

SPORTS

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Daily News file photo

Myles Straw gets down a bunt for SJR State in a 2015 Mid-Florida Conference game.

Straw Makes The Show

Called up by the Astros, he's the first ex-Viking to reach majors since 2006

By **ANDY HALL**

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Myles Straw celebrated a Pacific Coast League championship one night and found himself in a pennant race the next.

The former St. Johns River State College center fielder was summoned to the defending World Series champion Houston Astros in time to appear as a pinch runner and finish in center field against the Arizona Diamondbacks on Saturday. He became the first St. Johns product to

make the majors since Howie Kendrick in 2006 and the first among those who have played for coach Ross Jones.

Straw batted .291 this season between Corpus Christi of the AA Texas League and Fresno of the AAA PCL and led professional baseball with 70 stolen bases, according to Jones. He heard from Straw on Saturday while the Vikings were playing a fall tournament game at Chipola College.

"He was getting ready (for the Astros) and were in the middle of a game. He was just excited," said Jones,

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Straw

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who has worked with other major leaguers as an assistant coach at Florida, North Florida and Vanderbilt. "I love getting those phone calls. I've had a few of them and they're always special."

Straw came to SJR State as a walk-on out of Bradenton's Braden River High School and started on Mid-Florida Conference championship teams in 2014 and '15. He then signed with South Alabama, but opted for the Astros when they chose him in the 12th round of the 2015 free-agent draft.

"He was a kid that was undersized, physically was not very strong, but he had a great arm and he could run," Jones said. "There was no question in my mind he was a plus center fielder and he could run. The question was whether he could hit. I made him a deal. I offered him a walk-on spot and told him if he made our starting lineup, I'd scholarship him."

Straw responded to questions about his hitting with a .422 batting average that led the state in 2015. He averaged 20 stolen bases per season but wasn't asked to run often in a lineup that featured sluggers Nathaniel Lowe and Tyler Humphreys. A Tampa Bay Rays draftee out of Mississippi State, Lowe just completed a rise from class A to AA to AAA with the American Association champion Durham Bulls.

"I didn't take the bat out of Nate Lowe's hands. It was never a situation where (Straw) could show what he could do from a base-stealing standpoint," Jones said.

He is hopeful Lowe will get a call soon from the Rays after batting .330 with 27 home runs and 102 RBI in their minor-league system, but wonders if he will because Tampa Bay is out of postseason contention.