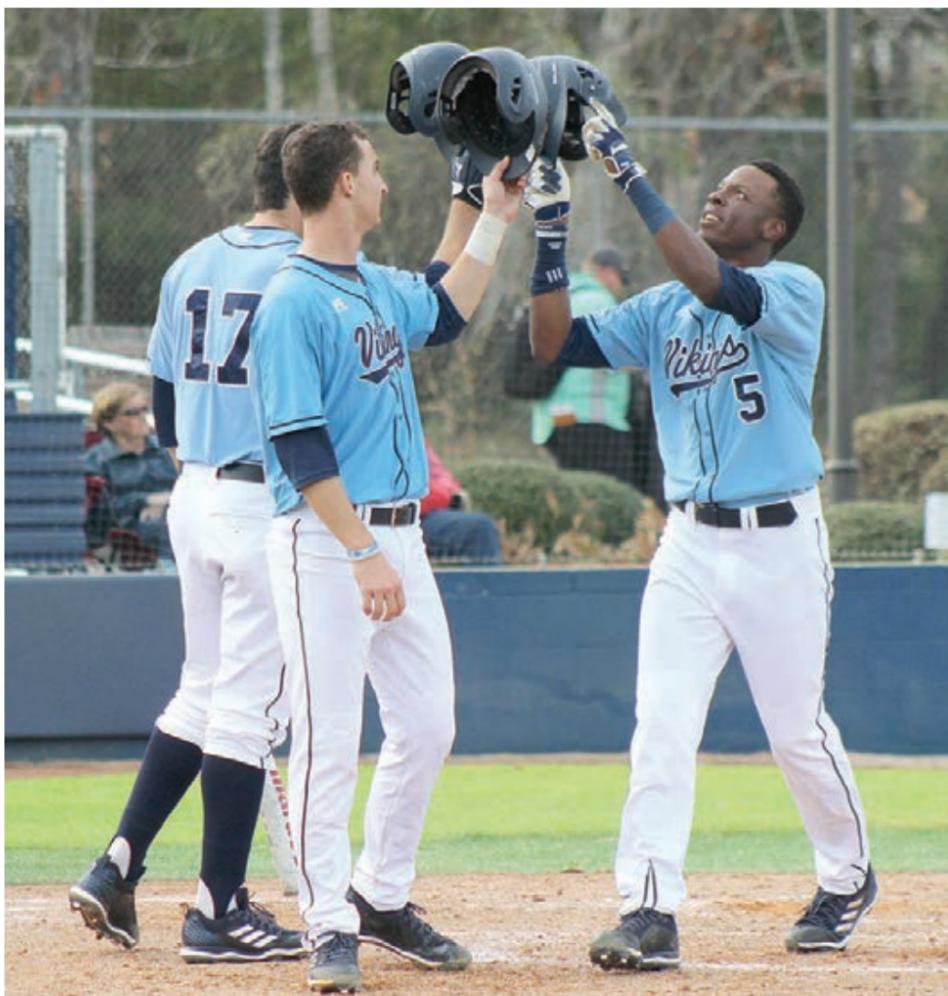


SPORTS

Two-Run Homer



ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

Justin Farmer (5) is congratulated for a two-run homer in Saturday's first game.

Finding the Plate

SJR State pitchers take control in second game, pull out split with ABAC

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The plate proved a little hard to find for St. Johns River State College pitchers at the start of both halves of a Saturday doubleheader at Tindall Field. They didn't find it in time in the opener. They did in the second game.

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College capitalized on the wildness to win the opener, 6-5, but Zach Blankenship settled in with quality relief from Luke Sutko as the Vikings took the second game, 5-1. The split gave them a 3-1 record in their season-opening series with the Stallions, having swept a Friday doubleheader in Tifton, Ga.

Blankenship and Sutko combined for 12 strikeouts in seven innings. Blankenship (1-0) had three-ball counts to his first two batters and gave up a run on two hits in the first inning, but went on to strike out

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Softball team jumps out to 4-1 start.

eight, allowing four hits and a walk. It was a 1-1 game when the sophomore lefthander gave up a leadoff double in the third, but he escaped on two strikeouts and a ground ball.

Sutko took over after a single and a walk in the fifth and finished the game for his first save. He struck out four, walked one and allowed only a bloop single.

"Zach had a rough first inning, but other than that, they were pretty good," said SJR State coach Ross Jones of Blankenship and Sutko. "Zach's got to get past that first inning. That was his M.O. a year ago."

The Vikings went ahead to stay on back-to-back, two-out homers in the third by Jimmy Goldsmith and Livingston Morris. Goldsmith sent his two-run shot to right and Morris followed for a 4-1 lead.

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ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

SJR State catcher Riley Wash tags Abraham Baldwin's Matt White, who was out on the play.

Vikings

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St. Johns got another run in the fourth, which began with a single by Joey Bellini and hustling double to left center by Kerry Carpenter. Bellini scored when Nick Romano grounded out. The first run came in the second inning off singles by Goldsmith and Morris, a sacrifice bunt by Joe Gunn and an RBI grounder by Francis Villaman.

Bellini, Carpenter, Goldsmith and Morris had two hits apiece, but the rest of the lineup was 0-12.

"For a couple of innings there, we were squaring up and swinging the bats," Jones said. "That home run Livingston Morris hit was at his knees. All the pop-ups the last couple of innings were all elevated fast-

balls. We lost focus. We thought it was over at 5-1."

Darin Kilfoyl (0-1) walked three of the first five batters he faced in the opener and wound up with the loss, leaving three batters into the fourth. ABAC was in front 5-2 before Matt Marini could get out of the inning.

"We couldn't make pitches when we needed to in the first game - too many disadvantage counts," Jones said.

The Vikings' Justin Farmer hit a game-tying, two-run homer in the third before the Stallions regained the lead for good. Romano's solo home run in the seventh got SJR State within 6-5, but nothing came of a two-out walk to Bubba Sangster.

Farmer and Romano were both 2-4 in the first game. Carpenter, Sangster, Goldsmith, Villaman and Riley Wash had one hit apiece.

The Vikings play two today at Tindall Field against the Thomas University junior varsity.