

Congratulations



Photos by ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

Above, Ray Gonzalez (center) is congratulated by SJR State teammates Nick Romano (left) and Langston Provitt for a home run. Below, left-hander Elijah Gill started Saturday's opener.

Wasting No Time

Vikings go right to work in season-opening sweep of Georgia's Abraham Baldwin

BY ANDY HALL
Palatka Daily News
ahall@palatkadailynews.com

The St. Johns River State College baseball team did good work in Saturday's season-opening doubleheader – when it was allowed to.

The Vikings walked 15 times and were hit by pitches twice but took care of the rest themselves, collecting 13 hits, striking out just six times and making just one error in a 5-3, 11-1 sweep of Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College on a cold afternoon at Tindall Field.

The second game was shortened to five innings on the 10-run rule. Sunday's rematch was rained out.

SJR State went right to work. Elijah Gill worked a 1-2-3 first inning. The Vikings' first batter of the season, Langston Provitt, legged out a double that skipped just inside the third-base line; he took third on a groundout and hustled home on Nick Romano's sacrifice fly into



right-field foul territory.

The Stallions (0-2) scratched out three runs over the next two innings, but Ray Gonzalez erased their only lead with a two-run homer to left center in the bottom of the third. Two batters later, Francis Villaman delivered an RBI single and the Vikings

did not trail again.

"Overall, I was pleased with the day," said St. Johns coach Ross Jones. "We struck out one time in the second game. The only negative was that two of the five strikeouts in the first game were with runners at second and third with nobody out. We've got to do a better job at that. But (we were) doing what we had to do with the number of positional players that were hurt."

The Vikings got by on just four hits in the opener – the Gonzalez home run, a pair of doubles by Provitt and Villaman's RBI single. Garrett Blaylock scored twice even though he didn't have an at-bat Saturday, walking five times and getting hit twice.

"The (Cade) Davenport kid in the first game was living away from us. He had a pretty good changeup, but he made a mistake on the pitch to Ray and Ray stepped up," Jones said.

See **BASEBALL**, Page 9A

Baseball

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7A

SJR State's winningest pitcher last year, Gill (1-0) began his sophomore season with a five-inning start in which he allowed three earned runs on seven hits, striking out five and walking one. Freshman Stephen Halstead got the save with two scoreless innings, striking out three, walk-

ing none and allowing one hit.

"Elijah lost it for a couple of innings, but his best two were the fourth and fifth and that's a really good sign," Jones said. "Stephen Halstead came in and pitched well. I had decided to go with Luke Sutko (last year's closer) in the seventh, but Stephen did such a good job."

Recent University of Georgia transfer Jordan Dubberly (1-0) wound up with a complete game when the second game was halt-

ed early on the mercy rule. He pitched a three-hitter with five strikeouts and two walks. "He got here during the (semester) break and gave us five really good innings," Jones said.

The Vikings capitalized on walks and got down some well-placed bunts on their way to an eight-run second inning that broke the second game open.

"We played the short game well and got their guy out of rhythm," Jones said.

Sandon Witt went 2-2 with three RBI in the second game. A.J. Mathis was 2-3 with two runs. Provitt, Gonzalez, Romano, Villaman and Luke Belanger had one hit apiece. Blaylock scored two more runs.

St. Johns plays host this week to the Kevin Miller Classic, an event normally held in Panama City but relocated this year while the traditional host, Gulf Coast State College, continues to recover from Hurricane Michael.