

SPORTS

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Running, relievers carry Vikings against Seminole

St. Johns into home stretch of Mid-Florida Conference play

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A text message and a gut feeling guided the St. Johns River State College baseball team to a 7-6 win over Seminole State in the first game of the last leg of Mid-Florida Conference play Friday at Tindall Field.

The text told SJR State coach Ross

Jones who was pitching for the Raiders.

"When I found out, the first thing I wrote down was 'run,'" he said.

Run they did, stealing four bases and more significant, getting three runs out of botched pickoff plays.

"We knew we could run on them," Jones said. "Their lefthanded starter doesn't like to pick and their first baseman doesn't handle the ball real well. We had to play offense today and not sit back. We had to force them to make mistakes"

The running game wouldn't have made that much difference, however, had a gut decision not worked out.

Seminole was up 5-2 and had the bases loaded with nobody out in the fifth when Jones summoned freshman reliever Cameron Sereda, a lefthander rarely tested under pressure. He responded by striking out the side and working into the eighth, allowing one hit along the way while improving to 3-0. Matt Marini got two outs, Jagger McCoy the last four – leaving the bases loaded with a strikeout in the eighth – on his way to his fourth save.

"He's gotten better and better," said Jones of Sereda. "You bring him into a situation like that – it's something you like to avoid, but sometime you've got

to show what you've got. We'll need the freshmen to step up in postseason play."

The Vikings still have work to do to get there.

They improved to 30-12 overall and 14-5 with the win, but gained no ground on streaking Santa Fe (33-6, 16-2), which won its 12th straight Friday, and remained in a second-place tie with Central Florida (26-12-1, 14-5), which also won. St. Johns goes to Lake-Sumter State today, then hosts Santa Fe Monday night.

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The conference champion automatically goes to the state tournament, but in contrast to previous years, the second MFC berth is determined by a tournament involving the second-, third- and fourth-place teams. Lake-Sumter (14-28-1, 6-12) is clinging to fourth.

Seminole (22-23, 5-13) appeared on its way to gumming up the works for the Vikings, going up 5-2 through three innings with three home runs accounting for four runs. But after Sereda stifled the Raiders' chance to break the game open in the top of the fifth, SJR State took the lead for good in the home half.

The Vikings loaded the bases with walks to Nick Romano and Justin Farmer and a single Pablo Cedenó chopped between short and third. Reliever Brady Martello (4-7) got Joe Gunn on a pop foul, but Romano scored on a fielder's choice by Riley Wash and one of the Raiders' botched pickoffs brought Farmer home as the Seminole lead shriveled to 5-4.

Francis Villaman hustled his way to an infield hit, scoring Wash to tie the game. He stole second and scored the go-ahead run when Ray Gonzalez bloomed a single into right.

Villaman pushed an insurance run across in the seventh with a bunt that scored Gunn, who reached on an error and raced to third in a single by Wash.

Villaman wound up 2-3 with a double and one RBI in an eight-hit offense. Cedenó was 2-5 with one RBI and won praise for his work at third base.

"Pablo Cedenó played really well at third base," Jones said. "He handled a shot in the ninth and got the lead runner when they were threatening in the eighth."

Romano tripled and scored two runs for the Vikings. Gonzalez, Gunn and Wash all singled.