

Pitch Perfect



ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

Anthony Simonelli, who pitched a perfect game for St. Johns, has signed with Virginia Tech.

Play Well, Move On

At least 14 Vikings are taking their talents to four-year programs next year

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The idea, in junior college baseball, is not just to win but to keep one's baseball career going at least two more years.

At least 14 members of the 2019 St. Johns River State College baseball team have done just that.

There'll probably be two more, but so far 14 have signed with four-year schools – 11 with Division I programs – from a team that finished 37-19 and narrowly missed a state tournament berth.

"These guys have done what they're supposed to do – they get here and they move along," said SJR State coach Ross Jones. "We're doing our job. We're proud of them."

The two highest profile signees are pitchers, lefthanded staff ace Elijah Gill, bound for East Carolina, and righthander Anthony Simonelli, who has signed with Virginia Tech. Gill struck out an even 100 in 84 innings while going 8-2 with a 3.11 earned-run average. Simonelli (6-3, 3.54) struck out 77 in 68 innings and threw a perfect game in February against South Georgia State College.

Closer Connor Centalla (4-4, 1.93, nine saves, 56

strikeouts in 42 innings) has signed with the University of Tampa. Despite missing much of the season with injuries, Darin Kilfoyl (0-0, 2.57) is on his way to the University of North Florida. Other college-bound pitchers from St. Johns are Evan Waterbor (2-1, 2.53) with Florida Atlantic, Luke Sutko (2-2, 3.38, two saves) with Mercer, Austin Elliott (14.49 strikeouts per nine innings) with Mount Olive, N.C., and Israel Cordero, who missed the season due to an injury, with North Carolina-Greensboro.

At least six position players from SJR State are college-bound as well.

The winner of the John Tindall Endowed Scholarship, outfielder Langston Provitt has signed with Jacksonville University after batting .383 with three home runs, 20 RBI and 23 stolen bases. Infielder Francis Villaman will play for Florida International after batting .311 with four home runs and 23 RBI. Another infielder, Garrett Blaylock, has signed with Georgia despite a .167 batting average. Catcher Riley Wash (.262, four HR, 17 RBI) is on his way to Pittsburgh. First baseman Bubba Sangster (.251, five HR, 31 RBI) will play for Faulkner State in Alabama and infielder Luke Belanger (.195, seven RBI) is going to Maryland-Baltimore County.

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Undecided is the Vikings' top power hitter, corner infielder Nick Romano (.348, 10 home runs, 57 RBI). Also looking to sign, but yet to do so, is outfielder Ray Gonzalez (.287, three HR, 27 RBI).

Jones expects seven scholarship players back for 2020 – pitchers Jordan Dubberly, Stephen Halstead and Jackson Spiller, pitcher-outfielder Michael Rosario, outfielder Sandon Witt and infielders Ryan Romano and Chase Malloy. The position players were full- or part-time starters this season.