

FSU baseball gets back in swing

Seminoles opened fall practice with plenty of open positions

12:38 AM, Sep 17, 2012 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

There are new faces and position changes. Three-fourths of the infield must be replaced. The All-America center fielder and closer, too.

No wonder Florida State's baseball coaches held a roll call before the first day of fall practice on Sunday at Dick Howser Stadium.

"Quite possibly, this is the most turnover we've ever had," said assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. "But the players are working hard, and everyone is locked in trying to get better."

Coach Mike Martin and the Seminoles are coming off their 21st appearance in the College World Series, where they were eliminated by eventual national champion Arizona in a bracket final. They finished ranked No. 4 in the final Baseball America top 25.

Senior center fielder James Ramsey, the program's first player to wear the captain's "C" on his jersey and went on to be a first-round selection of the St. Louis Cardinals, departed as one of the team's most decorated players and its undisputed leader.

In addition to annual attrition that also saw the loss of fellow seniors Sherman Johnson at third base and Hunter Scantling in the bullpen, FSU's roster was further depleted by the major-league draft.

Juniors who signed professional contracts included first baseman Jayce Boyd, second baseman Devon Travis and closer Robert Benincasa. FSU will open next season without a returning .300 hitter.

"It was a special group, that's why it made it so difficult to say goodbye to them," Martin Jr. said. "They brought a lot to the table every day. That was their motto, and it culminated with a good run and it was well-deserving for that group."

Martin Jr. and pitching coach Mike Bell covered the recruiting trail during the offseason and believe they have brought in an influx of talent that will help offset the losses. They also will rely heavily on returnees Justin Gonzalez at shortstop, Stephen McGee at catcher and Seth Miller in the outfield.

Gonzalez, a senior, was a 27th-round selection of the Los Angeles Dodgers and contemplated turning professional.

Also, Jose Brizuela, a freshman starter in left field last year, has returned to his natural position at third base. Sophomore infielders John Holland and John Nogowski and fellow sophomore outfielder Josh Delph also were key components last season.

A strength expects to be a young but experienced pitching staff. The top two starters return in sophomores Brandon Leibrandt, last year's No.1 starter, and Mike Compton. The duo combined for 20 victories and 190 innings pitched.

Fellow sophomore Luke Weaver is also expected to have a larger role after 16 appearances last season. Senior Scott Sitz and junior set-up man Gage Smith, who made a team-high 39 appearances last season, are back.

Martin Jr. said newcomers who made an impression during workouts in preparation for the start of fall practice include freshmen Alvin Swoope (second base) and D.J. Stewart (outfield), and junior-college transfers Marcus Davis (outfield), Brett Knief (outfield) and Robby Coles (pitcher).

Coles played at Wakulla High and Chipola College.

Practice ends in late October with the Garnet and Gold game, followed by an exhibition against the Ontario Blue Jays for the second consecutive year. The exhibition is set for Wednesday, Oct. 17, at 2:30 p.m.

Seminole baseball to open season with series of home games

11:42 AM, Oct. 9, 2012 |

Written by
Brendan Bures
Sports Editor

The month of February brings with it Valentines, cold weather and this year, Florida State baseball. The Seminoles will open season play February 15, 2013 with a three-game series against the University of Rhode Island inside Dick Howser stadium of Tallahassee. Fans of FSU baseball excited to see the new team will have plenty of opportunity as the Seminoles open the season with a 15-game home stand.

“It’s always important that we play as many games as we can at home early in the season because our weather is perfect to play baseball at that time of year,” head coach Mike Martin said. “The main thing is with a young club that we have got to find out what this team can do and what better way to do that than to find out at home.”

Florida State will have plenty of new faces as closer Robert Benincasa, slugger Jayce Boyd and captain James Ramsey all departed for life in the minor leagues. Florida State will face stiff competition early on with thirteen teams on this year’s schedule recorded 30 or more wins a season ago and four teams finished the season ranked in the top 25.

The state of Florida championship will be in full effect this season as Florida State battles against the major universities like Florida, Miami, Central Florida and South Florida. USF and FSU haven’t met since June 2, 2002 in the NCAA Tallahassee Regional, but the Bulls will travel to Tallahassee for a three-game series on February 22.

“We are going to play a very competitive schedule and I’m sure if you look on there you will see a number of teams that participated in postseason play including three against the No. 1 team in the country last year for a majority of the season in the University of Florida,” Martin said.

FSU will also face off against Florida state schools like Jacksonville, Stetson and Florida Gulf Coast.

