

SPORTS

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A Viking's Friend-ly visit back to South Florida

Boca native Friend shines at plate as St. Johns softball pulls off road sweep of Broward, Miami-Dade

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Kelsea Friend made a big impression back home at the plate. Maegan Stone made an impression with big plays at

shortstop. And the St. Johns River State College pitching staff made a big impression on its two opponents this weekend.

And when the buses turned around to head back to Palatka, the Vikings were off to the best start in program history.

By sweeping the Broward Community College and Miami-Dade College teams this weekend, the

Vikings improved to 13-4, one win better than the 12-5 start in 2016, coach Jill Semento's first year with the program.

The Vikings defeated Broward in a doubleheader on Saturday by scores of 6-1 and 13-1, then won two tight games with Miami-Dade, 2-0, and 3-2.

For the weekend, Friend, who played for Boca Raton Olympic Heights High, went 8-for-15 with six runs scored and an RBI in front of family and friends

who came to see her.

"She got singles when it mattered," Semento said. "I know she was really excited to play because her family doesn't get to see her play with her up here and the family down there. Whenever she got on base, we put her in a situation to steal." She had five stolen bases in the two games.

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The pitching came up big in the sweeps of Broward (4-9) and Miami-Dade (4-12).

Ariel McCullough walked three, allowed two hits and struck out eight in the 2-0 complete-game win over Miami-Dade in the first game Sunday, then came in for two innings of relief in the nightcap and ended up getting the win there with hitless ball in the circle with no strikeouts and one walk. Madison Roeshink allowed six hits on one run, walked none and struck out three in the first-game win over Broward to improve to 3-2.

And in a spot start in the second game against Broward, Brandi Polk won her first game, walking two, striking out three and allowing eight hits.

"Polk did great," Semento said. "She didn't walk a lot of people and our defense (three errors in the four games) did

well for us. Her control is why we recruited Brandi - she got us groundball outs."

Semento pointed out some big plays by Stone at shortstop that helped keep the opponents to four runs in the four games total.

"Maegan played lights out defense for us at shortstop," Semento said. "She had numerous plays where she got us big outs."

As for the games, Morgan Scala went 3-for-4 with two runs scored and three RBI, Friend had two hits, a run and three stolen bases and Stone went 2-for-4 with two runs and an RBI in the first game Saturday. Reganne McCarl, Jaime Valenta and Brittany Lewis added one hit each in the game. In the second game, Bezares hit a three-run home run to help get the Vikings to the win via the eight-run mercy rule in six innings. She was 2-for-4 with two runs and five RBI, while Friend went 4-for-5 with three runs and an RBI and two steals. Stone was 2-for-5 with three runs and an RBI, McCarl was 2-for-2 with a

run and three RBI and Selena Nunez, Rachel Johnson, Karsyn Barnes, Hattie Baldwin and Marissa Huggins had one hit apiece.

On Sunday, a scoreless tie was broken in the seventh inning when Stone singled, Scala reached on an error and Bezares, who was 2-for-3, muscled a single to the outfield to bring in Stone.

Scala would score the other run on a passed ball. Friend had the other hit in the first game. Another bloop hit, this one by McCarl, scored Friend in the seventh inning to break a 2-2 tie in the nightcap. The Vikings preserved the win when with one out, Chiara Biasi hit a line drive at right fielder Valenta, who caught it, then threw to Scala at second base to double off Eliza Artiles, who had taken off on the ball hitting the bat.

McCarl was 2-for-4 with two RBI in the nightcap, while Bezares, Lewis, Friend, Scala, Johnson, Stone and Taylor Nilsson had one hit each.

The Vikings host Tallahassee (5-6) on Thursday.