

WELCOME HOME



ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

SJR State's Cole Perry, right, is welcomed after his home run Saturday against Daytona State.

One Big Swing

Koenig ninth-inning homer edges Vikings over Patriots

BY ANDY HALL
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OCALA

St. Johns River State College was down to its last out, possibly one pitch from paying a heavy price for some messy baseball.

One swing changed everything.

With that swing, Michael Koenig – 0-4 with three strikeouts when he stepped to the plate in the ninth inning – cleared a 20-foot fence in left field for a two-run homer and the Vikings held on in the bottom half for a 5-4 victory Monday at the College of Central Florida.

St. Johns, which clubbed Daytona State 11-1 at home on Saturday, clung to a half-game lead in the Mid-Florida Conference over Santa Fe, which beat Seminole State 10-4 on Monday. The Vikings are 35-16 overall and 18-5 in the MFC heading into Wednesday's regular-season finale at home against Florida State College-Jacksonville.

A win Wednesday coupled with a loss for Santa Fe (34-11, 17-5) in one of its two remaining games would give St. Johns the championship and a more favorable draw at the state tournament. The Saints won the season series and thus hold the tiebreaker should they finish with the same conference record.

SJR State coach Ross Jones expects the same fight

from FSCJ that his team got from Central Florida (16-32-1, 7-16), even though the Patriots have been out of the race for weeks.

"They throw (heavily scouted ace Nate) Pearson at us and throw their No. 2 (Jackson Stoeckinger) behind him. People want to beat you and you'd better be prepared for a battle," he said. "It's not going to be any different Wednesday."

They didn't always seem prepared Monday, committing four errors, giving up four unearned runs and leaving 10 on base – nine in the first five innings.

"It's almost like we didn't deserve to win," Jones said. "Four errors. Our pitchers completed their butts off, but I don't think any one of them had their best stuff. We've got to make plays."

The Patriots had their own problems, leaving 15 aboard and committing two errors, but took a 4-3 lead to the ninth.

Stoeckinger (2-3) struck out Kerry Carpenter, but Justin Smith followed with his third hit of the day, blistering a 3-2 pitch down the third-base line for a double. The Vikings were down to their last out after Stoeckinger got Nick Koslowski, but Koenig made his next pitch disappear and St. Johns led 5-4 in spite of all that had gone wrong earlier.

"One big swing of the bat. It's amazing," Jones said.

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Andrew Vaccacio began the bottom of the ninth with a couple of strikeouts, but walked Steven Lugo on four pitches and saw Matt Moclair reach on a wild pitch after striking out. It took Vaccacio's fourth strikeout of the inning – and a throw from catcher Andrew Williamson to Cole Perry at first – to close the door.

Vaccacio (4-2) was the Vikings' fourth pitcher. Trevin Eubanks was the emergency starter for Clay Helvey, who had pain in his side warming up, and went three innings. Jagger McCoy and Zach Greene pitched two innings apiece before Vaccacio got the ball in the eighth.

"I knew (Helvey) wasn't ready. I wanted to see if we could go 3-2-2-2 the rest of the game. The only problem is they all threw a lot of pitches and we're going to need them

Wednesday," Jones said.

Besides the ninth-inning double, Smith's 3-5 day included an RBI triple. Carpenter and Nick Owens were both 2-4. The other St. Johns hits were Koenig's home run, a triple by Perry and a single by Jimmy Goldsmith.

Koenig went 4-5 with two doubles to lead a 16-hit offense Saturday as SJR State crushed Daytona.

Smith and Perry both homered and Koslowski was 3-4 with a double. Josh Broughton was 3-5 with two RBI. Smith

and Jimbo Reemsnyder were both 2-4. Scott Kobos delivered the RBI single that ended the 11-1 game on the 10-run rule.

Pearson McMahan (6-2) struck out 10, walked one and allowed one run on three hits over the first six innings.

"His last seven starts, he's really attacking the strike zone," Jones said. "He'd won six conference starts. There's no question he's our guy."

A lefthander, Kobos will start on the mound Wednesday against FSCJ.