

Carrollton Walks It Off Against Calhoun To Remain Undefeated At 21-0

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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CARROLLTON – Only one team was leaving Friday afternoon undefeated still.

For the first six and a half innings, that team looked like it was going to be the Warriors.

However, the Lady Hawks pulled off a comeback from 4-0 down to tie the game in the bottom of the seventh and then walked it off in the eighth as Carrollton beat Calhoun 5-4 in dramatic fashion.

The IHSA Class 1A showdown between No. 1 ranked Carrollton and No. 4 Calhoun (according to latest Illinois Coaches Association poll), began on Thursday, but didn't make it very far with the storms rolling through, so it was postponed until the following day.

Before the game was suspended, the Warriors had a 1-0 lead thanks to a solo homerun from Grace Ballard. She would have herself a day on Friday as well.

With the lead heading into the game's resumption on Friday, Carrollton had to work up hill all day, especially against Warriors ace Audrey Gilman.

She threw the first seven innings and was dealing early on, striking out 17 batters and only allowing one hit, but it was what happened in the bottom of the seventh that people will be talking about.

Calhoun pushed its lead to 3-0 in the fifth after another homer from Ballard, this time a two-run shot over the left field wall. The Warriors then made it 4-0 when Anabel Eilerman hit an RBI single, scoring Ballard who reached via a double.

All Calhoun had to do was get three more outs, but they proved impossible to get.

Gilman was still working in the circle and struck out her 16th batter to open the inning. She followed that up with four straight walks. First, Hannah Lake, then Halle Webb, then Lauren Flowers, and Hayden McMurtrie, pushing Lake across to make it 4-1.

Hannah Uhles, Carrollton's starting pitcher who worked six innings with three strikeouts, three hits, and three earned runs, hit into a fielder's choice, scoring Webb, while McMurtrie was out at second. That made it 4-2.

Daci Walls was intentionally walked to load the bases again before Gilman let two pitches get away from her. The first one allowed Flowers to steal home, while the second plated Uhles to tie the game at 4-4.

Gilman forced the game to extras after picking up her 17th strikeout to get out of the jam.

Flowers replaced Uhles in the seventh and wound up staying out there for the eighth. Calhoun's Haylee Armbruster reached on an error, but that was the only danger as Flowers picked up two K's and sent it to the bottom of the decisive inning.

Eilerman took over in the circle for Gilman and got things going on the wrong foot when Brookelyn Eilerman reached on an error. Back-to-back groundouts saw Brookelyn move to third.

Calhoun head coach Ann Gilman was taking no chances with one of Carrollton's best bats in Flowers, so she was intentionally walked, bringing up the freshman, McMurtrie.

She singled up the middle, scoring Eilerman as the Hawks walked it off in the eighth for their 21st consecutive win.

"She's done a great job all year and I was really proud of her at that moment," Carrollton head coach Travis Klingler said about McMurtrie. "She kind of struggled throughout the game a little bit, but we just preached that every at bat's a new at bat and she did a good job of putting it in play right up the middle."

Staring down the barrel of a 4-0 deficit, Klingler said his team never wavered, not even after the demoralizing two-run homer from Ballard.

"We huddled up after that. Just about every inning we huddle up, but that one was special. We needed to make sure we stay in the game, stay cheering, having competitive at bats, and they did," Klingler said.

"I don't know how many of them believed, but I kind of thought as long as we had three outs, that we could make it happen and I really thought if we got around to the top of the order then we'd have a chance," he continued. "I have to credit the girls for being patient. You could kind of see the trend was coming and it was ball, after ball, after ball. And they did a good job staying in there."

On the other side of the field, was regret for coach Gilman.

"I'm calling that one. I should have pulled her," speaking about her daughter and starting pitcher Audrey. "I knew she was tired. I should have pulled her after the sixth and started that inning with a different pitcher, and I think we might have had a better chance."

When asked what happened, coach Gilman had a simple answer.

"Just fatigued."

“When you play a team like this, you have to put a little extra on every pitch you throw. We haven’t played such a good hitting team for seven innings, so I think she just got worn down, and maybe a little bit in her head.”

“She did look a little tired,” Klingler said about Calhoun’s ace. “They’ve done a good job of managing her innings. I just told them to be patient, especially when she got wild there. We just needed to create some havoc, make some noise, and get some baserunners on and that’s what we did.”

It was the first loss of the season for the Warriors, bringing them down to 15-1-1, and more importantly 5-1 in the WIVC. The Hawks now control their own destiny at 5-0 as they look for their first conference title since 2012.

The two could meet again this postseason in the sectional semifinals, hosted by Carrollton, and that’s what the Warriors are focused on.

“Like I told the girls, it’s not the game that matters to me,” Gilman said. “The games that matter to me are the last ones of the season. What we’ve learned from this game is what will make us a better team.”