

Vikings

Santa Fe survives three late SJR State threats

BY ANDY HALL
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It was state tournament intensity on March 11.

The only comfort for the St. Johns River State College baseball team was that Saturday was only March 11.

It's still early in the Mid-Florida Conference season and the state tournament is almost two months away. The Vikings still get three shots at defending MFC champion Santa Fe after a 1-0 loss on a sunny Saturday afternoon at Tindall Field.

The first batter of the game scored the only run of the game as the Saints withstood St. Johns threats in each of the last three innings. Santa Fe improved to 20-7 overall and 3-1 in the league, dropping SJR State (20-11, 5-2) into a second-place tie with Daytona State.

"It's about as intense as it gets," said St. Johns coach Ross Jones. "We had runners in scoring position in the seventh, eighth and ninth and couldn't get a big hit.

"It's good experience. I'm proud of the way we competed. Santa Fe can really pitch and defend the field. We've just got to find a way."

Monday's Vikings-Saints rematch in Gainesville was rained out and rescheduled for Friday afternoon. The teams play Wednesday at Tindall Field at 4 p.m., two hours earlier than originally scheduled because of cold weather in the forecast.

SJR State was held to four hits on Saturday – a double by Justin Smith and singles by Nick Koslowski, Scott Kobos and Josh Broughton – but still had chances in each of the last three innings.

Each time, dramatic Santa Fe closer Troy Bacon had an answer.

Smith drew a one-out walk in the seventh and hustled to second on a careless throw from center after Koslowski field out. On came Bacon, who struck out Michael Koenig.

Bacon walked Kobos to start the eighth, then threw wildly to first on Broughton's sacrifice bunt. Cole Perry bunted them up a base and with two out, Bacon engaged in 3-2 battles

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with Nick Owens and Kerry Carpenter. He lost to Owens, who walked and loaded the bases, but after Carpenter fouled off pitch after pitch, Bacon got him on a

ground ball that almost snuck into right.

In the ninth, Smith blooped a leadoff double to left – the game's only extra-base hit – and Koslowski got him to third with a swinging bunt. Bacon walked Koenig, but came back to strike out Kobos and Broughton for his seventh save.

"Bacon made big-time pitches,"

Jones said. "(He's allowed) two hits and hasn't been scored on all year long. We got him to 60 pitches in two innings.

The win went to Saints starter Kyle Morton (3-1), who worked into the seventh. He struck out six – five looking – and allowed his only walk in the seventh.

Vikings starter Zach

Blankenship (2-1) walked the first two batters he faced and surrendered a run-scoring single to Alex Goebel before he could get out of the inning. From then on, Blankenship threw five and a third scoreless innings. Zach Greene got the second out in the seventh inning and Jagger McCoy finished on the mound.