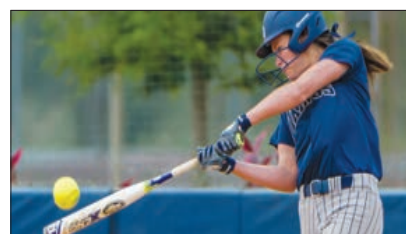




St. Johns River softball transitions nearly entire team for 2020, Page 5A



PALATKA DAILY NEWS

SPORTS

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 9, 2019

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FRAN RUCHALSKI / Palatka Daily News

Former Palatka High School standout Kendell Moody smacked three home runs for St. Johns River State College last year. She's one of only three returnees to the Vikings' softball team in 2020.

Nearly Starting Anew

Now in her 2nd year as SJR softball coach, Littlefield brings in 20 new players

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Transition years can be a scary proposition for any head coach, successful or not.

When the 2020 season begins in January for St. Johns River State College coach Marti Littlefield, she will have the mother of all transitional seasons.

There will be 20 – yes, 20 – new faces dotting the St. Johns River State softball roster. And even Littlefield, who searched far and wide to get her players the last year, said she's intimidated by it.

"It is scary, especially when I thought about it recruiting and we kept filling up and filling up and filling up," the second-year Vikings coach said. "There were a number of kids who were not going to come back this year and I looked at it and said, 'Man this is going to be super intimidating and scary. This is practically a brand new team.'"

That it is. There are just three players who will be returning to the fold when fall season kicks off next month – pitcher Amanda Jessel, who was 4-14 in the circle, outfielder Bri Clapper, who hit .368 and led the team in that category before breaking her wrist to end her season, and jack-of-all-trades Kendell Moody, a Palatka High graduate who finished with three home runs to lead the team along with departed players Jaime Valenta and Abby Ferlin.

Those three will greet 20 new faces who came from Colorado, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Texas, and, of course,

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MARK BLUMENTHAL / Palatka Daily News

After a 15-33 first year, St. Johns River State College softball coach Marti Littlefield recruited enough to bring in 20 new players next season from five different states.

Vikings

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Florida, where 15 new players reside. Most of these newcomers are from the central and southern part of the state.

The only name that would be familiar to anyone within Putnam County is Alachua Santa Fe's Emma Shiskin, an outfielder who hit .273 for the District 5-5A champion Raiders, who edged Palatka in 11 innings in the final, and was part of the team that reached the Region 2-5A championship before falling to Brooksville Hernando, 1-0. The only other players from the northeastern part of Florida would be twin sisters Soraya and Serena Hernandez of Jacksonville Mandarin High,

which went 24-3 and reached the Region 1-9A semifinals after winning a district title.

In some cases, transforming the Viking roster may have been a good idea. The Vikings struggled to a 15-33 season, finishing last in the Mid-Florida Conference at 4-20. The Vikings hit just .253 as a team and socked just 15 home runs in the 48-game season.

With the recruiting she's done – and she said she's going to a tournament in Orlando next week to start recruiting beyond the '20 season – Littlefield said confidence is at an all-time high at SJRSC.

"I definitely am confident about us keeping mistakes to a minimum," she said. "The kids I have ... they have an incredible energy about them. Just for an example, one of my new kids, usually keeps tabs with me on what she's doing to get ready and she's got a countdown ready before the season starts. Normally, that's the

other way around with the coaches checking on their kids."

Students start coming into the school a week from today and practice will begin by the final week of August for the fall season. Littlefield said she has six games set up, but would like to get 10 before the players break off and finish the fall semester, then come back to get ready for the '20 season in January.

"I can tell you I'm really feeling good about this bunch of girls," said Georgia native Littlefield. "I can already tell how much self-respect they have and know how much they work and how they respond to text messages and replies to them. I'm super, super confident that we're going to make a huge difference from last year and I mean with the culture and our main goal of changing that culture. Once that's complete, it's going to be kicking into the next gear."