



Area WIVC Week One Preview

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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***#5 Carrollton Hawks vs. Triopia Trojans
(Game of the Week)***

Location: Carrollton High School

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Last Meeting: Week 1 (8/25/17), 39-30

Carrollton

The Hawks are coming off another impressive season finishing 10-2 quarterfinalists. They could've easily been a lot different had they not scored 20 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to beat Triopia last year in the first game. A number of key players return from that classic. Quarterback Hunter Flowers, all-conference running back and linebacker Byron Holmes, all-state wide receiver Nathan Walker and another receiver Zach Flowers who caught the first touchdown of the season for the Hawks in that game. Flowers and Walker put up gaudy numbers through the air and announced their arrival against the Trojans. Flowers threw for over 2,000 yards and 34 touchdowns while Walker caught over 1,500 yards and 15 touchdowns. Much more will be expected out of the Flowers and Walker this year being a year older.

Triopia went in a different direction and finished 4-5 missing out on the playoffs. This year the Trojans will be expected to not only claim a playoff spot but make a run at the WIVC North title. Coached by recently inducted Hall of Famer, Brad Thompson, Triopia returns the core of their team and have 14 seniors who either started and experienced a good amount of playing time. They have two big-time players who're running backs and three-year starters, Zach Thompson and Michael Burns. The pair combined for 24 touchdowns and over 1,800 rushing yards last season while both averaged over five yards per carry. Zach Rouland (6-3, 250 lbs), who rushed for 440 yards as a fullback last season, will move into the trenches as an offensive tackle. Quarterback Shawn Bell threw for 557 yards with four touchdowns and seven interceptions while completing 29-of-57 passes (50.9%). He also has the capabilities of being a durable runner.

Chances are a lot both teams will produce plenty of points.

Carrollton's defense has tended to struggle during the past three season openers, particularly in the front seven. Triopia will undoubtedly test the Hawks defensive line from the get-go with Burns and Thompson getting their share of handoffs. Carrollton will remember last year's defensive frailties and have prepared for Triopia's wing-t offense, but more than likely the Trojans will put some points up on the board.

On the other side, Triopia has to find a way to slow down the Hawks high-octane spread offense. Hunter Flowers understandably started off shaky in his first career start, throwing two interceptions in the first half of the game last year. However, come the second half he settled into a groove. He's a year older now and knows what to expect. So do the likes of Walker, Zach Flowers, and Garrett Settles who will start as the third receiver and played on defense last year. The big question mark for Carrollton is how stable their offensive line will be, having graduated most of their starters? The Trojans will have Burns and Thompson in the secondary along with returning linebackers, Rouland, Austin Gaines, and Connor Bridgewater.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we have some shootouts coming out of the gate. Our next 11 going up against our defense is not going to be the quality we'll face in week one," Carrollton head coach Nick Flowers said. are going to be confident. I would say that could be one of our toughest ball games. I can't remember the last time we had an opener that I felt like was going to be an easy game, but we're looking for the challenge. I'm glad we play them down here."

Calhoun Warriors vs. #4 Camp Point (Central) Panthers

Location: Central High School

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Last Meeting: Week 1 (8/25/17), 16-14 OT Calhoun

Much like Carrollton, the Warriors will have their work cut out for them today as they make a two-hour drive up to Camp Point to face the No. 4 ranked team in Class 1A. It's a place Calhoun won't mainly be fond of since it's the same location where their 2017 season ended with a 30-12 loss in the first round of the playoffs. However, rewind nine weeks, and it was the Warriors coming out victorious in overtime.

Entering his eighth season at Central, Brad Dixon posts an outstanding 64-16 record. This season could potentially be the best and deepest team (58 players) he's ever had, which is saying a lot. The Panthers, who run a wing-t offense, return all of their backfield from last year who gained over 2,000 yards. Leading the pack is speedy all-stater Cole Williams who rushed 1,146 yards, 13 touchdowns and averaged 8.6 yards a carry. Chayse Houston carried the ball 93 times with 676 yards, six touchdowns and 7.3 yards per carry. Fullback, Noah Strohkirch gained 633 yards with five touchdowns and averaged six yards per carry. Quarterback Eric Jones threw for 557 yards with eight touchdowns and two interceptions while completing 38% of his passes.

Calhoun, who runs the triple-option, lost their leading rushers to graduation, but whoever carries the rock will have a sharp line to run through. It'll no doubt be a massive test for sophomore quarterback Corey Nelson starting the first varsity game of

his career. Calhoun head coach Aaron Elmore stated that the Warriors would throw the ball at least a little more than usual given Nelson's throwing ability along with his 6-foot-7 frame. Defensively, Calhoun might be more set up regarding returning players with linebackers Cody Lamarsh, A.J. Hillen, and Trey Hart to go with Trenton Buchanan, Brad Rose, and Trenton Eickmeyer on the line.

