

SJR State Slugger



CHRIS DEVITTO / Palatka Daily News

Pictured in a Feb. 8 game, Kerry Carpenter hit his 12th homer of the season Wednesday for St. Johns.

Flirting With Disaster

Vikings lead by seven in seventh, then forced to hold off FSC-Jacksonville

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They were a run away from a relatively early escape from a game delayed an hour and 20 minutes by rain.

It was disaster they escaped two innings later.

On the verge of winning in the seventh via the mercy rule, the St. Johns River State College Vikings had to hang on for an 11-10 victory over Florida State College-Jacksonville as afternoon gave way to evening at Tindall Field.

St. Johns never trailed and led 11-4 with the bases loaded in the seventh, but couldn't get the run home that would have meant an eight-run lead and an early finish. Still, there was little apparent cause for alarm until the Blue Wave scored five runs – three unearned – with two out in eighth to pull within 11-9.

Kevin Long's home run made it a one-run game with one out in the ninth, then Phillip Woulard doubled and took third on a wild pitch before the Vikings' Luke Sutko notched his state-leading eighth save with a strikeout and a soft fly ball to left.

SJR State improved to 27-11 overall, 13-5 in the Mid-Florida Conference. FSCJ is 14-20 and 4-10. Santa Fe (31-6, 12-2), which has not lost since

dropping two of three in its series with the Vikings last month, is in first place.

"Give up three unearned runs, don't make plays and give them all the momentum in the world," said St. Johns coach Ross Jones, recounting the hairy finish. "That's why we preach it: The game isn't over until the last out. Sometimes, 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds don't understand that."

Every SJR State batter had at least one hit in a 16-hit offense that included home runs by Kerry Carpenter and Joey Bellini. It was the 12th of the season for Carpenter, whose 3-3, three RBI game upped his batting average to .450.

Joe Gunn was 3-5 with a double and two runs. Pablo Cedenos was 2-3 with three RBI. Bellini and Francis Villaman were both 2-4. Riley Wash doubled and Ray Gonzalez, Nick Romano and Justin Farmer all singled.

"We hit the ball well," Jones said.

Bellini's solo shot was the big blow in a three-run first inning that appeared to have the Vikings on their way with Elijah Gill (7-1) opening with two perfect innings. But the freshman lefthander had his ups and downs – the Wave was within 5-4 in the middle of the fifth – before leaving with a 9-4 lead after FSCJ started the seventh with a single and a walk.

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"Elijah didn't have his breaking ball today – that was his Achilles' heel – but he got us into the seventh," Jones said. "Matt Marini

always comes through in that spot, but they flared some balls into center and we don't make plays."

Marini struck out the side upon entering in the seventh and the Vikings drew two bases-loaded walks in the home half to stretch their lead to 11-4.

Then disaster struck – almost.

Marini's fourth strikeout left the Wave with two out and a runner on first in the eighth when the visitors came up with five runs on five hits, plus the Vikings' only error of the game. They also missed a golden opportunity at a pickoff that could have ended the inning.

Jagger McCoy served up a

ground ball that stopped the bleeding, but then gave up Long's homer and Woulard's double with one out in the ninth, before Sutko came on for the save.

Beginning a nine-day break from MFC play, the Vikings are home today for a nonconference doubleheader with the Thomas (Georgia) University junior varsity.