

SPORTS



SIDELINES

ANDY HALL

Vikings, foes now going up against the wall

It will be harder to leave Tindall Field for Saturday's St Johns River State College baseball home opener with Eastern Florida, but fan convenience won't be impacted.

It will be harder for baseballs to leave the park from now on, a higher wooden fence replacing the chain-link fence that circled the field for years.

The new fence is eight feet, four inches, compared to the old fence that was just under six feet. It will show the Vikings' conference championship years, retired numbers and alumni who made the major leagues with the years they played for St. Johns and the team with which they made the bigs.

For instance, 2019 World Series hero and National League Championship Series MVP Howie Kendrick will be noted for playing here in 2002 and breaking in with the Los Angeles Angels; it was with the Washington Nationals, of course, that he came up big in the most recent Fall Classic. Among other ex-Vikings on the wall will be Palatka products Bill Swaggerty (1976-77 St. Johns, Orioles), Greg "Boo" Mullins (1991-92, Brewers) and recent stars Myles Straw (2014-15,

Astros) and Nate Lowe (2014-15, Rays). Ideally, finishing touches will have been applied in time for Saturday's game.

The wall not only celebrates SJR State baseball, it has its practical side. According to baseball coach and athletic director Ross Jones, the windscreen on the chain-link fence had to be replaced every three years at a cost of \$8,000.

"The first year, it looked great, but by the third year, it had all kinds of holes and had to be taken down every time there was a (tropical) storm. This wall will pay for itself in the long run and we can spend \$8,000 on something else every three years," Jones said. "It looks so much better. We've got a wall that will last long after I'm gone."

Incidentally, kids will be welcome to run the bases after the Eastern Florida game, following the same path taken by Kendrick and all those other big-leaguers.