

Calhoun Breaks Carrollton Hearts Again - Warriors Crowned WIVC Champions

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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CARROLLTON – The second meeting between the Calhoun Warriors and Carrollton Hawks proved to be much less dramatic.

Last time out it was one of the wildest endings to a basketball game back on Jan. 27.

Audrey Gillman intentionally missed her second free throw, Claire Hagen grabbed the rebound, and put up a Hail Mary three-pointer that went in at the buzzer to give Calhoun a crazy 46-45 win, crowning them champions of the 49th Annual Lady Hawk Invitational.

“They were high,” Carrollton head coach Brian Madson said about his team’s emotions heading into Monday night’s rematch.

“Obviously they were still a little bit upset with how the game unfolded last Saturday. It took them a good week to kind of get over that. But we had a good week of practice leading up to Calhoun today. I’m happy where we are. I’m happy how we played.”

Despite another close loss to the Warriors, this time by a 42-37 scoreline Monday night, Madson told his girls not to hang their heads too low.

“It definitely makes us better,” Madson said. “Our girls, minus Lauren , a little bit of Harper , and a little bit of Darcy , still don’t have that late-game experience. So, playing Calhoun who’s been a force the last few years, to give them everything they wanted the last two games shows a little character out of our girls.”

The Hawks even led this game for the majority of it, heading up until the end of the third quarter.

Sadie Kiel scored and made her ensuing foul shot to go ahead 3-0. That lead turned to 4-2, right before Darr’s three made it 5-4 Carrollton.

Calhoun answered with two free throws to go back ahead at 6-5, but the Hawks ended the first quarter on a five-point run to lead 10-5.

To open the second quarter Kiel drained a three-pointer to cut the deficit to 10-9. Carrollton eventually went ahead 19-11 before the Warriors ended the half on a five-point run to make it 19-16 Carrollton at halftime.

After the Hawks were leading 27-22, Calhoun went on a seven-point run sparked by another three from Kiel and back-to-back baskets from Kate Zipprich. Calhoun had gone ahead 30-29 after three quarters.

The Warriors held the Hawks at bay, outscoring them 12-8 in the final frame en route to their first conference title since 2017. Calhoun went a perfect 7-0 in the Western Illinois Valley Conference. Six of those wins were on the road.

“For this year, it means everything,” Calhoun head coach Mark Hillen said about winning the WIVC.

“Especially since we played six games on the road and one at home. It’s very impressive that we were able to get all those conference wins on the road and end it tonight like we wanted to.”

The Warriors improve to 26-4, marking their 14th straight win.

“Our biggest attribute we have right now is heart,” Hillen said. “We never give up, when adversity is in our face, we just find a way to get through it. We continue to fight, even if it's not pretty, we continue to fight and make plays when it counts.”

For the Warriors, Zipprich led with 14 points and Kiel had 11 against the Hawks.

Just like Carrollton, emotions ran high for the Warriors as well Monday night.

“We just played one of the most emotional games here two Saturdays ago,” Hillen said. “We knew they were going to give us their best shot and we had to counter with ours and we made that happen.”

As for the Hawks, they fell to 20-8 on the season and finished 5-2 in the conference.

The Hawks were led by Lauren Flowers with 10 points, Hayden McMurtrie with nine, and Darr and Abby Flowers each with six.

Now Carrollton's attention turns to the postseason. The Hawks are seeded No. 3 and await the winner between No. 8 Greenfield and No. 11 White Hall-North Greene. On the other side of the regional is Brown County seeded No. 2.

“Brown County's going to be tough,” Madson said on a possible regional championship opponent. “They beat us earlier in the season. I know they're playing a lot better lately, but we're playing way different than the first time we played them.”

“Our girls are excited to be in this position to be fighting for a regional title on their home court.”

Carrollton's first regional game will be played at home on Tuesday, Feb. 13 at 7 p.m.

As for Calhoun, they were awarded the No. 1 seed on the other side of the sectional bracket. Okawville is No. 1 on Carrollton's side.

The Warriors will take on the winner between No. 6 Kincaid South Fork and No. 7 Concord Tropa. Calhoun will play its first regional game on Tuesday, Feb. 13 at 6 p.m. at Concord Tropa.

Should Calhoun and Carrollton meet for a third time this season, it would have to be in the sectional championship.

“We’d love to see them in the sectionals,” Hillen said. “If we get to that spot against them, good for them and good for us, good for our conference.”