

# PALATKA DAILY NEWS

# SPORTS

## Mid-Florida Tournament Final



Photos by ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

Above, SJR State's Nick Romano is congratulated by Michael Rosario (18) and Chase Malloy after a home run. Below, shortstop Francis Villaman forces Santa Fe's Jarrod Cande at second base.

# Halted Halfway There

### St. Johns starts strong, but Santa Fe pulls away to win best-of-three series

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GAINESVILLE

The wheels came off halfway to the Promised Land.

Four and a half sparkling innings produced a three-run lead for the St. Johns River State College baseball team, bidding for a return to the state tournament after a year's absence.

The shine was off by the top of the sixth, the lead was gone by the bottom of the inning and there was no getting it back in the Mid-Florida Conference tournament final Tuesday afternoon at Santa Fe College.

The host Saints got four straight two-out hits – the last three doubles – in a three-run fifth inning, took their first lead with a run in the sixth and scored three in the seventh on their way to a 7-4 victory over the Vikings, winning the best-of-three series 2-1 and seizing the second state tournament berth from the conference behind regular-season champion Central Florida.

It was the fourth game in four days for the



Vikings (35-17) – a play-in game at Seminole preceded the series with Santa Fe (37-16) – and the grind caught up with them.

“Too many missed opportunities,” said SJR State coach Ross Jones. “In the office this morning, I told (assistant coaches) Cory (Elasik) and Joey (Pound), we’ve got to find a way to score six or seven runs.”

They got halfway there.

See **VIKINGS**, Page 7A

## Vikings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6A

They scored three in the top of the fifth, getting a base hit from A.J. Mathis and a bunt single from Chase Malloy, who each moved up on a dropped third strike with Langston Provitt batting. Ryan Romano's sacrifice fly to left scored Romano, then Nick Romano's two-run homer to left made it 3-0.

Meanwhile, SJR State starter Elijah Gill had a one-hitter in the works and had faced the minimum, Jarrod Cande having been

erased on a double play in a four-pitch third inning. Gill got the first two batters in the fifth, which made Parker Biederer's soft single seem harmless enough.

Three RBI doubles by Cande, Jonathan Logsden and Caleb Stafford – the Saints' 7-8-9 batters – followed. At 3-3 it was a new game and for Gill and St. Johns, never the same.

The Vikings' only error turned Isaiah Perry's sixth-inning single into three bases. He scored on when Biederer singled off Stephen Halstead and at 4-3 Santa Fe was ahead to stay.

The Saints chased Halstead (6-1) and roughed up Jackson Spiller during a three-run seventh

before Darin Kilfoyl came on to finish the inning and get St Johns through the eighth.

“Elijah was really good, but he was coming back on short rest (having thrown three-plus innings Saturday at Seminole) and ran out of gas,” Jones said. “They hit the gaps on those doubles. Jackson was pitching his third day in a row. Playing four days in a row is different than three days in a row (as was the case for Santa Fe). But you’ve got to stay out of those innings.”

“We had runners in scoring position and didn’t get them home. We tried to come back, but we didn’t take advantage of our opportunities.”

The Vikings stranded 10 Tuesday and the best they could do the last three innings was a run in the ninth as Malloy walked, Provitt singled and Nick Romano sent a two-out, RBI single to right.

Their season is not quite over, even if their state tournament hopes have vanished.

They wind up this weekend in Marianna, where they will face host Chipola College along with LSU-Eunice and Wallace-Dothan from Alabama.

“We’ll go over there and try to play hard. It’s an opportunity to play our freshmen and start to get some answers for next year,” Jones said.