

# SPORTS

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B SECTION

## Pinch-hitters deliver for Vikings in sweep

Solo HR, grand slam, tiebreaking double vs. South Georgia

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Again and again and again, pinch-hitters delivered for the St. Johns River State College baseball team in a Sunday doubleheader with South Georgia State College:

■ Tie game, fifth inning of the seven-inning opener: Sandon Witt drives a 1-2 pitch out to left center for

a two-out solo homer to put the Vikings ahead to stay.

■ Two out, bottom of the sixth, SJR State in front by two: The Hawks have a conference at the mound, then Ryan Romano drills the next pitch for a clinching grand slam as St. Johns goes on to an 11-5 win.

■ Second game, tied in the sixth, pinch-runner Chase Malloy at second for the Vikings: Witt, already with a game-winning home run and an RBI double on the day, is pulled for Bubba Sangster, who booms a 3-2 delivery to right center for a double that scores Malloy and SJR State completes the sweep with a 5-4 victory as

a spring-like February afternoon gives way to evening at Tindall Field.

The wins gave the Vikings (12-3) a four-game weekend sweep of South Georgia (6-7) and leave them in position to take a six-game win streak into this weekend's John Tindall Classic if they take care of business in a home doubleheader Wednesday with the NAIA Thomas University junior varsity.

"Sandon Witt with a pinch-hit home run, Ryan Romano hits a pinch-hit grand slam, Bubba comes up with a game-winning double to right center. I thought Bubba was the better matchup with that guy's (South

Georgia reliever Landon Nevill) velocity," said SJR State coach Ross Jones, recounting the clutch performances and explaining his decision to pinch-hit in the second game.

The wins were not without flaws. Two days after Anthony Simonelli's perfect game and a combined two-hitter by Elijah Gill and Connor Centalla in wins of 4-0 and 7-4 at South Georgia, the Vikings gave up nine runs on 19 hits in the rematch. Four of the runs were unearned, three of them following a two-out error in the first inning of the opener.

See **VIKINGS**, Page 3B

### Vikings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

"The thing is that we didn't start the games under control. We give up nine runs in 14 innings of a doubleheader and five of those were in the first inning," said Jones, looking to settle on a No. 3 starter and trying Jordan Dubberly and Jackson Spiller on Sunday. Neither got past the fourth inning or were involved in the decision.

"Somebody's got to step up and be the No. 3 guy. Gill and Simonelli are pitching real well. We've got to come up with another guy who can give us 15-18 outs and let our bullpen do the rest," Jones said. After the Hawks broke on top with

three unearned runs in the first inning of the opener, the Vikings came back with five in the home half, keyed by a two-run single by Francis Villaman and a one-run hit by Nick Romano. They did not trail again, though they needed the late heroics of Witt and Ryan Romano.

Evan Waterbor (1-1) took over for Dubberly in the fourth inning and picked up the win. Luke Sutko recorded a five-out save, his second of the season.

Nick Romano and A.J. Mathis both went 2-4, Mathis with a double in a nine-hit offense in the first game. The other hits were the home runs by Witt and Ryan Romano and singles by Villaman, Riley Wash and Ray Gonzalez.

Michael Rosario's two-run single highlighted a three-run first for SJR State in the second game. Witt and Sangster both doubled, Ryan Romano and Villaman had

RBI singles and Gonzalez singled and scored for the Vikings.

The win went to St. Johns' third pitcher, Centalla (2-0), who struck out four and walked one over two and a third hitless, scoreless innings.

The third tournament hosted by the Vikings this month, the John Tindall Classic is named for the program's first coach, who served from 1964-93. SJR State plays Tampa's Hillsborough CC at noon Friday, has Saturday games with State College of Florida and East Georgia and completes play on Sunday against two-time defending national champion Chipola. The ninth Tindall Endowed Scholarship will be presented between games on Saturday.

"We've got a tough, tough, tough week ahead and 12 days to conference play," Jones said.