

SPORTS

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B SECTION

Vikings stay out of FSCJ trap, win sixth straight

Sweep series and set themselves up for run in conference play

By **ANDY HALL**

Palatka Daily News
ahall@palatkadailynews.com

The St. Johns River State College baseball team avoided a trap Wednesday afternoon while trying to set one for their Mid-Florida Conference rivals.

The Vikings battered the best Florida State College-Jacksonville had to offer, chasing Jacksonville

University-bound ace Tyler Naumann in the sixth inning of an 11-3 beating at Tindall Field, completing a three-game series sweep and setting themselves up for the MFC stretch run, which begins Friday at Lake-Sumter.

Ray Gonzalez was 4-5 in an 11-hit offense, including an RBI single poked through a drawn-in Blue Wave infield to make it 11-3 and halt the game in eighth on the mercy rule. It was 2-2 before the Vikings scored seven runs in the sixth inning off four walks, singles by Gonzalez, Michael Rosario, Langston Provitt and Bubba Sangster and a sacrifice

fly by Nick Romano.

The win was the sixth straight for St. Johns, which improved to 28-13 overall and 10-7 in the conference. Having completed three-game sets with each Mid-Florida foe, now come single-game meetings with every team. There's a "twofer" Friday at Lake-Sumter, where the Vikings must first complete a March 4 game suspended in the 13th inning by darkness before proceeding with the regularly scheduled contest.

Each of the three teams SJR State is chasing – Central Florida, Seminole and Santa Fe – must come to Palatka for the last go-round.

"We're right in the thick of it," said Vikings coach Ross Jones, who will send out staff ace Elijah Gill (6-1) for the suspended game and ideally, the one to follow. "We've got two big ones Friday. If we can get through Friday, we've got a fighting chance and we've got Seminole at home Saturday."

FSCJ (13-25, 4-14) lost its eighth straight Wednesday, but not without switching its rotation to match Naumann (6-3) against Darin Kilfoyl, who was making only his third start – the first in conference – since returning to the staff after an injury.

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"To me, this game was the trap after we'd won the first two in the series," Jones said. "(Naumann) is good. He beat Central Florida. He beat Seminole. He's signed with JU. He's won six games on a team with 13 wins."

He kept the Vikings off the

scoreboard the first three innings, but threw 65 pitches in the process.

"After the fifth, he was over 100 and after his first pitch in the sixth, I said, 'He's done.' They waited too long to pull him," Jones said. "After the second time through the order, I thought it was a matter of time."

"The difference in this game was the bullpen. Ours threw 13 innings in this series and

gave up one earned run. They didn't have the depth in their bullpen,

"Darin Kilfoyl gave was a solid start. He was on a pitch count, of course It's unfortunate that he didn't come away with the win."

Kilfoyl went four and two-third innings before Evan Waterbor finished the fifth. Stephen Halstead, Jackson Spiller and Luke Sutko came on

for an inning apiece. Halstead (5-1) got the win.

Garrett Sheppard went 2-3 with an RBI to complement Gonzalez. Provitt, Sangster, Rosario, Ryan Romano and Francis Villaman has one hit apiece, all singles. Sangster had three RBI, Chase Malloy two.

"We're pitching it good right now, we're defending and we're hitting now. We're batting over .290 in conference," Jones said.