The six-time ACC Atlantic Division Champion Seminoles will begin their 30-game conference schedule against Boston College in Tallahassee March 8. Only one league opponent remains off the schedule for Florida State in North Carolina who the Seminoles won’t play for the second consecutive year.

“Of course one of the biggest disappointments is not playing the University of North Carolina,” Martin said. “But we have Miami down there, will visit a very good NC State ball club late in the season, and host Georgia Tech and Clemson, so we have a very, very competitive schedule as usual.”

Check the info box on the left for the full 2013 FSU baseball schedule.

Martin searches for lineup answers

FSU coach holding open auditions during practices

12:14 AM, Oct 16, 2012 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

Just a handful of fall practices remain for the Florida State baseball team, but there still are countless opportunities for the Seminoles' young players to catch the attention of head coach Mike Martin and his staff.

With only one returning starter in the infield and a "wide-open" competition in the outfield, Martin said he didn't set any huge goals for the Seminoles this fall.

He isn't harping on every minor detail the way he will when preseason cranks up in early 2013. He isn't demanding flawless execution or pinpoint accuracy.

He simply wants to see which newcomers from a group that includes many freshmen and junior-college transfers, have the natural talent and skills to help his team right away.

"Who can play baseball?" Martin said flatly.

As the Seminoles entered their final week of fall, Martin said there have been plenty of good days and bad. Several positions are still up for grabs, and most of those battles will carry over through the winter. But there have been enough flashes — with enough individual players — that Martin remains encouraged about his team's prospects for next spring.

"Marcus Davis is showing me he can play baseball," Martin said of the junior-college transfer from Cincinnati, who is competing for one of the outfield jobs.

Davis, a 6-foot-2, 220-pounder originally signed with LSU out of high school but ended up transferring to Walter State (Tenn.) Community College.

Another junior-college transfer who has grabbed Martin's attention is outfielder Bret Knief, who started his college career at North Carolina before moving on to Seminole State College. Like many of the newcomers, Knief has battled inconsistency during his brief time in Tallahassee, but he impressed Martin recently with his athleticism and instincts during a scrimmage.

"He went from second to home (on a single)," Martin said. "I went, 'That looks like a baseball player.' And it really was encouraging to see that develop."

Davis, Knief, freshman DJ Stewart and returning players Josh Delph and Seth Miller are likely the top candidates to claim the three outfield positions.

Senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez returns to anchor the infield, along with catcher Stephen McGee, but there still is major competition at the other spots.

Sophomore John Nogowski (North Florida Christian) and freshman John Sansone are the top prospects at first base; sophomore Giovanni Alfonzo, freshman Alvin Swoope and walk-on Casey Schmidt are in the mix at second base; and sophomore Jose Brizuela has been competing with freshman J.J. Gould at third.

Brizuela started at left field for the Seminoles last season as a freshman.

“Breezy’s probably one of the best athletes we have,” Gonzalez said. “It’s easy for a guy like that to make the transition from the outfield to the infield. And he came in as a third baseman ... he’s been doing a heck of a job for us.”

While all of those competitions will play out throughout the winter, Martin said he would be surprised if everything is even nailed down by the time the regular season starts in mid-February.

Seminoles' pitchers will be on display

12:02 AM, Oct 18, 2012 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

With their top four hitters from last season now playing professionally, Florida State's baseball coaches know there will be some growing pains on offense in 2013.

There will be some challenges defensively as well, with three new starters in the infield and a total makeover in the outfield.

But one thing — one major thing — working in the Seminoles' favor is the return of an excellent pitching staff. FSU played 67 games in the 2012 season, and the pitchers who made 66 of those starts are returning.

"When you look at our ballclub," FSU coach Mike Martin said, "you have to ask the question: 'Can the pitching sustain us until these new guys get their feet on the ground?' That's what we're striving for (and) hoping for."

The pitching staff will be led again by sophomores Brandon Leibrandt and Mike Compton. As a freshman, Leibrandt emerged as the Seminoles' Friday night starter and posted an 8-3 record with a 2.82 ERA. Compton went 12-2 with a 2.87 ERA.

The Seminoles also return junior reliever Gage Smith (5-0, 2.89) and versatile senior Scott Sitz (4-3, 3.72).

FSU fans will get a chance to see the veterans pitch today at 3 p.m. in a Garnet and Gold intrasquad scrimmage at Dick Howser Stadium. The Seminoles will hold another scrimmage Friday at 6 p.m., and that will feature first-year pitchers.

FSU will wrap up fall practice Monday at 3 p.m. with an exhibition against the Ontario Blue Jays.

Admission is free to all three games.

