

SPORTS

www.palatkadailynews.com

TUESDAY, MAY 9, 2017

B SECTION

NJCAA REGION 8/FCSAA BASEBALL TOURNAMENT

Vikings shown door by Northwest Florida

After win over Tallahassee on Saturday, SJRSC runs out of gas after an early lead on Sunday

By ANDY HALL
Palatka Daily News

LAKELAND – Kerry Carpenter went deep. Justin Smith went deeper.

Alas for the St. Johns River State College baseball team, it was the deepest part of Joker Marchant Stadium, able to contain shots that could have tied the game. A walk offered a last glimmer of hope, then a strikeout snuffed out the game and the season for the Vikings.

Northwest Florida State 4, SJR State 3.

It was the third year in a row one ended the other's season at the NJCAA Region 8/FCSAA Tournament. Northwest Florida did it two years ago and Sunday, St. Johns last year.

Facing elimination and having used four pitchers in Saturday's 13-11 win over Tallahassee CC, the Vikings (37-18) got six surprisingly strong innings from David Litchfield (4-1), a freshman whose only starts of the season were in nonconference games.

Litchfield struck out five, walked none and allowed three hits. But the last two came back to back in THE seventh, the Vikings clinging to a 2-1

lead and their only error moving the runners to second and third. Litchfield left after serving up a run-scoring groundout. Andrew Vaccacio walked the first batter he faced, struck out the second then gave up an RBI double to Daino Deas as the Raiders went up 3-2.

A wild pitch got home an insurance run that allowed Cameron Sanders (6-3) and Northwest Florida to withstand Cole Perry's solo homer in the eighth. Sanders then pitched his third scoreless inning in the ninth.

"The kids competed their tails off in two really tough losses," said SJR State coach Ross Jones, referring to Sunday and Friday's 5-2 loss to top-ranked Chipola, another game in which the Vikings lost the lead late. "You come down here, you're playing the best. You've just got to finish.

"We had our chances. We couldn't get the big hit. Ninth inning, Carpenter and Smitty hit those deep balls to center field. Just pull it. It's out in every park in the country, but this one."

Jones couldn't have been happier with Litchfield.

"I felt like that was our best matchup. He competed real well," the coach said. "He poured the ball in the strike zone, pitched in advantage counts. I was hoping for four or five innings. I didn't know he'd get us to the seventh."

As it had against Chipola and Tallahassee, St.



TOM HAGERTY / Special To The Daily News
St. Johns River State College's David Litchfield fires a pitch Sunday against Northwest Florida.

See VIKINGS, Page 4B

Vikings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

Johns was the first to score Sunday, getting consecutive doubles from Carpenter and Smith in the third inning. Litchfield was perfect until two out in the fourth, when Ross Goforth drove a 1-0 pitch out to left to make it 1-1.

The Vikings went back in front in the sixth. Josh Broughton walked, went to second on a wild pitch, third on Scott Kobos' bunt and scored on another wild pitch. Sanders and starter

Brayson Smith walked 10 between them, but St. Johns left 11 on base compared to four for Northwest Florida.

SJR State was making an unprecedented fifth straight state tournament appearance. Its best finish has been third in 2015, when Northwest Florida went on to the national championship.

"This has been a phenomenal group of young men, the best I've had," said Jones of a club that finished second to Santa Fe in the Mid-Florida Conference.

"Not just the talent part. They had the desire and wanted to do something."