

# Hawks Battle Lena-Winslow To The End In Class 1A State Championship Football Game

by John Hough  
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DEKALB - Nick Flowers knew his players were going to be in the fight of their lives against a team who out-sized them in the trenches just like in 2014 in the state championship.

So did Ethan Harrellson and Kyle Leonard who both had older brothers (Trenton Harrellson and Cody Leonard) on that 13-1 team.

“I know how they feel now,” Harrellson said.

The Carrollton Hawks found ways to challenge the Lena-Winslow Panthers in a variety of ways, but just like in 2014 against Forrester, they came up just a little bit short.

For the second time in seven years, the Hawks finished as state runners-up in the IHSA Class 1A state championship loss to Lena-Winslow 38-25 on a cold Friday afternoon in DeKalb at Huskie Stadium on the campus of Northern Illinois University.

The Panthers managed to capture their fifth state championship in school history all within an 11-year span (2010, 2013, 2017, 2019, 2021). They're 18-1 in the playoffs since 2017.

The Panthers were led by senior running back 5-10, senior Marey Roby's 232 rushing yards, and three touchdowns with 213 of those yards coming in the first half.

"We knew it was going to be a hard-fought physical game. I think the biggest difference in the game was their first half, Carrollton coach Nick Flowers said. "We had a hard time tackling Roby. He could move laterally just as quick, just as fast as he could downhill. We felt like we were stalemating things at the line of scrimmage and (Roby) was really cutting back and they had a nice little wall. They had one heck of a power scheme and that was definitely the difference, especially in the first half."

Despite the Hawks having trouble defensively in the first half, they countered with senior all-state 6-1, 210-pound quarterback Grant Pohlman. He finished with 156 rushing yards plus one touchdown and was 9-for-24 with 111 passing yards, two touchdowns.

"He's just a great player," Lena-Winslow head coach Ric Arand said of Pohlman. "I don't want to disregard the rest of their team, but he single-handedly put them on his shoulders and gave them a shot to win a state championship. I don't want to say he did it all alone, but without him, they wouldn't be in this position."

Lena-Winslow got on the board first to go up 6-0 on a 60-yard touchdown run by Jake Zeal and drove downfield moments later, but an interception in the end zone by Gus Coonrod gave the Hawks a much-needed lift. They then got a break on a muffed punt by Zeal recovered by Max Arnett at the Panther's 19-yard line. Carrollton capitalized as Pohlman hooked up with fellow all-stater, Kyle Leonard on an 18-yard touchdown strike, which gave the Hawks their only lead of the game at 7-6 early in the second quarter.





“It got our crowd going and got us going,” Leonard said about his touchdown reception. “It loosened up their defense to where we could find little holes to attack.”

That score was the start of a second-quarter shootout.

Roby scored his first of three touchdowns on the ensuing drive. He ran 45 yards before stepping out of bounds at the 2-yard line and on the next play found the end zone.

On the first play of the next Carrollton drive, Pohlman kept a read-option run, blasted through a hole up the middle, and scored a 63-yard touchdown. However, Flowers decided to go for two after the Panthers jumped offsides. Still, Le-Win stopped Pohlman short of the goal line to preserve their lead at 14-13 and would do so the rest of the way.

Roby replied with a stunning 45-yard touchdown run where he jukeed, and cut his way to the house, and broke multiple tackles along the way. That put Le-Win up 22-13 thanks to a two-point conversion, but the Hawks answered quickly with a 47-yard touchdown pass from Pohlman to senior Gus Coonrod with 1:54 left in the first half down 22-19.

“We talked the whole week how (Lena-Winslow) was going to give us holes out there passing-wise so we knew our passing game was going to be there,” Pohlman said. “If I could just squeeze the ball in there and let my receivers go up and get it and make plays we would have success.”

Nonetheless, Roby and the Panther's offensive line responded for a third time as he pounded his way for 47 yards to the end zone with 49 seconds left in the first half. A few plays later he intercepted Pohlman to preserve the 30-19 lead at halftime.

“(Le-Win’s) line is really good. On the offensive side they did almost perfect,” Carrollton two-way lineman Ethan Harrellson said. “Part of it was just their big strong boys to where most of us and me are technically small linemen. They can change a whole play of blocking like that on the line and that really helps them. It's hard to fight a down block coming back and they do that and go to backers. Their line wasn't just a problem for our line, it was a problem for our backers and everybody. They're good at everything.

Carrollton started out strong as their defense got a pivotal stop. Pohlman converted a 3rd and 11 from the Panther's 22-yard line down to the 5-yard line on a scramble. Three plays later he scored on a 1-yard touchdown run to trim the deficit to 30-25 with 4:51 left in the third quarter.

At that point, both teams had scored four touchdowns, but extra points decided the difference with Le-Win getting 3-of-4 two-point conversions and Carrollton failing all three of their two-point chances.

“It's pretty tough. We talk about maximizing opportunities. There were a couple of opportunities early,” Flowers said. “We got them to jump (twice) and in our minds automatically we go for two there. Lena does a good job tackle-to-tackle inside. They're definitely a run-stopping kind of team and so we had some opportunities and couldn't get it done. If we had to do it all over we would do the same thing.”

The Panthers put together a methodical drive to open the fourth quarter and scored on a 1-yard quarterback sneak by Luke Benson to go up 38-25.

With under five minutes left, Carrollton rallied and got down to the Le-Win 9-yard line, but would go no further as the Panthers broke up multiple pass attempts to force a turnover on downs and soon ran out the clock.

“It’s kind of fitting that probably the two or three best players on the field were the two or three best players on the field as they were all season long on our side and their side,” Arand said.

Carrollton’s season ends at 12-2







