

SPORTS

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Vikings pull out home opener in bottom of ninth

Strike out 14 times, but complete sweep of Eastern Florida

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It was a feelgood win for the St. Johns River State College baseball team, if not always a playgood win.

The Vikings survived 14 strikeouts in Saturday's home opener, getting their only back-to-back hits of the game in the bottom of the ninth for a 3-2 triumph that completed a two-game, season-opening sweep of Eastern Florida State College.

Andre James led off the SJR State ninth by drilling Zack Kornack's first pitch to right center for a double, hustling to beat the throw to second. James took third on a passed ball, then J.J.

Sousa punched a 1-0 pitch past first base and a drawn-in infield.

The fourth St. Johns pitcher, Steven Halstead (1-0) got the win despite a couple of one-out walks in the ninth. First baseman Nick Tripp fired to Halstead from a sitting position to get the first out and after the walks, shortstop Ryan Romano and Tripp combined on the game's only double play.

The Vikings won despite the 14 strikeouts and five hits, one of those an infield pop, along with a couple of errors and baserunning mistakes.

But they'll take it.

"I'm not pleased because I know what we can do, but it feels good to be 2-0," said SJR State coach Ross Jones. "We've got some little things – the baseball IQ things – we've got to get better with. We've got to see more live pitching. I want guys to be aggressive, but we've got to have a better two-strike

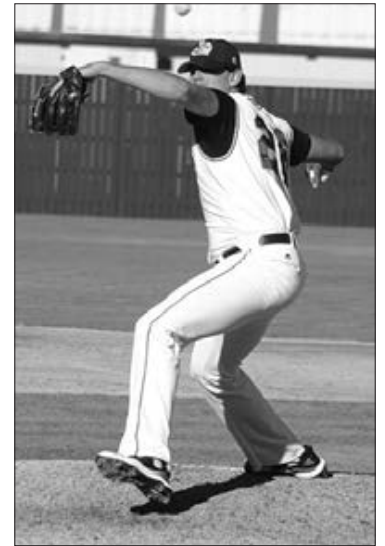
approach."

St. Johns pitchers combined on a five-hitter that included nine strikeouts and three walks. Starter Franco Aleman, the University of Florida signee, worked four scoreless and walk-free innings, striking out five and allowing two hits. Cameron Sereda and Nic Daniels threw two innings apiece until Halstead took over.

"For the most part, our dugout has been great the last two days, but it's easy to be great this time of year," Jones said.

St. Johns was ranked eighth, Eastern Florida 10th in the preseason state poll released Friday.

The Vikings never trailed, getting the first run without a hit in the second inning. Hit by a pitch, James went to second as Sousa walked and scored on a two-out error as Sandon Witt's chopper to third was thrown away.



ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

SJR State starter Franco Aleman threw four scoreless innngs.

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Sousa walked to open the fifth,

took second on a wild pitch and scored on n errant throw after August Haymaker flared a single to left center. Michael Rosario singled sharply to right to begin the sixth, but the next six Vikings struck out

and they failed to capitalize on a pair one-out walks in the eighth.

"The bottom part of our order is where we've struggled offensively," Jones said. "(Ben) Spitler, who's going to be our five-hole guy, has a

hamstring (problem) and he's not going to play until Friday."

The Titans tied the game in the seventh inning on a leadoff walk, a one-out error and a two-run single by Tyler Isenberg.