

Inside Pitch



CHRIS DEVITTO / Palatka Daily News

SJR State's Ray Gonzalez avoids an inside pitch in the eighth inning Monday afternoon.

One They Needed

Vikings start fast, withstand ninth-inning rally to beat first-place Santa Fe

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The St. Johns River State College baseball team reached the end of its rope in the Mid-Florida Conference Saturday, then tied a knot and hung on Monday at Tindall Field – barely.

The Vikings withstood a five-run, ninth-inning rally to beat first-place Santa Fe, 7-6, keeping alive slim hopes of catching the Saints while staying a game behind Central Florida in the battle for second

and a first-game bye in the MFC tournament.

Nick Romano homered twice and Darin Kilfoyl struck out 10 in six innings as St. Johns improved to 31-13 overall, 15-6 in the conference. The Vikings took the season series from the Saints, 3-1; Santa Fe (35-7, 16-3) has not lost to anyone else in the MFC. Central Florida (28-12-1, 16-5) ripped Florida State College-Jacksonville Monday, 13-3.

“We survived. It was a game we had to win,” said SJR State coach Ross Jones.

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His team was coming off a 12-4 loss Saturday at Lake-Sumter and facing the prospect of having to beat Santa Fe ace Matt McKinley, who came in 6-0. The Vikings got to him early, scoring four runs in the first two innings, and drove him from the mound with Romano's second home run of the day, a solo shot on the heels of Kerry Carpenter's two-run homer in the seventh.

That made it 7-1 and all appeared well for after Cameron Sereda, relieving Kilfoyl, pitched two scoreless innings.

Jones knew better.

“Santa Fe is amazing. They've got six come-from-behind wins in the conference,” he said. “They hit some good pitches in the ninth.”

That they did, getting a leadoff

double and a three-run homer in an uprising that wasn't done until a fly ball settled in the glove of left fielder Ray Gonzalez for the final out.

“The park was playing small today – the wind blowing out,” Jones said. “If you'd told me there were going to be 13 runs scored in the game, I'd have said, ‘Which team?’”

The win went to Kilfoyl (4-3), who struck out 10, walked two and allowed one run on six hits. Matt Marini and Jagger McCoy both worked the ninth, following Sereda.

Romano was 3-4 with three RBI in an 11-hit offense. His first home run gave St. Johns a 2-0 lead in the first. He also homered Saturday at Lake-Sumter and has nine for the season despite missing 12 games with an injury.

Carpenter, Riley Wash and Pablo Cedenno were 2-4, Carpenter with a home run and Cedenno with a double. Gonzalez

and Joe Gunn both singled.

“I was proud of the way we played against McKinley. He's probably going to be the state's pitcher of the year,” Jones said.

The Vikings collected 11 hits Saturday, but imploded on the mound against a Lake-Sumter team battling for the fourth-place berth in the MFC tournament. The LakeHawks scored six runs in the sixth inning and the game ended when their lead reached 12-4 in the seventh.

“We stunk it up on the mound from the fourth inning on,” Jones said. “It's a one-run game in the fifth inning and the bullpen didn't do its job.”

Gonzalez went 3-4 with a double. Romano and Carpenter were both 2-4. Gunn, Cedenno, Wash and Justin Farmer had one hit apiece.

Starter Elijah Gill (7-2) was tagged with the loss.

The Vikings go to Daytona State on Wednesday.