Fall ball comes to an end with Garnet & Gold game

12:32 AM, Oct. 22, 2012 |

Written by

Eric Fisher

Senior Staff Writer

Florida State baseball, coming off a 50-win season capped by another College World Series appearance in 2012, wrapped up its fall practices with two scrimmages at Dick Howser Stadium on Thursday and Friday to conclude what was a crucial stretch of preparation for a team looking to replace many of its biggest stars from a season ago.

The Garnet squad topped the Gold by a score of 8-5 on both Thursday and Friday as the Seminole bats, generally viewed as the bigger question mark as the 2013 season approaches, showed some flashes of promise.

"I thought it was a great opportunity for a lot of guys and they showed a lot of perseverance," hall-of-fame coach Mike Martin said. "We had a couple of mistakes that you can't have and expect to win. But what impressed me is the guys would turn around and make a good defensive play."

Martin saw both a few of his returning veterans in the offensive lineup and some of the new faces in the program stand out in the two games at the plate, but none more than sophomore Jose Brizuela, who will look to build off a successful freshman season where he was a regular starter. Brizuela went 4-for-7 in the two games, notching three RBI and a double. Freshman Alvin Swoope also had a productive pair of games, going 3-for-6 with two RBI of his own.

Martin said that the pitching staff, which features returning freshman All-Americans Brandon Leibrandt and Mike Compton, as well as other experienced hands like Scott Sitz and Gage Smith, looks to be in good shape, despite some shakiness in the scrimmages.

"I'm sure the nerves were playing a role, some of them are much better than they showed," Martin said of his pitchers. "But you might want to credit our hitters, because we've been starting to play a bit better offensively."

Sitz ended up claiming MVP honors for the fall games after performing well both on the mound and more surprisingly, at the plate, where he smacked a double to deep right on Friday. The senior also pitched two innings Thursday and allowed just one run as part of his squad's victory.

"Scott Sitz, of course, you won't see that again but he certainly was impressive," Martin said of the pitcher's double. "I'll tell you one thing, I wouldn't hesitate if I thought I could see that same swing out of him again—he hit the daylights out of the ball."

Overall, the fall season was about bringing along a host of new faces for the program, and Martin said he was pleased with the progress his program has made.

"It's been a good fall," Martin said. "We have tried to do more this fall than we have in the past because of the young guys. We just tried to play like we've done all fall and that's just do the little things—move runners when we had the opportunities."

FSU baseball team wins 16-0

11:56 PM, Oct 22, 2012 |

Written by

| Democrat staff report

The Florida State baseball team closed out its fall season Monday afternoon with a 16-0 victory over the Ontario Blue Jays in a scrimmage played at Howser Stadium.

FSU pounded out 15 hits including five for extra bases, while six Seminole pitchers combined for the nine-hit shutout.

Stephen McGee led all hitters with a four-hit performance. He had two doubles and two singles and drove in three runs. Freshman DJ Stewart, who started in left field, finished with three hits. Giovanni Alfonzo and John Sansone each had two hits and an RBI. Brett Knief hit the only home run of the game as the junior-college transfer led off the bottom of the eighth with a solo shot to left.

Scott Sitz pitched the first two innings, allowing one hit, to earn the win. Peter Miller and Luke Weaver threw two innings, combining for five strikeouts. Gage Smith, Bryant Holtmann and Robby Coles closed out the game with an inning of work to preserve the shutout.

Dooley speaks at Quarterback Club

Legendary Georgia football coach Vince Dooley is the guest speaker at tonight's Tallahassee Quarterback Club meeting, which starts at 6 p.m. at the University Center Club. Tickets are available at the door. Email Tallyqbclub@gmail.com for details.

Florida State baseball goes international

Seminoles end fall ball with scrimmage against Ontario Blue Jays at home
10:31 PM, Oct. 24, 2012 |

Written by
Alexis Schulman
Staff Writer

If fall baseball is any indication of the spring season to come, then Florida State baseball fans have plenty to look forward to. The Seminoles wrapped up their fall baseball season on Monday in an afternoon scrimmage against the Ontario Blue Jays. The 'Noles trounced the Blue Jays 16-0.

Florida State smacked 15 hits in the game, including five for extra bases. Head coach Mike Martin had to be pleased with the swings his club got at the plate, but he was particularly happy with the six Seminole pitchers who combined for the nine-hit shutout.

"It's like I told the guys in the locker room after the game, anytime we see that zero in the last column, that's what this program is about," Martin said. "We are trying to play a game of error-free baseball and I was very proud of that fact."

Martin got the first chance of the season, following the team's intra-squad scrimmages last Thursday and Friday, to see how his young ball club looked against a team not in garnet and gold.

