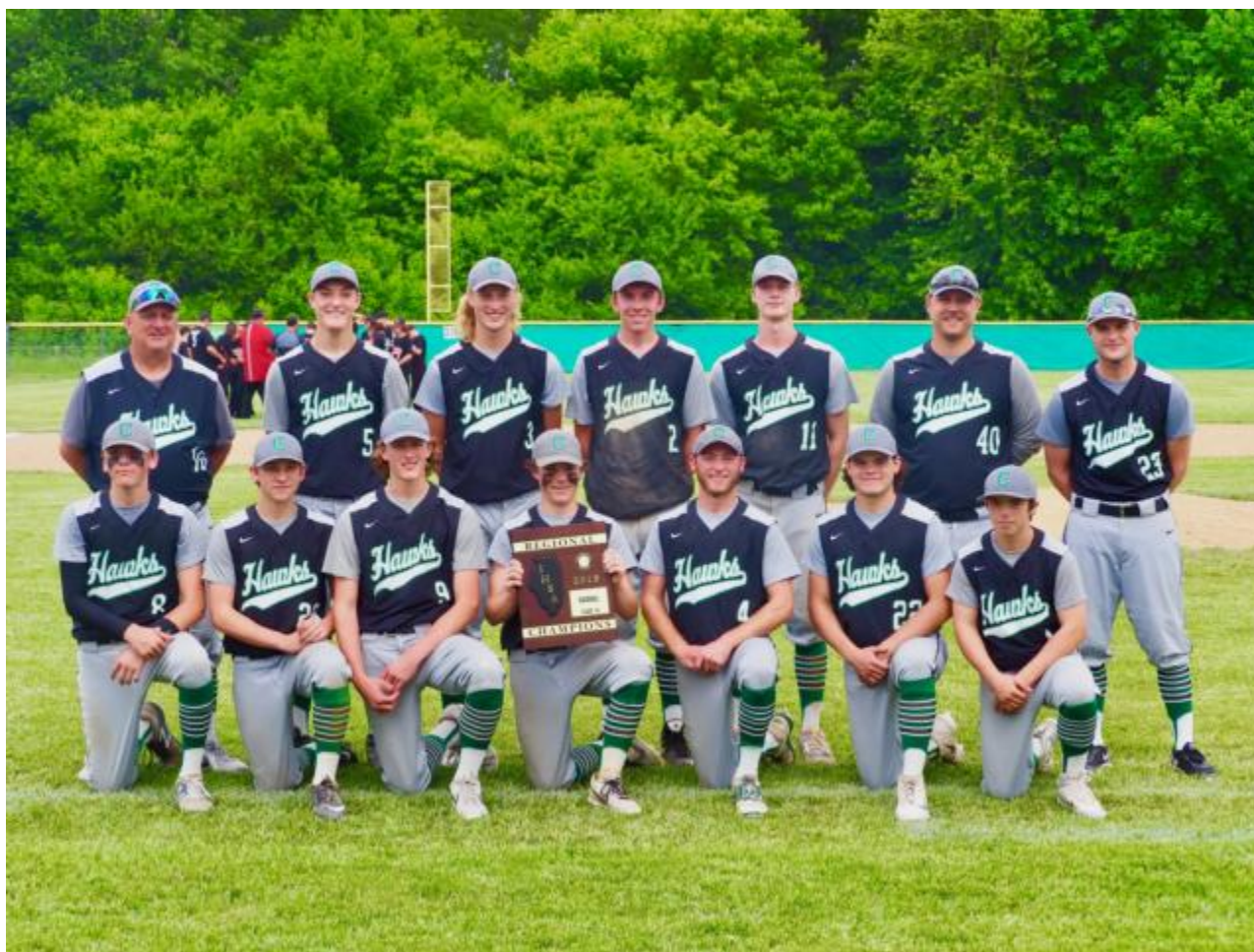


Hawks Fourth-Inning Rally Boosts Them to Fifth Straight Regional Title

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CARROLLTON - Nathan Walker was forced to live up to his reputation.

Walker and the Carrollton were holding onto a 1-0 lead against the Bunker Hill Minutemen in the top of the fourth inning. Hawks head coach, Jeff Krumwiede pulled starting pitcher Gabe Jones with no outs and the bases loaded for Bunker Hill. The two-time all-state outfielder had to come to the rescue on the mound.

He calmly struck out the next three batters and not to be outdone; Walker swatted a two-run double in the bottom half of the inning to help Carrollton build up a five-run inning.

That proved to be the dagger and led the Hawks to a 10-0 victory over the Minutemen in six to claim the Class 1A Carrollton Regional championship and Saturday afternoon.

