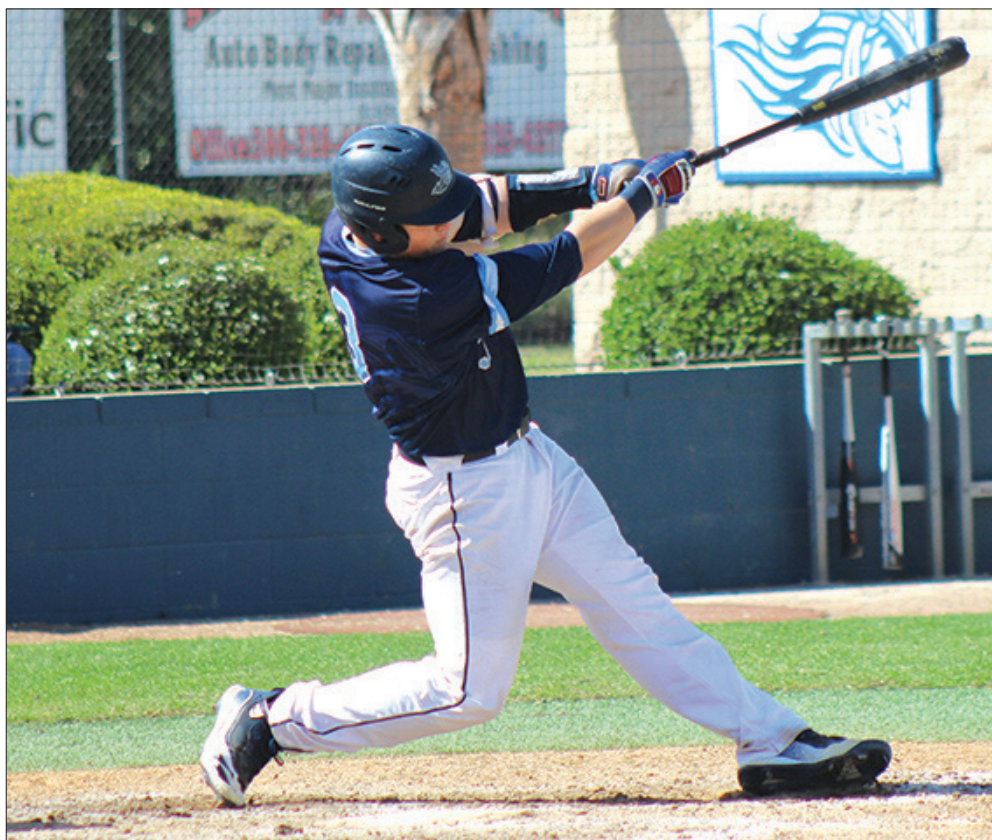


Arkansas-Bound



ANDY HALL / Palatka Daily News

A .280-hitting catcher, Charlie Welch has signed with Arkansas.

Expanding Horizons

Nine SJR State players headed to four-year schools, five to SEC or ACC

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St. Johns River State College is sending a combination of proven prospects and hidden gems to four-year schools to play baseball.

Nine Vikings are moving on, eight having played in 2020 and another having missed the COVID-shortened season with an injury. Five are headed to Southeastern Conference or Atlantic Coast Conference schools. Four were recruited as pitchers, four as position players and one as a combination pitcher-outfielder.

“You get five guys going to the ACC and SEC, you’ve got a lot to be proud of,” said SJR State coach Ross Jones. “I’d liked to have had some of them a little bit longer.”

The Power Five conference signees are pitcher Franco Aleman (Florida), pitcher Jordan Dubberly (Miami), pitcher-outfielder Michael Rosario (Miami), infielder Ryan Romano (Florida State) and catcher Charlie Welch (Arkansas).

The 6-foot-6 Aleman was 3-1 with a 3.26 earned-run average and 51 strikeouts in 38 innings as a sophomore at St. Johns. Rosario was a .295 hitter, second in the state

with seven home runs to go with 22 RBI; he was 0-3 on the mound with a 4.64 ERA and 21 strikeouts in 18 innings. Romano batted an even .300 with five home runs and 27 RBI. Welch hit .280 with four homers and 17 RBI. A starter in 2019, Dubberly did not pitch this season because of an injury.

The other pitchers headed up are Jackson Spiller (Florida Atlantic) and Stephen Halstead (North Florida). Outfielder August Haymaker has signed with Lipscomb University in Tennessee, first baseman Nick Tripp with South Carolina-Aiken.

Spiller was 3-2 with a 5.50 ERA and 36 strikeouts in 37 innings this spring, Halstead 1-2 with two saves and a 3.86 ERA along with 20 strikeouts in 23 innings. Tripp hit .224 with three home runs; Haymaker batted .204.

Where players such as Aleman arrived amid great fanfare, having already committed to the Gators, Jones pointed to three that didn’t.

“Ryan Romano was a walk-on; now he’s going to Florida State. Spiller was recruited by a few other junior colleges but no four-year colleges out of high school,” Jones said. “Stephen Halstead had never pitched in his life; now he’s going to UNF. We signed him as a pitcher because he was athletic and his arm worked.”