

Hawks Youth Movement Leads to 4-0 Start

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - Nick Flowers knew his team had a chip on their shoulders.

Expectations were low for the Carrollton Hawks at the beginning of the season due in large part to their lack of numbers and experience. The glaringly obvious was the number of 10th-graders on the field. The Hawks start six sophomores on offense and seven on defense. That didn't stop them to continue to do what they've done consistently for over seven years: win games.

Behind a balanced offensive attack and solid defense, Carrollton is out to a 4-0 start for the second time in three years and full of confidence.

“I told the boys at the end of practice (on Wednesday night) that I don’t think some of your fans and local people were thinking you guys would be where you are right now,” Flowers said. “They’ve put in the work and the time and been believing in what they want to do and work with one another. It’s been a fun one. Being 4-0 right now we’re really happy.”

An improvement so far has been the line play and defensive presence. So far the Hawks have surrendered 16 points per contest, however, in second halves of games they’ve allowed five per game.

Before the season started, Flowers wanted his defense to be aggressive and take risks. So far it’s paying off. Sophomore lineman, Ethan Harrelson leads the team in tackles with 36 and senior defensive tackle, Chris Beiermann has 33. Senior Lucas Settles has 28 tackles with seven in the backfield.

Another thing that is proving beneficial for the defense was an offseason change in the approach to practicing. Flowers and his staff sacrificed learning sessions on offense to spend more time working on the defensive setup.

“You only get so long with the boys when it comes to practicing. What we do offensively is hard and takes so much time to get the timing of things down. Unfortunately, I probably would get accused from my coaches of taking too much practice time for offense in the past,” Flowers said. “One thing in the offseason we said is we gotta get back to hard-nosed defense. Our goal is to be aggressive and not sit back in prevent base defense. We’re going to get after people, and I’ve been very happy so far defensively.”

The offense is averaging 43 points per game with production coming all over the place.

After a slow to start to the season passing-wise, senior quarterback, Hunter Flowers has thrown ten touchdowns in the last two games to bump his overall total up to 14. He’s thrown for 974 yards and completed 59-of-83 (71%) passes with no interceptions. He’s accumulated over 1,000 total yards and 17 touchdowns halfway through the season.

Matt Retherford, the only junior on the team, is the most productive receiver with 297 yards, six touchdowns, and 15 receptions. However, Garrett Settles, Kyle Leonard, and Grant Pohlman all have over 160 receiving yards with multiple touchdown receptions.

“We’re pretty balanced between four receivers. It’s been nice to have that many guys that can make a play,” Flowers said. “Hunter’s had to adjust his playing-style a little bit. He’s had to build that trusting relationship and they’ve had to do the same with him. We’ve been able to do that and win ball games along the way.”

A 5-foot-9 sophomore running back, Angel has rushed for 253 yards on 45 carries with two touchdowns and averaging 5.6 yards per carry. He also has 146 receiving yards and a touchdown reception to add to the balanced air attack. Angel, along with improved line play, has helped the Hawks establish a respectable ground game to make life harder for opposing defenses.

“It’s only a matter of time Harley’s going to have a big-time breakout game. If teams put less guys in the box and want us to beat them with our run, we’re going to run the ball. That’s what we’re gearing for,” Flowers said. “If you’re going to cover three of our receivers with two defensive backs we’re going to pick you apart. We’re going to take what you’re going to give us.”

Pohlman is another one of the several impact sophomores. He’s been a force on all three phases. On the very first play of the season against Unity-Payson, he returned a 95-yard kickoff for a touchdown. In the next game against Brown County, he picked off two passes and returned both of them for touchdowns, including a 90-yard return. Additionally, he’s third on the team in tackles with 28 playing at linebacker.

Carrollton was tested in the first two weeks having to make the long trip to Unity but came out 40-14 winners. The next game was their home-opener against the Brown County Hornets who held a 7-1 all-time record over the Hawks. However, Carrollton broke away from an 8-8 tie in the first half by scoring 26 unanswered points, including 20 in the second quarter to win 36-14.

“Brown County was a huge boost of confidence. The fact is they’ve had our number in the past, and that’s no secret. To whip an improved Brown County team like we did is an unreal feeling. They racked up quite a few yards on us. We did some bending but didn’t break. It was a heck of a football game and really proud of the boys.”

The Hawks then opened WIVC South play with a 34-14 win over North Greene and defeated Calhoun 60-20 last week.

Carrollton prepares for their biggest matchup of the season so far as they host their long-time rivals, the Greenfield-Northwestern Tigers in a game that could ultimately decide the WIVC South conference title. The Tigers are 3-1 and have a defense that has the potential to limit the Hawks offense as they’ve surrendered ten points per game. A win for the Hawks will make them playoff eligible.

“It’s a middle of the season type game where you need to be clicking on all cylinders. We’re going to play in a big-time ball game on Friday night,” Flowers said. “Greenfield

is improved and athletic. They graduated quite a few kids up front, but it sure seems like the kids upfront now are improving. Coach Pembroke does a nice job with them. I know that they want this one, but our boys want this one awfully bad too.”

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