

SPORTS

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B SECTION

SJR STATE SOFTBALL

Vikings do their job, but don't get help

Sweep Saints, but miss out on trip to state

BY MARK BLUMENTHAL
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GAINESVILLE – The St. Johns River State College softball team picked a perfect time for its first Mid-Florida Conference doubleheader sweep of the season.

Unfortunately for the Vikings, Florida State College-Jacksonville picked a perfect time to foil hopes of a state tournament berth.

In a long and sometimes peculiar doubleheader Sunday at Santa Fe College, the Vikings won both games, benefitting from a Little League home run that plated three runs in the top of the seventh inning for a 6-5 win in the opener, then scoring six times in the sixth inning for a 10-5 win in the nightcap.

However, it was all for naught.

Though the Vikings helped their cause immensely, FSC-J stood up to the challenge by sweeping state-tournament bound and host Seminole on Sunday, 3-1 and 1-0, to claim the fourth and final tournament berth from the Mid-Florida Conference with

a 10-14 mark. The Vikings finished MFC play 9-15.

"We still have one more doubleheader at home on Thursday with Eastern Florida State," said Vikings coach Jill Semento, who with a split on Thursday can become the program's first coach in the fastpitch era to record a winning season in their first year.

The Vikings go into that doubleheader with a 26-25 record, tied for the second-most wins with the 2007 state tournament team, only trailing last year's 33-22 team.

"We did all that we could do. Our girls played amazing ball, but in the end, it wasn't enough," Semento said.

Under blue skies, the Vikings and Saints (21-31, 7-17) played far-from-stellar softball in the five hours and 30 minutes. In the end of both games, though, the Vikings found a way.

The first-game finish left many with dropped jaws.

Trailing 5-3 going into the top of the seventh, winning pitcher Chris Marasa (12-10) began the frame with a bloop single to center field. Sydney Shows sacrificed her to second base and another bloop single, this one by backup catcher Jordan Phillips, put runners on first and third.

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Reliever Chelsea Malcolm, in line to get the win, got Savannah Montgomery to go after the first pitch and pop out, leaving it to No. 8 hitter Hannah Sommers. On an 0-1 pitch, Sommers delivered an excuse-me, half-swing bloop into left field that landed just inside the left-field line. Left fielder Sydney Smith got to the ball as fast as she could and tried to make a play on Marasa at the plate, but her throw completely missed home plate and bounced off the backstop, eluding catcher Megan Schuster on the rebound. As the ball skirted away, Phillips came home to tie the game at 5-5.

But that wasn't the end of the play.

Sommers kept running and attempted to take third base. Schuster got to the ball and fired the ball well past third baseman Sarah Ortiz and into left field, easily allowing Sommers to come all the way around the bases on a check-swing single.

Schuster hit a two-out bloop single in the bottom of the seventh, then Adrix Paradizo delivered a long shot to center field that Amanda Peck collected a few steps from the fence to end it and give the Vikings the shocking win.

"In all my years I've ever been involved with college softball as a player and a coach, I've never seen that before," Semento said of the wacky play involving Sommers' hit. "Never anything like that."

The Vikings found themselves down 5-4 in the sixth inning of the nightcap after Cassandra Garcia delivered a fourth-inning home run to break a 4-4 tie. With the bases loaded and one

out, Marasa, who would get the win in the second game as well, beat out an infield hit to score Peck with the tying run. That brought up Shows, who hit a groundball to shortstop Destiny Carroll, whose throw short-hopped catcher Schuster for an error to score Haley Wildes. As the ball bounced back into the infield, pinch-runner Kacee Langsford scampered home to make it 7-5.

It only got worse for Santa Fe as back-to-back-to-back RBI hits by pinch-hitter Jessie Grissom, Montgomery and Alandra Resendes put the game away. Further complicating issues was the fact that Santa Fe veteran head coach Chris Ahern came out to move her defensive alignment around not once, not twice, but three times in the inning, leaving Vikings fans in an uproar over the delay.

Marasa relieved starter Skye Davenport in the second game and was effective, allowing just the solo home run by Garcia in 5 2/3 innings, scattering five hits, walking three and striking out one.

The Vikings collected 29 hits in the twinbill with Montgomery and Sommers leading the way, each going 4-for-7 with two runs and two RBI, while Phillips ended up 4-for-5 with an RBI and a run scored. Peck finished 3-for-8 with three runs scored. Kayla Kight was 3-for-10 with a run and two RBI. Shows was 3-for-8 with two runs. Marasa finished 3-for-9 with three runs scored and two RBI. Wildes ended up 2-for-8 with two runs and Shelby Griffis, Grissom and Resendes each getting one hit.

"We took advantage of their defense and with our speed," said Semento, whose Vikings were the recipients of nine errors and stole 11 bases, including seven in the first game, without having any runner thrown out. "Whatever happened, happened. We did the best we could."

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