

Lady Hawks Soar From Seasonal Uncertainty To Regional Champions

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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CARROLLTON - It's been a roller coaster of a season for the Lady Hawks, but it's beginning to pay off.

From not having a coach and the season in jeopardy due to low numbers, to now a 20-win team and regional champs as of Thursday night.

Returning Carrollton head coach Brian Madson is happy to see such a turnaround in the program.

“This team, if you think about it, they didn’t have a coach at the beginning of the season,” he said. “They almost didn’t have a season. But the girls rallied and got the numbers up. The girls are the ones who did this.”

The No. 3-seeded Hawks took down the No. 2-seeded Brown County Hornets Thursday night in the Carrollton Regional championship by a score of 58-51, but it didn’t come easy.

Carrollton scored first but Brown County got out to a brief 6-4 lead early on in the first quarter. But thanks to three straight baskets from Megan Camden, the Hawks took control at 10-6, eventually leading after an eventful first quarter 23-16.

The Hornets scored back-to-back baskets to open the second and cut the lead to 23-20, but after what felt like a slow start, Lauren Flowers was starting to heat up. She scored seven points in the second as the Hawks led 36-27 at halftime.

No lead was safe though from the team that beat the Hawks earlier this season 53-51.

“It never felt comfortable,” Madson said. “I think we were up by 14 at one point and it was never comfortable. Brown County is a heck of a team.”

Carrollton’s lead grew to as much as 44-31 midway through the third quarter, but Brown County inched closer and made it 49-42 headed into the fourth.

Flowers, alongside Brown County’s Ashley Markert, sat the bench to start the fourth as they were both sitting on four fouls each.

After a basket and two more free throws from the Hornets to start the final frame, the Hawks began to sweat, only leading 49-46. At that point, Flowers came back in and helped grow the lead to 57-50 before she fouled out with 1:50 remaining in the game.

This was after both Darci Albrecht and Camden both fouled out a little bit earlier on in the fourth. Carrollton played much of the game’s crunch time without three of its starters.

But no one stressed. Everything was okay.

“Next girl up,” Madson said.

“There when Lauren went out, we had to go to Brookelyn . Brookelyn’s seen very limited minutes this year. Tessa and Hayden , they’re in the normal rotation so I didn’t

worry too much about them. It was a scary situation, but I'm glad we came out on top," Madson said.

Flowers, the game's leading scorer with 24 points, could only watch on as her team tried to finish out the job.

"I knew they could pull through," she said. "I knew that they wouldn't panic. I had confidence in them."

"It's hard for us because we're a "young" team," Flowers continued. "We're a junior-heavy class, but the last quarter of the game, we had freshmen in. We don't have a lot of experience but they came in clutch. They worked hard in practice and it shows that they can play at this level."

It's no secret that Carrollton doesn't have much big-game experience. But the game didn't seem too big for any of the Hawks.

"Really, Lauren is the only one with experience, Harper and Darci a little bit," Madson said. "But this is growing for us. They've all matured so much this season, couldn't be prouder of the direction they're going."

"I talk all week about big games, big situations. Practice time, I kind of put them in those situations. So they were ready for it," Madson continued. "Our junior class stepped in, our senior stepped in, they took on that experience role even though they really haven't had any."

McMurtrie finished with 11 points and Abby Flowers had 10. Camden had six points, Albrecht had four, and Darr had three.

Besides the early 6-4 lead, the Hornets never led again.

Kenzie Kassing had a team-high 21 points for Brown County. Hope Ingram had eight and Markert had seven. The Hornets end their season at 24-5.

Carrollton improves to 22-8 as it won its first regional title since winning three straight from 2018-2020. And it was never out of reach for the Hawks according to Madson.

"I told them day one, this team reminds me so much of my first time here," he said. "We ended up going to state and this team reminds me so much of them. We're not ready to stop."

Madson previously coached the Hawks from 2013-2016 and he finished second at state in his first season with a 25-7 record.

“This team’s chemistry goes far more than just X’s and O’s,” Madson said. “We definitely have a shot come Tuesday.”

Tuesday, Feb. 20 will be the sectional semifinal between the Hawks and top-seeded Okawville at Nokomis with a tip-off set for 7:30 p.m.

The Rockets are 20-11 and more importantly the defending Class 1A state champs. They beat Farina South Central 68-30 in their regional title game. Their star player Alayna Krauss scored 38 points en route to her 2,000th career point Thursday night.

Needless to say, Okawville proves to be a handful, but the Hawks are going in optimistic, and better yet, hungry.

“We’re going to prep for them and the goal is to beat them. I think we can,” Flowers said.

“By the way our season started, this was our whole goal. We wanted to have a good season,” she continued. “We got our 20 wins, but we want more. We want the sectional, we want more.”