

SPORTS

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B SECTION

Needed shot of confidence

Vikings edge Santa Fe night after Saints clinch conference title

BY ANDY HALL
Palatka Daily News

Santa Fe won the trophy on Sunday. St. Johns River State College won confidence on Monday.

The Vikings turned four straight walks and Andrew Williamson's two-run single into a three-run ninth inning for a 6-5 victory Monday over the Saints, one day after Santa Fe beat Daytona State to end St. Johns' three-year run atop the Mid-Florida Conference.

Both the Vikings and Saints are headed for the state tournament – third-place Central Florida could join them if it wins a postseason play-in game – but even though their places were secure before Monday, both took this one seriously. Each pitched its ace, Andy Toelken for SJR State and Trent Johnson for Santa Fe. Emotion ran high in the ninth inning and beyond.

St. Johns coach Ross Jones welcomed the win, which kept the Saints from sweeping the season series.

"This game was about confidence for us," he said. "We needed to beat these guys for confidence. We're in opposite brackets (at state), but we could see them Day 3 or 4.

"Both teams played well. It's what you expect when you see two nationally ranked teams.. If you asked me or (Santa Fe coach) Johnny Wiggs, we'd say we were proud of how we competed with everything all set."

Santa Fe (37-7, 19-3 MFC) is ranked first in the NJCAA poll. St. Johns (38-10, 16-6) is 13th.

Toelken took a 1-0 lead into the seventh before he surrendered a

three-run homer to Robbie Hanlon. Toelken left after a leadoff walk – his only walk – in the eighth.

"Toelken pitched his heart out. He made one bad pitch and (Hanlon) rode it out," Jones said.

The Vikings turned singles by Nick Koslowski and Matthew Rhodes, a bases-loaded walk to Hunter Alexander and Cole Perry's RBI fielder's choice into two runs and a 3-3 tie in the bottom of the seventh. The Saints regained the lead with two runs in the top of the eighth and a spectacular double play helped them get out of the bottom half.

But there's no defense for walks.

Call Graham (4-1) walked four straight to begin the ninth – the fourth walk brought in Wes Weeks to make it 5-4 – and went 2-0 to Williamson before Wiggs had a reliever ready. Bailey Metcalf's first

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two pitches were strikes but after the count reached 3-2, Williamson singled to right, scoring Rhodes and Perry to win it.

Closer Tyler Carr (8-1) got the win. He struck out two,

walked two and allowed one hit over an inning and two thirds. Both his strikeouts ended innings.

Eight SJR State players had one hit apiece – a double by Omar Villaman and singles by Williamson, Koslowski, Weeks, Rhodes, Nick Owens, Alec Dowell and Harlan Harris

The Vikings are scheduled

to complete the regular season at home Friday against Florida State College-Jacksonville – Saturday's Daytona State rainout won't be made up because it doesn't affect the standings – but Jones may try to pick up some nonconference competition while waiting for the state tournament, which doesn't begin until May 15.