

SPORTS

JUST IN TIME



ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

SJR State's Hunter Alexander beats the tag by Pasco-Hernando catcher Bailey Partlow.

Scoreboard Watching

Vikings down Blue Wave with Mid-Florida Conference race coming into focus

By ANDY HALL
Palatka Daily News

The season has reached the point for the St. Johns River State College baseball team that scoreboard watching is OK.

Just don't take both eyes off the opponent.

That almost happened to the Vikings on Monday, when they had to hold on for a 7-5 victory at Florida State College-Jacksonville after leading 7-0. The Blue Wave are a humble 10-24 overall and 5-10 in the Mid-Florida Conference – but the Vikings (34-7, 12-3) have FSCJ to thank for helping them regain control of their bid for a fourth straight conference championship.

It was that Wave that upended first-place Santa Fe 12-4 on Sunday, allowing St. Johns to win the conference again by winning their remaining conference games. The Saints (32-5, 13-2) have a one-game lead, but two more games against the Vikings.

"It's like this every year. For the first time in three years, we're looking up," said SJR State coach Ross Jones. "But we don't need help. We control our own destiny. We've got to get through FSCJ first. They can sneak up and bite you."

They almost did Monday.

St. Johns took a 7-0 lead to the bottom of the fifth when the Wave's Jordan Stacy stroked a leadoff homer. FSCJ scored another run in the sixth, then Stacey started the seventh with his second home run and

Walker Bailey added a two-out, two-run shot that brought the home team within 7-5.

On came Andrew Vaccacio for starter Andy Toelken. Vaccacio got the last out in the seventh and pitched a perfect eighth, the Tyler Carr worked a 1-2-3 ninth for his 11th save.

Toelken (7-1) was the winner, striking out seven and walking two. He gave up six hits, including the three homers.

"One of them was a good pitch. The others were just mistakes," Jones said.

The Vikings collected 14 hits, none bigger than Matthew Rhodes' three-run homer in the fourth, but Jones was concerned that they appeared to take their foot off the gas after taking a 7-0 lead.

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"Offensively for five innings, we were really good. Then we sat back," he said. "We let them stay in it and they got a little momentum."

Nick Koslowski was 3-4 with an RBI. Four other Vikings had two hits apiece – Omar Villaman,

Alec Dowell, Hunter Alexander and Harlan Harris. Their other hits were Rhodes' home run, a double by Wes Weeks and a single by Cole Perry.

The FSCJ series comes to Tindall Field Wednesday afternoon and concludes Friday in Jacksonville, followed by a make-up game with Santa Fe Saturday in Gainesville.

Alexander delivered a tie-breaking sacrifice fly in the sixth

and Villaman provided insurance with a three-run double in the eighth as the Vikings held on to beat Pasco-Hernando State 7-4 in their final nonconference game of the season Sunday afternoon at Tindall Field.

Alexander's fly scored Wes Weeks, who doubled to start the sixth and went to third on Perry's groundout. Perry singled with one out in the eighth, becoming the first of seven straight St.

Johns batters to reach base. Andrew Williamson was hit by a pitch to score Perry and keep the bases loaded Villaman, who drove reliever Riley Chaote's first pitch to the gap in left center.

Villaman wound up 3-5 with four RBI. Harris was 2-3. Weeks, Koslowski, Perry, Alexander and Nick Owens had one hit apiece.

The win went to Daniel Williams (5-2), the second of six SJR State pitchers.