

SPORTS



SIDELINES

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Memorable date for Magic, Larry, Vikings, Swaggertys

The date: Monday, March 26, 1979.

The place: St. Johns River Community College baseball field.

The event: University of Akron JV-St. Johns River baseball.

This date will forever be famous in sports history. It was that night in Salt Lake City that a legendary rivalry was born. On this particular night 40 years ago, Earvin "Magic" Johnson and the Michigan State Wolverines got the better of Larry Bird and the unbeaten Indiana State Sycamores for the NCAA men's basketball championship.

That night was the springboard of Johnson and Bird battling one another for over a decade on the professional basketball court, especially in three NBA titles as Johnson's Los Angeles Lakers beat Bird's Boston Celtics in 1985 and '87 and Bird's Celtics winning over the Lakers in 1984.

But earlier in the afternoon at St. Johns River Community College on its baseball diamond, coach John Tindall and his Vikings were taking on the

University of Akron – the junior varsity team, not the varsity. Still, a big deal if you think about players on a four-year team taking on guys who were there on the two-year plan hoping to move on to a four-year school.

On the mound in the first game for the Vikings was Palatka native Kirk Swaggerty. He had his best stuff going on this afternoon, allowing what would be just two hits for the game, both infield dribblers that no Vikings could get to in time.

And with the way Swaggerty was throwing, he didn't need a whole lot of support. As a matter of fact, the only runs that Swaggerty needed came in the second inning when the Vikings put two runners on base and Jim Bryson delivered a double to bring them both home.

Nonetheless, the Vikings gave Swaggerty more insurance, scoring a run in the fourth, then blowing the game open with four more runs in the sixth.

The Vikings won the first game of a doubleheader against the Zips' JV team, 6-0, with Swaggerty striking out five batters. The wins improved Swaggerty's mark to 3-0 on the season.

Nice start to the scheduled doubleheader. In the second game, Tindall sent Bill Hemme to the mound. And in the "anything you can do, I can do better" category, Hemme was able to match what his counterpart in the first game did. He, too, would surrender two hits in the nightcap, striking out seven Zips.

However, there was a difference in the performances. One pitch made the difference in having carbon-copy efforts by Swaggerty and Hemme.

The first pitch, no less.

On the opening delivery, Jeff Becuerer launched a shot over the fence to give Akron the early lead.

Turned out that was just false hope for the Zips.

The Vikings would go on an onslaught in the second game, collecting 14 hits, and were led by Scott Gering. Gering would deliver three hits in the nightcap, including a home run and a double, and knock in five runs. Keith Kelley, Dennis Blanchard, Jay McDonough and Chris Dooley each added two hits as the Vikings put 13 unanswered runs up after the opening home run and would complete the sweep of the Zips' JV guys with a 13-1 rout.

More importantly, the wins pushed the Vikings over .500 for the year at 13-12.

And, by the way, it turns out Kirk wasn't the only Swaggerty having a good day in the household. Older brother Bill, a future Major League pitcher with the Baltimore Orioles, pitched six strong innings for Stetson University against Florida State in a 14-9 triumph in Tallahassee.

The victory gave the older Swaggerty his fifth win of the season in eight outings and ended FSU's winning streak at 16.

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