

SPORTS

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B SECTION

Sizzling St. Johns softball team runs streak to seven

Comes back from 8-1 deficit in first of four weekend wins, now 21-6

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The St. Johns River State College softball team is rolling.

Winners of seven straight, the Vikings improved to a best-ever 21-6 start after going 4-0 at the Seminole State Tournament at Soldiers Creek Complex in Sanford.

On Saturday, the Vikings overcame an 8-1 deficit to edge Pensacola State, 9-8, rallying for one run in the fourth inning, six runs in the fifth and one

more in the sixth, then defeated a team that beat them earlier in the season, State College of Florida, 6-3. On Sunday, the Vikings took down Miami-Dade, 8-3, before finishing their weekend with a convincing 8-0 shutout of Tallahassee.

"We are definitely a lot more confident after this weekend," said third-year Vikings coach Jill Semento, whose team hosts Indian River State College at 2 p.m. Thursday before beginning Mid-Florida Conference play Saturday with a doubleheader at Central Florida in Ocala. "State College was the only team that had beaten us that we didn't have a chance to play them twice. Just the fact we got the chance to play them a second

time and beat them convincingly makes me feel a lot more confident with the conference schedule coming up."

But the ball got rolling in the first game when the Vikings rallied from the huge deficit against Pensacola.

Morgan Scala got things going with a solo home run in the fourth, then it was a three-run home run by Selena Bezares, her eighth of the season, that tied things up at 8-all. In the bottom of the sixth, Jaime Valenta tripled to left-center field with one out and came home on a Taylor Nilsson sacrifice fly to center field.

Lacy McClellan (4-1) went the final 3 1/3 innings in relief to get the win, allowing one hit, walking two and striking out

none. Maegan Stone, who finished 8-for-13 with four runs scored and four RBI for the weekend, went 3-for-4 with a run and an RBI, while Valenta, Scala, Bezares and Reganne McCarl accounted for one extra-base hit each.

"That's the biggest deficit we've come back from this year," Semento said. "The thing, though, was we needed to cut down on strikeouts. That conversation was last Tuesday and since then, we've drastically cut down. We're putting the ball in play more and people tend to make errors in the field, especially with our speed. That helps us a lot."

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Scala had a two-run single to highlight a four-run third inning and Bezares cracked her ninth home run of the year in the win over State College of Florida, which beat the Vikings, 8-0, in five innings in the second game of the year on Jan. 26.

Ariel McCullough (12-3) went the distance, scattering six hits, walking none and striking out two. Stone and Scala were each 3-for-4 with a run scored with Scala adding two RBI. McCullough had two doubles in four trips to the plate with a run and an RBI, while Selena Nunez, Bezares, Marissa Huggins and Rachel Johnson had one hit each.

On Sunday, Bezares's two-run single tied the game at 2-2 against Miami-Dade as she plated Kelsey Friend and Stone, then with the bases loaded, Valenta was hit by a pitch, forcing home Bezares. Friend was 4-for-4 with two runs and an RBI, while Bezares went 2-for-4 with a run and three RBI. Nilsson, Scala, Brittany Lewis and Baily Bellamy had one hit each for the Vikings. McClellan went the distance in a rare start, walking two, striking out two and allowing three hits.

In the final against Tallahassee, McCullough walked no batters, struck out five and yielded four hits. Stone was 2-for-3 with a run and two RBI, while Friend, Bezares, Nunez, Brooklynn Basile, Valenta and Huggins had one hit apiece.