

## ANOTHER DAY AT THE BALL PARK



Photos by CHRIS DEVITTO / Palatka Daily News

Russell Allebaugh enjoys the April 19 St. Johns River State baseball game with Zach Duke.

# Sound the Viking Horn

Russell Allebaugh, 86, celebrates SJR State baseball, home runs in particular

**R**ussell Allebaugh has become so closely associated with St. Johns River State College baseball that when Tindall Field served as a neutral site for a state tournament play-in game last week, Daytona State coach Tim Touma wanted to borrow him.



ANDY HALL

At first, Allebaugh said no, that he honked the horn on his motorized scooter only for Viking home runs. But SJR State coach Ross Jones said it would be all right, that he was rooting for Touma's team. So for one night at least, Allebaugh was a Falcons fan. To no avail. Tallahassee CC beat

Daytona in 10 innings.

Allebaugh is used to being on the winning side at Tindall Field. He's a regular not only at home games, but at practices. That's him in the Korean War cap and Vikings shirt, riding his scooter to and from the handicapped section of the grandstands to a spot alongside the dugout where he can chat with coaches and players.



"My favorite saying is, 'I'm on this side of the fence. They're on that side.' I let Ross and his other coaches take care of (coaching)."

- Russell Allebaugh

He was there Wednesday when the Vikings loaded up to go to the state tournament in Lakeland. Allebaugh made one state tournament trip back in 2010, but with vision problems that limit his driving, he'll follow his team

online this morning as the Vikings, 36-16 and ranked sixth in the state, open against Chipola College, 40-8 and ranked No. 1 not only in the state, but the nation.

"At first, I thought they had a chance to go to nationals, but they've been playing sloppy ball. Ross knows it, too," Allebaugh said. "Every one of them's a good player, but sometimes they're error-prone. If they can get past Chipola and Santa Fe, they'll have a good chance."

Allebaugh's standards are high, having grown up in Rhode Island as a Red Sox fan who saw Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio play.

"Kids ask me if I played. I said, 'No, I was uncoordinated. I couldn't adjust my cup and spit at the same time.' Actually, I sang in the second-oldest boys' choir in the country for a huge Episcopal Church. Back in the '40s, you did what your parents wanted, not what you wanted."

He spent eight years in the Navy, about four months on a ship near Korea. ("They rotated ships. I never actually set foot on land.") Allebaugh spent a portion of his life in the printing industry, working in customer service for a firm that used to publish National Geographic.

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## Allebaugh

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He was living in Virginia when he saw a high school baseball coach mowing his field.

"I said, 'Coach you've got too much to do. Why don't you let me?' So he did and I started keeping the scoreboard and cutting the field. I enjoyed it and started following the team."

Allebaugh moved to Pomona Park, where his sister lives - he has a brother in Melbourne - and began following St. Johns baseball in the *Daily News*. "This is my third coach," he said of Jones, who is in his ninth year. "I started with Sam Rick, then Mike Robins."

Allebaugh turned 86 on April 12, celebrating by watching the Vikings clinch their fifth consecutive state tournament berth with a 4-1 victory over Lake-Sumter. He's the first to admit the wisdom of his years has its limits when it comes to baseball.

"My favorite saying is, 'I'm on this side of the

fence. They're on that side.' I let Ross and his other coaches take care of that," Allebaugh said.

But while baseball insight is limited, friendship is not. Allebaugh befriends not only players, but parents and follows ex-Vikings via Facebook and on the Internet.

"The thing that's neat is how he keeps us with our former kids," Jones said. "He's like my Twitter guy. I'm just not on Twitter or Facebook. He tells me, 'Myles Straw had three hits last night, Nate Lowe hit his first home run, Jake Schrader and his wife had twins.'"

"Everybody knows him. When other coaches come in, it's like, 'Hey, where's Russell?' He loves baseball. He just loves being around it. It's good for him to be around these kids and it's good for them to be around Russell."

Allebaugh moved from Pomona Park back in June to the Vintage Care assisted living facility on Moody Road, right across from SJR State in buildings that once served as dormitories that housed St. Johns athletes more than 40 years ago. He made the move as a concession to declining health. By happy coincidence it gave him

greater access to Tindall Field.

"My breathing is horrendous. That's why I'm in this chair. The VA bought it," said Allebaugh, who struggles with COPD. "The slightest little exertion - just standing I get out of breath."

"I can't stand for the National Anthem. That bothers me."

One of the things Allebaugh likes about Vintage Care is the way the staff keeps track of him, mindful that if he's not at the facility, he's probably across the street at Tindall Field. He counts a doctor among his friends - former St. Johns baseball player Monte Ketchum, but he declines to single out an all-time favorite Viking.

Former players seek Allebaugh out and shake his hand when they return to Tindall field. Back in the days he traveled to road games, a player spotted his disabled vehicle and Jones had the bus turn around to pick him up.

"The last few years, Ross has really had a knack for not only bringing in good players, but great kids," Allebaugh said.

Andy Hall is sports editor of the Palatka Daily News.