

SPORTS

Business as unusual for SJR State

No chances being taken as safety precautions put in place for programs

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It's business as unusual for St. Johns River State College athletes amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The baseball players moved in last weekend. The softball players will be here Monday.

First order of business is testing for the virus.

"That's coaches included," said baseball coach and athletic director Ross Jones. "They're quarantined until the tests are back. Before they come in the dugout, we're going to take their temperature."

"They're moving in on the 17th. On the 18th, we'll get them tested. If the results come back negative, we'll get started (with fall practice)," said softball coach Marti Littlefield. "We'll have the mask requirements and social distancing."

For the baseball team, social distancing includes holding the first team meeting in the Tindall Field grandstand so players can be spaced out rather than in a classroom where they could not.

"We're going to wipe off the bats and weights (between usages) with sanitizer," Jones said. "It's going to be a different kind of fall, but we're going to do what we have to do to be successful."

Both teams had their 2020 seasons cut short when the National Junior College Athletic Association suspended spring sports because of the virus. The baseball team was 18-12, the softball team 10-14. Ten baseball players are returning to go with 24 prospects. The softball team returns 16 players and has seven freshmen.

"They did a lot of work on their own," Littlefield said during the downtime. "We continued to send them workouts, whether it was weights or defensive drills."

Even though virtually all SJR State fall classes will be virtual – taken online – the athletes will live near the campus as usual, not only to practice but to participate in study hall.

"We're going to have Plexiglas in the study hall," Jones said. "Not everyone does well in that (online) setting. You're not getting guys to Florida, Florida State and Arkansas if you're not getting the job done in the classroom. We're very fortunate we have the backing of our administration."

"They mean business," Littlefield said.

As reported in the *Daily News* last week, the Viking volleyball team had its season moved to the spring of 2021 by the NJCAA, which did so with all fall sports. The volleyball players will have fall practice instead.