

Big Swing, Big Pitcher



Photos by CHRIS DEVITTO / Palatka Daily News

Above, Nick Romano hits a three-run homer in the bottom of the fourth. Below, SJR State starter Darin Kilfoyl went five innings to pick up the win.

Vikings Tied at the Top

Big blows offset uneven pitching, defense in 14-6 beating of Daytona State

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The St. Johns River State College baseball team has found its way into a first-place tie in the Mid-Florida Conference.

It found its way Wednesday through injuries, errors and rare struggles on the mound.

In their first game since losing slugging first baseman Jimmy Goldsmith for the balance of the regular season, the Vikings hit three home runs and three doubles on their way to a 14-6 beating of Daytona State on a windy afternoon at Tindall Field. The third St. Johns home run, a two-run shot by Riley Wash that curled inside the left-field foul pole, ended the game in the bottom of the eighth on the mercy rule.

The win, coupled with Santa Fe's defeat of Central Florida, pulled with Vikings (22-8, 8-2) into a first-place tie with Central Florida (19-8-1 overall). Santa Fe is 24-6 and 5-2.

Nick Romano and Justin



Farmer also homered for SJR State, which made the most of its 11 hits. Farmer blistered a two-run double into the left-field corner to get the Vikings on the board in the third; he finished

2-4 with a sacrifice fly and five RBI. Romano was 3-5. Joey Bellini was 2-3 with a two-run single, Joe Gunn and Ray Gonzalez both doubled and Kerry Carpenter singled.

Despite the show of force, SJR State coach Ross Jones didn't like his team's energy during the middle of spring break.

"I wish they'd do away with it. We play our worst baseball in conference play every year during spring break," he said. "We look great defensively and then we look bad defensively. It's not just the physical errors. Sometimes, it's the mental errors."

Jones wasn't impressed with the pitching, either. Starter Darin Kilfoyl (2-2) got through five innings allowing two runs despite seven hits, striking out four and walking one. Matt Marini labored in the sixth, when the Falcons scored three runs to creep within 6-5, but came back with a 1-2-3 seventh. Jagger McCoy allowed an eighth-inning run after an error.

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"(Kilfoyl) did not have his good stuff, but he competed through it. What he did not do was allow a crooked number," Jones said. "We make an error, don't get a double-play call and Marini struggles in the sixth."

A designated hitter since returning from his own injury in recent weeks, Romano took over at first Wednesday for Goldsmith, who was batting .361 with seven home runs before he broke a bone in his wrist while swinging in a nonconference game on Sunday.

The Vikings did not trail Wednesday after Farmer's two-run double, which highlighted a three-run third. Romano's three-run blast extended their lead to

6-1 in the fourth and it was 6-2 when Kilfoyl left after the fifth. Daytona (19-11, 4-6) made it interesting with three runs on three hits, two walks and an error in the top of the sixth.

The interest quickly waned. Falcons reliever Matt Rinks hit No. 8-9 batters Gonzalez and Francis Villaman on the helmet and got the hook. They pulled off a double steal and scored as Bellini greeted Austin Dreher with a sin-

gle up the middle. He would score on Farmer's sacrifice fly to make it 8-5.

From there, the Vikings feasted on the back of the Daytona bullpen.

"They've got a (strong reliever), but before they could get him ready, we scored and it was 8-5," Jones said.

St. Johns plays in Daytona Beach on Friday, then the series ends Saturday at Tindall Field.