Patriots keep Viking playoff plans on hold

St. Johns leaves 12 on base in 3-2 loss

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St. Johns River State College's bid for a fourth straight state tournament berth is stuck along with the 12 runners it left on base Wednesday in Ocala.

The Vikings stranded seven in the last three innings of a 3-2 loss at Central Florida in a Mid-Florida Conference game. A win would have cinched their spot in at Lakeland with four games left in the regular season. The loss kept their magic number for second place in the MFC – and a tournament berth – at two and kept them three games behind first-place Santa Fe, which beat Lake-Sumter on Wednesday.

"It was a well-played game on both sides," said SJR State coach Ross Jones, whose club dropped to 36-10 and 14-6 and has lost three of their last four – two by one run. "We outhit them (10-9) and had opportunities. We just couldn't get the clutch hit."

The Patriots scored two runs in the first inning off St. Johns starter Daniel Williams (6-3). The Vikings got one run back in the third when Omar Villaman singled to score Nick Owens and tied it in the top of the fifth when Villaman's sacrifice fly plated Harlan Harris. Central Florida regained the lead in the bottom of the fifth, however, and held on even though SJR State loaded the bases in the seventh and had two runners on in each of the last two innings.

"We had a base running mistake that cost us," Jones said. "Twice (in the seventh and ninth), we had the leadoff guy on and couldn't get a bunt down."

The Vikings had 10 hits, but only Harris' double went for extra bases.

Owens ended up 2-2. Harris and Alec Dowell were both 2-3, Nick Koslowski 2-4. Villaman and Wes Weeks were both 2-4.

Four relievers combined to give St. Johns four and a third innings of scoreless relief.

"I thought our bullpen was really good. We mixed and matched well. Ryan Ross threw exceptionally well," Jones said.

The Vikings are home Friday to face Lake-Sumter.