The Warriors tend to start off seasons well defensively. They'll most likely have a bigger line than Central's, but with running backs like Williams and Houston getting to the edges could be quite challenging to stop. Offensively the Warriors could be in for a long night against an experienced Panthers defense with a new quarterback and backfield. If Calhoun can keep the score low, then they have a chance to pull off one of the biggest upsets in the state.

"We felt like we made some tremendous amount of mistakes in the first round last year we played them, which was uncharacteristic of us. We weren't very happy about that," Elmore said. "We know what kind of talent they have coming back, but have some talent coming back. I think it's going to be a game we can win, but I'm sure they're thinking the same thing. It should be a good game."

North Greene Spartans vs. Routt Catholic Rockets

Location: Illinois College (England Stadium)

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Last Meeting: Week 1 (8/25/17), 27-26 OT Routt

It'll be hard to find a more anticipated match between two teams who in 2017 went a combined 1-17. The one win was Routt's 27-26 overtime victory over North Greene in week one. This could quite possibly be an emotionally charged opening game for the Spartans. They'll be facing off against the man who departed the program after one season, Barry Creviston. Additionally, Routt gained attention during the offseason by co-oping with Springfield Lutheran much to the displeasure of a hefty amount WIVC followers. After the first voting process concluded, the co-op didn't pass. Later on, a second vote was held, and it went through after North Greene changed their vote from a no to a yes. That was Creviston and less than a month later he was named as head coach and athletic director to the Catholic high school in Jacksonville.

The Spartans are now led by rookie head coach Donnie Allen, who formerly was the defensive coordinator at North Mac and for a short while on the Routt coaching staff along with Creviston before taking the North Greene job. He inherits a team who've gone 3-24 in their last three seasons, but optimism is swirling around the Spartans, for now. North Greene will be able to rely on more senior leadership this season with 11, and their main strength is their line on offense. Brad Woolsey (6-5, 242 lbs), Cade VanMeter (6-4, 234 lbs), Dylan Gaffney (6-0, 260 lbs), and sophomore Owen Baird (6-

2, 242) will step in. Kaiden Heberling is a dual-threat quarterback with Carter Hoseman being his favorite target.

The Rockets have a roster of 26 players, including three from Springfield Lutheran, but boast some good athletes. Jared Plunk returns at quarterback has thrown for over 1,000 yards in 2017. His primary receiver, Alex Cosgriff returns. The defense could be the Rockets strong suit having returned key athletic players.

“Even before Crevy left and went up there, that’s one of those games the kids want. It’s one of those teams,” Allen said. “It’s going to be emotional for me because I had a little for those kids too. I have a lot of respect for coach Creviston. I give him a lot of credit for believing in me. I like the fact that he could see in the potential that I had. I appreciate everything he did for me.”

“On the other hand, I’m going to love getting a W at IC on opening night. That would be great,” Allen said. “We’re not going to focus on the win. We’re going to focus on making sure we do our jobs. My job is to put the kids in good positions. As far as the hype around the game it’s going to be a lot more in the bleachers than it is going to be on the field.”

Greenfield-Northwestern Tigers vs. Unity/Payson Mustangs

Location: Greenfield High School (Fleur de Lis Field)

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Last Meeting: Week 1 (8/25/17), 32-14 Unity

The Tigers were full of confidence going into Mendon last year, and they were slapped with a 32-14 victory and ultimately fell short of a playoff berth. This time around they don’t have to make the two-hour bus trip up instead the Mustangs do to the always lavishing Fleur de Lis Field.

Greenfield-NW will have to replace three-year starter Jacob Foiles on both sides of the ball and this season head coach Joe Pembroke has suggested that the Tigers will try and beat teams using their speed. A player to watch is sophomore Denver Davenport who showed impressive athleticism last season as a freshman. Two juniors, Blake Bettis and Collin Grummel, will be the two running backs along with sophomore fullback Doug Mcwhorter. Senior Zane Thomson was a quarterback last season with over 500 yards but could utilize elsewhere on offense.

Conner McLaughlin kicks off his second season as the Mustangs head coach. They went 4-5 last season and had expectations for a place in the Class 2A playoffs this season as the Mustangs return linemen Collin Gross, Chris Ulrich, Grayson Lewis and P.J. Hildebrand. The quarterback position is up for grabs after Taylor Klusemeyer graduated,

but starting wide receiver, Luke Jansen returns as does back up running back from last year Skyler Hagerbaumer. Unity/Payson looks good on defense as they return eight starters from last year.

“We don’t have to make that long bus trip. That’ll be good,” Pembroke said. “They’re very athletic, well coached. They have good size. They surprised us, but I think a hand full of people last year with the season they put together. We know that they’re going to be a formidable opponent and a good week one challenge for us. Hopefully, we’ll be able to answer the bell.”