

Up-tempo Hawks primed for turnaround 2018-19 season

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - Year No. 2 has arrived in Matt Goetten's tenure as the head basketball coach of the Carrollton Hawks, his alma mater.

A season ago, he was a rookie head coach with one of the youngest and inexperienced groups of players around. It was always going to be uphill, especially when the WIVC had five teams finish with 20 or more victories.

The Hawks finished with a 10-16 record, their worst since the 2005-2006 season, but there was a visible light on the horizon as the season concluded last February. The Hawks open the season tonight as they host the Southwestern Birds (2-2) which will be broadcasted live on Riverbender.com.

"It was a tough year for us," Goetten said. "It was a meat-grinder of a schedule for us most of the way and even though I had high expectations for the guys. Looking back at that I'm not sure I could anticipate the strength of that schedule, I can't remember a time when the WIVC was such a good conference from top-to-bottom. All I could say to the parents was we would be better in February than we were in November. I think the regional kind of bore that out."

This season could see Carrollton's fortunes from a year ago turn completely around.

The Hawks return their top four leading scorers and the vast majority of their roster, including seniors Gabe Jones (6-3) and Nathan Walker (6-1), and juniors Ethan Brannan (5-10) and Hunter Flowers (6-2).

“It’s been better this year than it was last year. They’ve come in hungry with a year under their belt. I’ve seen a lot of positive things,” Goetten said. “Yes, we were young, but a lot of people are young. It was the inexperience on the varsity level. We graduated seven seniors the year before, and those guys had no varsity experience.”

Brannan, Jones, and Walker’s best sport is arguably baseball while Flowers was named to the IHSFCA Class 1A All-State team as a quarterback and Walker made the list as a wide receiver last year.

Goetten is fully aware of the kind of players he has at his disposal. His goal is to get the best out of their athleticism by pressuring opponents up and down the court 32 minutes.

“There’s no mystery to what we’re trying to do. We’re trying to pressure you and turn turnovers into points. That’s the style of play you’ll see from us this year. We’re not afraid to get into a track meet,” Goetten said. “We’re trying to cash in on having the athletes maybe not the basketball guys. It’s been trying to get those guys who are so athletic to do the things that they can do well. We like to get up and down, and the guys like playing that way and when it goes right it’s really beautiful to watch.”

Goetten anticipates the Hawks will go nine-to-ten deep on their bench and rotate in players more frequently to keep them fresh.

While the Hawks will be more seasoned this time around, Jones and Walker are the lone seniors. Jones averaged 14 points and five rebounds a game while Walker totaled six and four per contest. Goetten expects the duo to be more significant impacts than last year.

“Nate’s a tremendous athlete. He’s got a gear that I’ve never seen on the basketball court, and I’ve watched basketball for 40 years. When he gets to the rim he can finish,” Goetten said. “Add Gabe who is arguably the best athlete on the team. You put those pieces together, that’s my job to try and fit them in the right sequence. When they’re clicking together, and we’ve seen that at times in practice it is scary looking.”

Brannan was one of the top performing sophomores in the Riverbender area a season ago. He averaged ten points, three rebounds, two assists and two steals per game. The junior point guard, who sat out most of the football season due to a leg injury, is healthy as are most of the other football players coming off their season.

“I ask so much of Ethan Brannan. He almost set a single steal record for us as a sophomore. I challenged him this year to break that record,” Goetten said. At the same time as our primary ball-handler, he’s gotta work on both ends a lot, and I need him to score more than he did last year. He’s moved his range out the three-point line a little further and looking really good at getting to the rim.”

One of the few basketball-only athletes on the team is six-foot-three junior forward Jacob Graner. After a successful offseason, he is expected to have a starter's role.

“He’s added some muscle. He’s been in the weight room a lot of over the summer. He’s been doing a lot of shooting and pick up games, and it’s showing,” Goetten said. “He’s a kid that by mid-season I think a lot of people will be scouting to stop Jacob.”

Forward Hunter Flowers returns after missing the second half of the season predominantly due to undergoing surgery on his left shoulder. He averaged ten points a game and is another player that Goetten labeled as a “tremendous athlete.”

Junior guard Garrett Settles (5-10) started numerous games and earned significant minutes off the bench late in the season last year.

Carrollton’s biggest weakness last season was arguably their inconsistency to put the ball in the basket. There were games where the Hawks would go long periods with no field goals, but Goetten has already seen improvements in practice. However, he pointed out that they won’t truly find out until the regular season starts.

“Does that translate into a game? You never know. You gotta play the game,” Goetten said. “So far in practice, I’ve got some guys shooting the ball better than what we saw last year.”



