

SPORTS

Vikings get helping Hann for trip to state

Two game-winning RBI in sweep of Patriots

By **ANDY HALL**
Palatka Daily News

Kyle Hann had a big eighth inning Wednesday afternoon. Two, as a matter of fact.

Twice, the St. Johns River State College shortstop delivered game-winning RBI in the eighth – a three-run homer in the completion of a suspended game and a go-ahead single in the regularly scheduled contest as the Vikings took two from the College of Central Florida, 7-3 and 3-2 at Tindall Field, locking up their fourth state tournament berth in six seasons.

St. Johns improved to 41-7 overall – every win adding to the school record – and 16-3 in the Mid-Florida Conference, a game in front of Santa Fe, which beat Lake-Sumter 13-4 on



ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

SJR State's Kyle Hann is congratulated after a go-ahead three-run homer.

Wednesday.

The Vikings, who have five regular-season games remaining, could clinch their third straight conference cham-

pionship with wins Friday at Lake-Sumter, Saturday at home against Daytona State and Monday at Santa Fe. Even in a worst-case scenario,

third-place Daytona can do no better than tie the SJR State for second and the Vikings already own the tiebreaker with three wins over the Falcons.

"It's amazing. Seven years ago, the dream was to get to 30 (wins)," said St. Johns coach Ross Jones. "It's something to think how far we've come."

The program had gone without a state tournament berth from 1989 until 2010, Jones' second season.

The suspended March 11 game resumed with one out in the top of the eighth, tied 3-3 and Central Florida with a runner on second. The threat ended on Tyler Carr's second pitch – lined to first baseman Nathaniel Lowe, who stepped on the bag for the unassisted double play.

With one out in the home half, Wes Weeks doubled down the line in left and Collin Morrill walked. Myles Straw's liner off the pitcher was handled for the second out before Hann homered to left center for a 6-3 lead.

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Lowe followed with a solo shot and it was 7-3.

Carr (5-1) worked a scoreless ninth for the win.

Hann wound up 4-for-5, three of his hits coming in the March 11 portion of the game. Lowe and Nick Agosto were both 2-4. The other hits were Weeks' double and singles by Straw and Matthew Rhodes.

Dustin Hersey and Kyle Kalbaugh combined on a walk-

free, six-hitter in the game that followed. Hersey pitched the first five, striking out nine and allowing three hits. Kalbaugh (9-1) finished, striking out five. He froze a runner at third with one out in the seventh with a strikeout and a pop foul that Lowe snagged near the fence.

"The biggest deal in this game was the pitching. Dustin Hersey and Kyle Kalbaugh pitched really well," Jones said. "Dustin made one mistake – to a really, really good hitter."

That would be Christian Khawam, who drove the mistake out of the park for a two-run homer

in the third inning, giving the Patriots (24-20, 9-11) a 2-1 lead that would stand until the eighth.

That's when the Vikings got another helping Hann.

Straw got things going with a single to right. Alec Dowell and Lowe both walked on 3-2 pitches, loading the bases for Hunter Alexander, who got Straw home and Dowell to third with a sacrifice fly to right that made it 2-2. Hann followed with a single up the middle and it was 3-2.

Jones praised Hann's performance and cited Straw as a difference maker.

"This was his first full game in

two weeks (because) of a wrist injury. He changes the way they pitch to our power guys – Dowell, Lowe and Alexander," Jones said. "Myles Straw at 60 percent is better than anybody else. He finds ways to get on."

Onetime St. Johns signee Malik Tatis singled to start the Central Florida ninth but with two out, Harlan Harris fired to second baseman Cletis Avery to end the game when Tatis tried to steal.

Morrill scored the Vikings' first run after a walk in the second. Rhodes doubled him to third and Weeks scored him on a sacrifice fly.

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