

SPORTS

Vikings claim No. 1 ranking, then blank Polk

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It's official – both the game and the first No. 1 state ranking in St. Johns River State College baseball history.

The Vikings ascended to the top of the Florida College System Activities Association coaches' poll late Tuesday afternoon and before any "No. 1 curse" could grab them, they got in five innings for a 4-0 victory at Polk State College in Winter Haven.

St. Johns was batting in the sixth when the game was stopped by rain.

Hunter Jones struck out nine in five innings, Kyle Hann homered and Myles Straw tripled as SJR State improved to 14-1 and extended its win streak to six. Along with news of the No. 1 ranking came word that for the second straight week, the Vikings had the state's player of the week – Straw, who was 10 for 15 and scored eight runs and stole three bases over four games.

SJR State coach Ross Jones tried to keep the accolades in perspective.

"I told all the guys it's an honor to

be recognized, but when (Mid-Florida) Conference play starts, everybody's 0-0 and nobody's ranked," he said. "It's validation for what we've accomplished over six and a half years and the direction the program is headed. But it doesn't mean anything at the end of the year if you're No. 1 in February."

St. Johns, which completed the 2014 regular season ranked second and also held a No. 2 ranking under longtime coach John Tindall, has won two straight MFC champion-

ships, only to be frustrated with two-and-out performances in the state tournament.

Responding to a couple of first-inning walks with two strikeouts, Hunter Jones (4-0) took a no-hitter to the fifth before a bloop double and a single placed runners on the corners with two out. He escaped with his ninth strikeout. The first-inning walks were his only walks, the fifth-inning hits his only hits.

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"Probably the best outing from a starter we've had all year," said coach Jones of his son, a redshirt freshman. "He threw the ball well in the zone."

Nate Lowe's RBI groundout and Matthew Rhodes' run-scoring single gave the Vikings a 2-0 lead in the first. Straw scored after a third-inning tri-

ple on a sacrifice by Hann, who homered in the fifth.

The Vikings remain in Polk County for a game with the Webber International JV.