

SPORTS

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B SECTION

Lowe basks in AL Player glow

Former SJRSC baseball star and current Rays player earns weekly honor after big series

BY MARK BLUMENTHAL

Palatka Daily News
mblumenthal@palatkadailynews.com

When the news came to Ross Jones on Monday afternoon, he was in the role of proud papa.

For the first time in his 11 years of running the St. Johns River State College baseball program, one of Jones' players was given a lofty honor by Major League Baseball.

Nathaniel Lowe, who has been on a tear since being recalled a couple of weeks ago by the Tampa Bay Rays, was named the American League Player of the Week. Lowe had a huge weekend series against the Baltimore Orioles, going 8-for-17 at the plate with three home runs, including two in the second game of a double-header, a 12-4 rout on Saturday, while knocking in seven runs and scoring six times.

For the season, Lowe is hitting .299 with five

home runs and 16 RBI.

"It's just a great thing for him and I'm just glad for what he's done," Jones said. "He's in the big leagues and he's doing as well as he's doing is a credit to him."

Jones said he has talked twice to his star pupil since he was recalled by the Rays a couple of weeks ago, once on his birthday, July 7, when the Rays were hosting the Yankees to cap a four-game series, and then again this Friday as the Rays were playing the four-game set at Camden Yards.

Lowe was highly touted to make it to the big team out of spring training, but instead was sent back to Triple-A Durham. He earned a promotion to the Rays, but things didn't click and he was sent right back to Durham. This time around, Lowe has been delivering over and over again, first in the four-game set against the Yankees for which the Rays split the set before the All-Star break, then the big series against the Orioles for which Tampa Bay took three of four games.

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Daily News file photo

Nate Lowe, shown after hitting a home run in a February 2015 game for St. Johns River State College, was named the American League's Player of the Week after going 8-for-17 with seven RBI for Tampa Bay this past weekend against the Baltimore Orioles.

Lowe

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Going into a four-game series that started Monday at Yankee Stadium, the Rays were 55-40, six games behind the American League East-leading Yankees.

Jones said he saw the difference between spring training and Lowe's current tenure with the team.

"He went into spring training

trying to do too much," Jones said. "He was trying to show them the power he had in the minors (where he hit 27 home runs and knocked in 102 runs at various stops in the minors last year). He was pressing, knowing he's trying to win a job in the big leagues. That's not uncommon and he didn't have a great spring training. He just crashed a little in spring training. But he got back to the minors and at Triple-A, he got that swing back. In his final game, he hit back-to-back-to-back home runs before

being called up again.

"He's got such a great swing and such a good eye," Jones said. "He plays with such plate discipline, maybe he was trying to overswing and duplicate his home run numbers from a year ago. But the last few weeks, he's found that power swing again."

At St. Johns River State, Lowe was named the Mid-Florida Conference Player of the Year in 2015, hitting 17 home runs and knocking in 53 runs, while scoring 59 times in 56 games as the Vikings went 47-10 and took

fourth in the state tournament in Lakeland. Lowe and current Houston Astros outfielder-shortstop Myles Straw were teammates on the team.

"When he was here, Nate Lowe was everything we thought he was and he showed it," Jones said.

Lowe went on to Mississippi State and played for the Bulldogs in 2016, where he was named second team All-American by Louisville Slugger. He was drafted by the Rays in the 13th round (the 390th pick) of that spring's amateur draft.