

SPORTS

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PAGE 6A

Vikings buck book, beat Polk in ninth

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Palatka Daily News

The St. Johns River State College baseball team used almost everybody and tried almost everything against Polk State College Tuesday.

The Vikings went through all but one position player and one reliever on a day off for the regular starting pitchers.

And after getting the leadoff man to first and down by a run in the bottom of the ninth, they went against

the book.

Swinging away paid off and the SJR State escaped with a 7-6 win, handing Polk only its second loss of the year while improving to 8-3 heading into the Capital City Bank Classic, which starts Thursday at Tindall Field with a game against South Carolina's Florence Darlington Tech.

The Eagles (7-2) led 6-5 in the ninth when Nick Owens worked Justin Tworek (0-2) for a leadoff walk. On came Justin Smith, who

had homered in the fifth. He never squared to bunt and wound up doubling a 2-2 pitch into the corner in left. Kerry Carpenter drew an intentional walk, loading the bases for Cole Perry.

A wild pitch brought in Owens with the tying run and Smith hustled home with the winner on Perry's relatively shallow fly ball to left.

St. Johns coach Ross Jones didn't have to be asked why he didn't try bunting Owens into scoring position.

"I've got my best three power guys coming up," he said. "I noticed their closer in the bullpen. He kept missing arm side.

"I didn't want to play for a single run. Get a crooked number and get this one over."

The win went to the fifth Viking pitcher, Andrew Vaccacio (1-0), who wriggled out of a 3-0 jam to the leadoff man in the top of the ninth and went on to strike out the side.

See VIKINGS, Page 7A

Vikings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6A

SJR State pitchers combined for 11 strikeouts. Starter Zach Blankenship worked five solid innings, leaving with a 4-2 lead.

"Pretty good college baseball game between two good teams," Jones said. "We've got to clean

some things up, but the guys hung in there, never quit. That's why we play these in February."

Polk put up single runs in the first and third innings before St. Johns responded with a four-run fifth.

Nick Koslowski got it going with an opposite-field single to left. Jimbo Reemsnyder and Brian Moore both bunted – Koslowski was safe at second

after Reemsnyder's bunt – and with two out, Smith hammered a 2-2 pitch out to left for a 3-2 lead. Carpenter followed with a 395-foot blast to straightaway center.

The Eagles answered with four in the sixth behind two doubles, an infield single, a walk and a sacrifice fly. The Vikings got one run back in the home half when Josh Broughton followed Michael Koenig's leadoff double with an

RBI single.

But it was still 6-5 going to the ninth. St. Johns was unable to capitalize on consecutive two-out singles by Broughton, Koslowski and Scott Kobos.

Broughton wound up 3-4. Smith was 2-3 with three RBI, Koslowski 2-4. The Vikings' other hits were Carpenter's home run, Koenig's double and singles by Owens and Kobos.