

Second half comeback by the Lady Hawks stuns Routt in regional championship

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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GREENFIELD - Even when the script was being read, the Carrollton Lady Hawks never panicked.

They were neck and neck with the vaunted Routt Catholic Rockets at halftime. Then the Rockets surged ahead with a quick 8-0 run to take an eight-point lead in the third quarter. With doubt starting to creep in, Carrollton would hold Routt scoreless, gained back some momentum and then played out of their minds for the final nine minutes of the game.

The Lady Hawks overtook the Rockets by outscoring them 24-10 in the fourth quarter and upset the No. 3 team in the Illinois AP Class 1A rankings 45-36 to claim the Greenfield Regional championship on Thursday night.

“I’m so proud of these girls and the fight they had,” Carrollton head coach Blaine Hartwick said. “I don’t feel like we’ve ever really put a full four quarters together. The third quarter was tough for us, but we hung around and gave ourselves a chance in the fourth quarter.”

Carrollton, who previously lost to Routt 51-34 three weeks ago, came into the game with a nothing-to-lose attitude and that mindset was a constant throughout.

“We knew coming into this we were the underdog and had nothing to lose,” Carrollton senior Hannah Krumwiede said. “We needed to put all the pressure on them. We did a great job of working as hard as we can and getting every rebound and every loose ball and wanting everything. All we had to do was put everything out there, and there was a chance for us. This was definitely the funnest game I’ve ever played in.”

Carrollton senior forward Marley Mullink scored game-high 20 points. Junior guard Libby Meuth followed with 13, Krumwiede added nine and Ava Uhles chipped in five.

“It’s a great feeling,” Mullink said. “I didn’t want it to be over, and neither did the rest of our team, and we all came together, and we wanted another. Defense is my strong suit, but my offense just came tonight, and I was really happy about it.”

With the Rockets superior size advantage, the Lady Hawks had to be creative offensively to break down Routt’s man-to-man defense.

“Credit Libby. She kept taking the ball to the hole. Marley was a beast inside as well,” Hartwick said. “They found that middle . They couldn’t quite get to the basket, but just stopping right there in the middle and open things up.”

Despite a dominating regular season, Routt’s year comes to a close at 27-4.

5-foot-10 junior forward Bella McCartney led the Rockets with 12 points. Junior point guard Lacey Schierl tallied 11 points, and Kirsten Huffman added nine all on three-pointers. 6-foot-2 center Annika Black was held to four points and battled foul trouble in the first half.

Carrollton was forced to double-team the likes of Black and McCartney whenever they touched the ball in the paint and gave them fits all game long. That was the poison they picked to defend Routt, and by doing so, they left Huffman, Schierl, and Kaitlyn Horney open for three-pointers. They made enough to give them leads and cut deficits, but never a knock out blow.

“I told the girls it’s just one of those nights,” Routt head coach Joe Eilering said. “Our shots didn’t fall like they normally do. It wasn’t from a lack of effort. We gave it all we had, and all anyone can ask of anyone is give it all you got, and we laid it on the line, and we fell short tonight. It was a fabulous season. 27-4 is a great year.”

Routt’s other 6-foot-2 center, Katie Abell who’s been nursing an ankle injury for the last couple of weeks made two short appearances in the final seconds of the first and second halves. The game very well might have been different with her at 100 percent, but Eilering would not make any excuses.

“It’s a terrible way for a senior to end her year,” Eilering said of Abell’s injury. “We were really hoping to get back home and have a couple more days of rehab. It just wasn’t meant to be.”

Carrollton trailed early on at 7-3, but Mullink knocked down a pair of three’s another field goal to kick start a 10-3 Lady Hawks run as they took a 13-10 second quarter lead. With Black on the bench with two fouls, Carrollton had all the momentum, but Routt’s defensive intensity stepped up as did McCartney on offense. She scored all eight of the Rockets points in the quarter and gave them an 18-16 lead, but the Lady Hawks got a vital basket right before halftime after they forced a steal and Mullink made an uncontested layup to tie it at 18 all.

In the first two minutes of the second half, it seemed as though Routt would rise up and take the game by storm.

Black gave them the lead on a short-range shot then Schriel and Huffman made back-to-back three-pointers that made Hartwick call a timeout as Routt led 26-18. That timeout was more of a group therapy session as Hartwick wanted the momentum to die down and get his players relaxed.

“It happened to us a few weeks ago when we went up ,” Hartwick said. “For whatever reason, we just couldn’t score in the third quarter against them. That three at the end of the third that Hannah had changed the momentum. Luckily we didn’t fold like we did up there and were able to stay in it here. I called that timeout and got them settled down. I told the girls to just get together, relax, and we’ll be fine, and we were.”

The timeout worked as the Lady Hawks wouldn’t allow the Rockets any more points for the rest of the quarter. A big reason was the defensive work of Mullink and Uhles down in the paint who helped deny and then rebound almost every shot in the second half and not allowing second-chance opportunities like in the first half.

“I had to box out, keep them out of and just deal with their tallness,” Uhles said. “I have some bruises. I got hit in the eye when I was getting a rebound. I wasn’t nervous. I knew we could stop them.”

With time winding down in the third quarter, the Lady Hawks recovered a loose ball and Krumwiede, Carrollton’s most explosive offensive weapon was wide open in the corner and drained a three to cut the Routt lead to 26-21 heading into the fourth frame. That gave Carrollton some momentum.

“That was big,” Krumwiede said. “I knew at halftime I needed to start scoring because they’re going to shut other people down and I have to step up. That started to get us going again.”

“I felt like we were finally playing,” Eilering said. “I didn’t feel like we had them, but I thought, “ok here we go, we’re going to make a run.” Shoot, we didn’t score again for the next six minutes or so, and we only gave up three points in the third quarter. I felt pretty good, but nothing would fall and give credit. They just kept coming back.”

After both teams traded baskets, the Lady Hawks made their run. Buckets by Krumwiede, Mullink, and Uhles gave Carrollton the lead again. Another score by Mullink made it 31-28 with 3:41 to play.

Routt would answer.

A layup by McCartney and another trey by Huffman put the Rockets back on top, but Meuth had other ideas. She tied the game by making a scoop shot by having to make a

mid-air adjustment near the basket and then made two free throws to give Carrollton the lead for good at 35-33.

A three-pointer by Schriel cut the lead to 37-36 with 48 seconds to play, but the Lady Hawks broke Routt's full-court trap, and Mullink was able to convert a layup as she was fouled for an and-one and made the free throw to go up 40-36. She and Krumwiede made four more free throws to ice the game.

Carrollton improves to 19-11 on the season. They move onto the Jacksonville (Routt) Sectional Semifinals and awaits the winner of the Lebanon Regional championship between Okawville and Lebanon.

"I told these girls when I was in high school the Lady Hawks always won a regional," Hartwick said. To be able to get back-to-back regionals that's what I told them, let's go get it done. That's the tradition of our program. To be able to beat a top-notch team like this, the sky's the limit now for us to see where we can go."





