

Carrollton moves to IHSA Class 1A Sectional with triumph over North Greene

by John Hough, Sports Writer
February 28 2015 10:00 PM



North Greene High School has been anything but a haven for the Carrollton Hawks in the past 20 years for regional finals.

“My family and my alumni all know about some sad things that have happened up here in regionals,” Carrollton head coach Jeff Krumwiede said.

In 1996 they lost to North Greene by six points. They lost to them again in 2005 when the Hawks and Spartans all-time leading scorers Mark Gillingham and Sean Knox, both IBCA Hall of Famers, duked it out. Then in 2010 Carrollton was defeated by West Central 47-40 on the North Greene court.

Carrollton finally ended the drought as they routed North Greene 57-31 to win the North Greene Regional championship on Friday night. It was also the third time the Hawks bested them this season.

“It’s always great when you get wins against your rivals. North Greene is a big rival of ours,” Krumwiede said.

Jacob Smith of Carrollton led all scorers with 18 points and picked the perfect time to have one the best games of his career in the biggest game of his career.

“It has been awhile for me. I haven’t been hitting shots lately, but coach is always giving me the green light,” Smith said. “I’m really happy that I can come out and play well in a big game.”

“Jacob showed a lot of leadership tonight,” Krumwiede said. “He had a very good game in a lot of ways and kind of had a fire in his eye. He took it upon himself to make things happen.”

The rest of the Carrollton quartet of high scorers was with Smith in double figures. Cody Leonard finished with 12 points, eight coming in the second half. Luke Palan and Luke Gillingham each had 11.

Elijah Barber led North Greene with 8 points. Austin Davis added 7 and Nathan Randall had 6.

The first 11 seconds of the game was dreadful for Carrollton. They won the tipoff, but it sailed out of bounds, and Randall drilled a three-pointer. Krumwiede immediately called timeout. It seemed to work as Smith drained a three-pointer that settled the Hawks down.

“I hit my first one and that really gave me all the confidence I needed,” Smith said.

The score was tied at 6 with 2:28 left in the first quarter. Carrollton took a 10-6 lead going into the second quarter and opened the game up by going on a 16-6 run to get the lead up to 26-12.

A key play that sparked it was when Leonard blocked a Spartan shot and heaved a full-court pass to Smith, who scored on a layup to ignite the run and the Carrollton supporters.

But Leonard picked up his second foul and sat out the rest of the second quarter, which swung the momentum back to North Greene.

“When Leonard came out we missed a lot of shots and didn’t get any rebounds,” Krumwiede said.

Barber almost single handedly willed the Spartans back into the game. He made two free throws, drained a trey, and made a nice assist to Davis to cut the deficit to 26-19.

The Hawks held the ball for the final 2:06 remaining, but failed to score as they sat on a 26-19 lead at halftime.

“We wanted to take their momentum away their crowd was enjoying. They came off the floor like they were up by seven and I reminded our kids that we were up by seven,” Krumwiede said. I was very comfortable with that lead.”

The second half belonged to Carrollton from the opening possession to the last.

“There was about a 12-minute stretch where we didn’t do a whole lot wrong,” Krumwiede said.

In the first half Gillingham and Smith carried the load in terms of scoring; in the second half it was Leonard and Palan’s turn to lead the attack.

“We were able to get the ball to Leonard inside and get Palan to the rim and things started to open up for us,” Krumwiede said.

Leonard and Palan combined for 12 points, six each in the third quarter as they helped build Carrollton’s lead. Palan capped the quarter by nailing a 15-foot pull up jumper at the buzzer to give the Hawks a 41-23 advantage going into the final frame.

“We’re mostly out there with four guards and those guards don’t have a lot of size. It’s hard for us sometimes if we’re not hitting from the perimeter and that’s why at halftime I wanted to go back to pounding it inside and we had success with it,” Krumwiede said.

The Hawks were razor sharp on defense in the second half, holding the Spartans starters to just three field goals in the second half.

Carrollton weren't even close to stepping off the gas pedal in the fourth quarter. They ran away with the game by going on a 16-2 run.

It was also coach Krumwiede's birthday tonight and obviously he couldn't have asked for a better present.

"It has happened a couple other times. My birthday tends to be regional week," Krumwiede said. "Knew it was on a Friday night and hoped we could make it a special one."

Carrollton (26-4) will travel to Okawville to take on the Metro East Lutheran Knights (20-10) in the sectional semifinals on Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. The Knights beat Calhoun 57-54 on Friday to advance. The Hawks defeated them three years ago in 2012 to win their previous regional championship

"They've really been on a run lately where they've played a lot better in the second half of the season," Krumwiede said. "I see it being a good battle."

North Greene's season ends at 13-16.

Since the Hawks are on the verge of a playoff run it doesn't hurt that a lot of the players on the roster were key members of Carrollton football teams the past three seasons that played in a total of 10 postseason contests. Then of course there was the 2012 Hawks basketball team that finished second in state when Leonard, Palan, and Smith were all freshman.

"We've all played pretty much in big games doing with football," Smith said. "I think we're all just really excited because us seniors were just freshman the last time we won a regional. It was a great experience getting second in state and those seniors taught us what it's like to come into every game just focused ready to play from the beginning."