

Vikings struggle in split

Only one hit with runners in scoring position

BY ANDY HALL
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St. Johns River State College will be playing for keeps in the Mid-Florida Conference the next time the lights go on at Tindall Field.

That'll be a week from Wednesday. SJR State coach Ross Jones only hopes the Vikings will be ready.

"Quite frankly, we're not ready," he said on the heels of a Sunday doubleheader split with South Georgia State College at Tindall Field. "Right now, we're not a very good team."

Actually, there was little wrong with the pitching until the seventh inning of the second game. Clay Helvey and Andrew Vaccacio combined on a four-hit shutout in the opener, a 1-0 game decided on Michael Koenig's leadoff homer in the bottom of the third.

The second game was 2-2 going to the seventh, when the Hawks (10-9) scored three runs off three hits, three walks and a passed ball with the bases loaded. St. Johns (13-7) loaded the bases with nobody out in the home half – Koenig walked, pinch-hitter Jimmy Goldsmith doubled off the left-field fence and Nick Owens was hit by an 0-2 pitch – seemingly setting the table for one of the final at-bat rallies for which Jones' teams have come to be known.

Not so. Justin Smith grounded into a double play, scoring Koenig to make it 5-3, and Kerry Carpenter grounded to first to end it.

The Vikings were 1-10 on the day with runners in scoring position after going 0-9 in the first half of Friday's 2-1 loss in the first half of a doubleheader with the Hawks on Douglas, Ga.

"We pitch and we don't hit and don't defend. We're not putting it together," Jones said. "We're more talented than we're playing."

The only hit with runners in scoring position for SJR State Sunday was Nick Koslowski's two-run single with two out in the fourth, scoring Owens and Smith for a 2-0 lead in the second game. Koslowski had three doubles in two games at South Georgia on Friday.

Starter Zach Blankenship gave the Vikings three and two-third innings before four straight South Georgia batters reached, one of them scoring. David Litchfield got the last out of the fourth, but ran into trouble in the fifth and it fell to Jagger McCoy to get the last two outs, the Hawks having pulled even at 2-2.

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McCoy (1-2) worked a trouble-free sixth inning, but gave way to Jaison Heard after allowing two one-out singles in the seventh. Heard walked the two batters he faced and South Georgia led 5-2 before Zach Greene could get the last two outs.

"We pitched well all day except for the last inning," Jones said.

Owens was 2-3, Koslowski 2-4 in the second game. The other St. Johns hit was the Goldsmith double in the seventh.

Koenig's home run would prove enough for Helvey and Vaccacio in the first game.

Helvey (2-1) struck out six, walked none and scattered three singles before Vaccacio took over with two out and a runner at third in the sixth.

"Helvey pitched really well. It's his best outing so far," Jones said.

Vaccacio struck out the first batter he faced and pitched a scoreless seventh for his second save.

Koenig was 2-2. Owens and Smith both singled.

The Vikings play the Rollins College junior varsity in Winter Park this afternoon, when head to Marianna for a weekend series with two Alabama schools, L.B. Wallace and Shelton State, and host Chipola College.

Conference play opens March 1 against Seminole State.