“Garrett got us started, and we were able to capitalize on some opportunities later in the game,” Walker said. “Pitching-wise my curveball was working better than it normally is, so that’s good. I could find the strike zone. I don’t know what it was today, but I could really put a lot of spin on it, and they just weren’t hitting it.”

“Talk about taking care of business, he comes in and strikes out the side with the bases loaded and nobody out,” Krumwiede said. “He hits big for us, pitches big for us. The catch he made in centerfield was tremendous. He’s a bonafide all-stater. I don’t care if it’s 1A, 2A, or 3A, he’s an all-stater, and he showed it today. That’s what a leader does.”

Bunker Hill’s season ends at 10-11, and it’s the third time in four years they’ve had their season ended by Carrollton. Coincidentally, the Hawks beat them 10-0 as well in the regional championship in 2016.

Despite pitching three full innings, Gabe Jones picked up the victory and brought his record 6-2. He struck out three batters, walked three and gave up two hits, and no runs. He did, however, prevent two runs from scoring in the top of the second when he snagged a line drive out of the air off the bat of Evan Morris to end the inning. Jones admitted he didn’t know how he caught it.

“I’ve only caught a ball like one other time in my life. Those you don’t know how you catch them. You have no reaction time on those,” Jones said. “They go straight into your glove and just squeeze as soon as you feel the ball. You just get lucky, to be honest.”

In the next inning, Braden Morris lofted a deep fly ball to left center field, forcing Walker to run a long way, but ultimately made a running catch on the warning track.

The Hawks scored ten runs on nine hits against Jacob Weidman, who was on two days rest after pitching three innings on Thursday against Calhoun.

However, Weidman was no slouch in the early going. He retired the first five Carrollton batters but plunked Hunter Flowers in the back to give Garrett Settles a chance for a two-out rally. On a 2-2 pitch, Settles hit a high fly ball off the left-field fence that scored Flowers to make it a 1-0 Carrollton lead.

After Walker got the Hawks out of their bases jam, they started to get runners on base, but their hitting parade began in large part to a big break.

With two outs, freshman second baseman, Kohl Smith chopped a grounder to third base, but Devon Ralston’s short-hopped his throw and A.J. Birdsong couldn’t gather it. Smith was safe, and Ethan Brannan scored to make it 2-0. After Curtis Lake drew a walk, freshman catcher, Grant Pohlman pulled a two-run double down just inside the third

base line scoring Smith and Lake. Two batters later, Walker roped another two-run double to left center field to give Carrollton a commanding 6-0 lead.

“The momentum was completely on their side. Nate comes in and does a great job. He strikes out the side, and it was unbelievable. I’m so proud of him,” Jones said. “When the bats came alive, it was a really fun experience to be apart of that dugout, and we were going crazy.”

“We got the Brannan blooper into left field, and all the ice was broken, and the proverbial lid was off,” Krumwiede said. “After that our line drives found holes and we started getting some breaks.”

Eight of Walker’s nine outs were via the strikeout and gave up two walks and no hits through three innings.

Carrollton ended the game in the sixth inning scoring four more runs that all came from the three seniors, Jones, Lake, and Walker. Jones put the icing on the cake by driving in Pohlman and Walker for the game-winning hit followed by Krumwiede giving the senior trio the game ball.

This is now the fifth consecutive regional title the Hawks have hoisted, and the third Krumwiede has been a part of.

“It’s been a big thrill for me to be a part of it,” Krumwiede said. “We were fortunate to get awarded the regional again this year. It’s a labor of love, and I’m really glad to be a part of it.”

Pohlman, Jones, and Walker all went 2-for-4 at the plate with Walker driving in three runs. Cole Kiffmeyer and Coy Sellars collected the only two hits for the Minutemen.

Carrollton moves onto the Greenville Sectional Semifinals where they’ll meet the Valmeyer Pirates (19-14), who defeated New Athens 4-1 earlier before the game. This will be the third season in a row the two sides have matched up in the sectionals, and both times the Pirates came out on top winning 7-4 in 2017 and 9-0 last year.

“Valmeyer’s ended our season two years in a row. I think would tell you they would want another shot at them,” Krumwiede said. “That doesn’t mean we’re going to beat them and it doesn’t mean we’re going to be cocky about it. We’ve really had our hearts broken the last two years, and we’re hoping we can do something for those alumni that graduated that weren’t able to get over that hump.”

“This one means a lot being my senior year,” Walker said. “I’m ready for Valmeyer. Hopefully, we can finally beat them.”













