

Out of Trouble



FRAN RUCHALSKI / Palatka Daily News

SJR State's Anthony Simonelli reacts to getting out of a bases-loaded jam in the second inning.

There They'll Go Again

Vikings win 3-1, knot MFC series with Santa Fe; trip to state at stake today

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Game 3 of the Mid-Florida Conference tournament series will have a Game 7 feel.

Makes sense. At stake is a trip to the state tournament for St. Johns River State College and Santa Fe College, the series knotted at a game apiece after St. Johns outlasted Santa Fe 3-1 on a sunny Monday afternoon at Tindall Field. That forces Game 3 for series and the seventh game between the MFC titans this season, each having won three.

The decisive meeting is today at 3 at Santa Fe.

"I'm looking forward to it. You knew it would come down to this," said SJR State coach Ross Jones, whose 35-16 team rode a nine-run sixth inning to a

10-2 win at Seminole on Saturday's tournament opener, then made five errors in a 7-4 loss at Santa Fe in the best-of-three opener on Sunday. "We've just got to play loose and play our game. It ought to be fun."

As in many postseason series, Monday's game had likely and unlikely stars.

The Vikings' No. 9 batter, Chase Malloy, hit just his second home run of the season, a two-run shot to left that broke a scoreless tie in the fifth inning. Michael Rosario delivered a two-out, RBI double later in the fifth and that would be enough for starting pitcher Anthony Simonelli (6-3), who picked up his second win in three days. Jackson Spiller and Connor Centalla took it from there, Centalla picking up his seventh save.

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"We pitched really well today. Anthony gave us six good innings. That's just what we were looking for. Jackson Spiller bridged the gap to Connor Centalla and Connor pitched well," Jones said.

Simonelli struck out nine, walked one and allowed one run on three hits, leaving after a leadoff walk in the seventh. He worked through some early struggles, most notably a second-inning jam in which the Saints (36-15) loaded the bases on a bloop single, a walk and an error before he came back with two strikeouts, then served up a fly-ball out.

Santa Fe loaded the bases with one out in the sixth on a walk and two hits, including a double that glanced off the glove of third baseman Ryan Romano, but Simonelli came back with two strikeouts.

Garrett Sheppard's bunt single got the Vikings going in the fifth, then Malloy drove Anthony Arguellis' 0-1 delivery out to left for a 2-0 lead. Ryan Romano drew a two-out walk, took second on Nick Romano's single and scored when Rosario doubled to right.

The Vikings couldn't make anything of Francis Villaman's leadoff triple in the sixth as they stranded nine Monday – and the Saints got on the board in the seventh when Cade Westbrook's two-out single plated Jonathan Logsdan, who reached on a walk and got into scoring position on another walk.

Relieving Spiller, Centalla got out of the inning on one pitch and worked in and out of trouble the last two innings.

Langston Provitt was 2-2 and reached in all four plate appearances for the Vikings.

The win answered a challenge Jones gave his players after Sunday's sloppy game in Gainesville.

"That was our worst game in April and I told them today would tell us what we were made of. I never saw any panic in the guys' eyes," Jones said.

Once down 6-0, SJR State battled back within 6-4 by the seventh, but couldn't close the deal. The loss went to starting pitcher Jordan Dubberly (6-2), though none of the six runs with which he was charged were earned.



FRAN RUCHALSKI / Palatka Daily News

SJR State's Garrett Sheppard beats the throw to first for a bunt single with one out in the fifth inning. The next batter, Chase Malloy, homered for a 2-0 lead.

"We just didn't defend the field. We showed some fight, but didn't deserve to win," Jones said.

Ryan Romano was 2-5 with a home run and three RBI in the loss.

The Vikings went to the sixth down 2-1 at Seminole on Saturday, then shelled the Raiders with nine runs, including a grand slam, by Riley Wash and a three-run blast by Rosario.

Wash wound up 1-3 with

five RBI, Rosario 2-4 with three RBI. Provitt and A.J. Mathis had two hits apiece.

"We had good at-bats all day. The sixth inning was the backbreaker," Jones said.

Simonelli took over for Gill with one out in third and threw an inning and two thirds for the win on what Jones called Simonelli's bullpen day. Stephen Halstead threw the line two innings of a game stopped after seven on the mercy rule.

Jones isn't sure who he'll start today, mindful that Santa Fe has two fully rested starting pitchers and a closer who didn't work Monday or Sunday.

"It's going to be Johnny Wholestaff – mix and match," he said.

St. Johns is looking to return to state for the first time since 2017.

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~ Ross Jones