

# SPORTS

## McCullough fires shutout in opener of St. Johns softball split Saturday

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St. Johns River State College softball coach Jill Semento said her team is getting better within the Mid-Florida Conference. This is coming of the initial shock of getting swept in the conference opener March 10 over a week ago at Central Florida, 9-1

and 8-0.

On Saturday, the Vikings split with visiting Santa Fe College, winning the first game, 2-0, behind the four-hit pitching of Ariel McCullough, but falling in the second game, 6-4, as the Saints scored four runs in the fifth inning to break a 1-1 tie.

"We're playing a little more relaxed," Semento said after her team moved to 24-11 overall and 2-4 in the conference. "If we had gotten a few more hits in the second game, we'd gotten the sweep, but it still gives me confidence that we're going to be a lot better the second time around."

All McCullough needed was Jaime Valenta's third-inning home run in the first game. A Selena Nunez single up the middle chased home Maegan Stone with the insurance run in the sixth. McCullough walked one and

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struck out three in her shutout. Nunez was 2-for-3 with an RBI, while Selena Bezares was 2-for-3. Stone, Valenta and Morgan Scala had one hit apiece for the Vikings.

In the second game, Giulia Fiorentini highlighted the four-run fifth with a two-run single. She was 2-for-3 with

two RBI, while Emily Yakel finished 2-for-4 with a run. Bailee Moll blasted her seventh home run of the season for the Saints (25-12-2, 5-3).

Down 6-1, the Vikings rallied for three runs in the bottom of the seventh as Valenta singled home Nunez, Alyssa Rosenbaum singled in Valenta and Scala doubled home Taylor Nilsson. With runners on second and third and two out, the Saints opted to intentionally walk Bezares, the owner of 11

home runs, to face Reganne McCarl. McCarl grounded out sharply to shortstop Natalia Bellinger to end the game.

Valenta and Nilsson each went 2-for-3 with an RBI with Valenta scoring twice and Nilsson once. Scala, Kelsea Friend, Rosenbaum and Nunez had one hit each for the Vikings.

Weather permitting, the Vikings will host Seminole State (33-6, 5-1) at 4 p.m. today.