose.

Wednesday for the Carrollton Hawks it was the first inning that ultimately did them in against arguably the most talented top to bottom Class 1A team, the Valmeyer Pirates.

A couple of mistakes and mental errors from the Hawks, plus some good hitting by the Pirates led to a 3-0 first inning and eventually defeated Carrollton 9-0 in the Greenville Sectional Semifinals on Wednesday afternoon.

“We had a bad game. The thing about it is we couldn’t score anyway,” Carrollton coach Jeff Krumwiede said. “Defensively we had a lot of mistakes, and we weren’t sharp.”

It’s the second season in a row Carrollton’s season was ended at the hands of Valmeyer. They dropped a 7-4 decision in the sectional finals on this very field and against the same opposing pitcher.

That would be lefty super sophomore, Philip Reinhardt.

He came in with a record 4-2 but sported a 1.42 E.R.A. in 48.3 innings of work.

“Reinhardt’s that good,” Krumwiede said. “Give Reinhardt and Valmeyer credit. They’re a nice team. We knew we had to come down here and play our best game to beat them and we didn’t.”

The sophomore tossed six innings of shutout baseball giving up three hits and striking out six while walking one.

Carrollton had another sophomore, Ethan Brannan. He pitched six and one-third innings of work striking out one and walked four.

“I told him he had a great game. We let him down in the first inning, no doubt about it,” Krumwiede said. “Who knows? he’s toe-to-toe with the team who got second last year.

A lot of things have to happen, but maybe it's Brannan against Reinhardt for two more years."

"He's as good as anyone else," Blake Struble said. "I'd trust any of us going into that game. He did a great job holding them to three runs. We just couldn't get the runs across."

At the plate, Brannan was the Hawks best hitter going 2-for-3.

Valmeyer's Michael Chism was 4-for-4 with three RBI. Cole Juelfs was 3-for-5, and Tyler Kempfer went 2-for-4.

In the first, Chism led off and got on base via an infield error then Juelfs knocked a double to left-center field. Next up, Jake Krekel hit a ground ball to Kyle whose throw to home plate had Chism beat, but he managed to evade Hayden Stringer's tag with an excellent slide.

A past ball scored Juelfs to give the Pirates a 2-0 lead.

The Hawks caught a break moments later as Reinhardt flew out to Nathan Walker who fired a laser to home plate that beat Krekel, but once again he avoided Stringer's initial tag, however this time he missed the plate and Stringer tagged him out.

Next up was Jacob Rowold who lofted a high fly ball to left field, but Garrett Settles never picked up the flight of the ball, losing it in the sun. The ball bounced yards behind him, and as a result, the Pirates picked up another run making it 3-0.

Reinhardt proved that a three-run lead was more than enough for him, but he would eventually get into some trouble.

In the bottom of the fifth, Reinhardt plunked Stringer with a pitch then Brannan beat out a throw from Juelfs for an infield hit to put two on with no outs. Reinhardt bared down and got Tyler Barnett and Settles to hit ground balls to the left side of the infield for force outs at third base. Alex Bowker forced a walk to load the bases, but Reinhardt struck out Waters to escape unscathed.

"The first inning kinda got us down, but after that, we couldn't get anything going," Struble said. "We had runners in scoring position, but couldn't get anything across. They played better and beat us.

Valmeyer took any hope of a late-inning Carrollton rally out by plating six runs in the seventh. With one out and the bases loaded, Chism broke the game open with a three-

run double. Two batters later, Reinhardt who was hitless in his first four at-bats, helped himself with a two-run single.

Carrollton's season finishes at 25-9, and it also marks the end for one of the best classes to ever play in the Hawks program. Seniors Tyler Barnett, Kolten Bottom, Alex Bowker, Hayden Stringer, Blake Struble, and Kyle Waters left a legacy highlighted by a record of 98-31-1 and four regional championships. Additionally, they've been the WIVC South champions for the past three seasons.

"That's a pretty good mark. Regional championships, conference championships. There's a lot to be proud," Krumwiede said. "I hope that's what they'll be able to focus on as we go on. One or two of the seniors is a little disappointed, but most of them are heady kids and knew this day would come. It's a bitter pill to swallow, but they know how fantastic their careers have been and how much they have to be proud of. They'll always have their era that they went through and it was a terrific four years."

"That's what you always try to do when you play high school sports. You want people to remember you, and I think with our class everyone will," Struble said. "We played hard all four years, won several regional championships and unfortunately we never made it out of the sectionals... It was just a fun and enjoyable time here."

The Hawks will have a lot of rebuilding to do with the massive graduation loss, but there are signs of some good things to come. Juniors Gabe Jones and Walker are two three-year starters and Brannan, although not the No. 1 starting pitcher, finished the season with a 5-1 record.

"I told Ethan we got to get better of him one of these days and hopefully it'll be the next two years. Ethan's got that opportunity and showed today he belongs," Krumwiede said. "We've got some dedicated kids and a lot of pitchers coming back. We're going to have a chance to be back here again, but we're gonna have to work hard."