"It was good for our guys to play in an environment of a team with a different color uniform," Martin said. "I thought we played a pretty good game today."

The Seminoles struck first and never looked back, pouring seven runs on in the first inning.

Freshman DJ Stewart, who started in left field, pounded out three hits, including a two-run triple that helped set the pace for the 'Noles in the first inning.

Catcher Stephen McGee led the team in hits, going a perfect 4-for-4 at the plate with a pair of doubles and singles. McGee drove in three runs off the four hits and scored twice.

Veteran shortstop Justin Gonzales grabbed a hit, walked once, scored twice and was hit by a pitch. Outfielder Josh Delph walked twice as the Seminoles were walked nine times in the game.

Newcomer Brett Knief tallied the game's only homerun and went 1-for-3 with two walks and 3 RBI. Giovanni Alfonzo and John Sansone both notched two hits and one RBI a piece.

"We are getting closer to seeing what our line-up is going to look like," Martin said. "We don't exactly have an order at the present time, but I like what I am seeing from this collection of players."

Scott Sitz was one of the six pitchers responsible for shutting out the Blue Jays and the senior allowed just one hit in his two innings pitched. He finished with four strikeouts and walked no one.

Peter Miller and Luke Weaver followed Sitz with two innings of shutout work. Weaver finished with four strikeouts and allowed two hits, while Miller gave up one hit and struck out one. Gage Smith, Bryant Holtmann and Robby Coles each struck out a batter and pitched a shutout inning to close out the game.

“I thought the pitching was excellent,” Martin said. “We played very strong defense and it was a nice atmosphere for our guys.”

Buster Posey, the Champions' Champion

By TYLER KEPNER

Published: October 29, 2012

Buster Posey has played two healthy seasons in the major leagues. Both ended with him squeezing a third strike to end the World Series, then romping out to the mound to embrace his pitcher.

This is not how baseball works, especially now, with 10 teams in the playoff field. At 25 years old, Posey, the San Francisco Giants' catcher, has won as many championships as Christy Mathewson, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Juan Marichal and Barry Bonds — combined. These are glory days for his franchise.

"I know guys play their whole career and don't get to experience what I've experienced twice," Posey said Sunday night, in a hallway outside the Giants' clubhouse at Comerica Park. "And I don't take it for granted."

Ten other players were on the Giants' World Series roster in both 2010 and 2012. Tim Lincecum might be the most famous, with his two Cy Young Awards, his contorted delivery and his skater-boy haircut. Matt Cain and Madison Bumgarner have the longest contracts, each stretching through 2017, at least. Pablo Sandoval has the best nickname — Kung Fu Panda — and was just named most valuable player of the World Series.

But Posey is the cornerstone of the franchise. He is the fulcrum, the cleanup hitter for the offense and, as catcher, a leader of the pitching staff. Giants people talk about Posey the way Yankees people talk about Derek Jeter, who also won two World Series in his first three seasons. His leadership enhances his skills.

"It's rare to have, at that age, somebody so thoughtful that everybody can rally around," said Larry Baer, the Giants' chief executive. "Even for somebody with big numbers, it usually takes a while for him to get the respect. But Buster Posey has grabbed this clubhouse by storm in ways that are hard to imagine for somebody that's been in the majors three years."

Posey hit only .200 this postseason, but he made his home runs count. He ripped a grand slam in the final game of the Giants' division series in Cincinnati, and his two-run homer in Game 4 on Sunday erased the Tigers' only lead of the World Series.

Posey also guided a pitching staff that throttled St. Louis and Detroit to win the final seven games of the season — the Giants' only seven-game winning streak all year. The pitchers allowed just seven earned runs in those games for an earned run average of 0.98.

"He's cool, calm and collected," said Brian Sabean, the Giants' general manager. "Even though he had some struggles here through the playoffs, nobody's really talking about Buster and what he did to handle the pitching staff. He's really the unsung hero."

Catcher is not Posey's natural position. At Florida State, he was named to the freshman all-America team as a shortstop and switched to catcher because of the makeup of the Seminoles' roster. The

position suited his intellectual side — Posey earned a 3.8 grade-point average in the second semester of his junior year, even with the draft just ahead — and he poured himself into learning it.

When scouts came to Florida State to watch Posey, the assistant coach, Mike Martin Jr., compared him to two major league captains with multiple World Series championships.

“Mark my words: he’s Jason Varitek behind the plate and Derek Jeter as a hitter,” Martin said he told them, in a 2010 interview. “He gets inside the ball like he’s Jeter, and he runs the show like he’s Varitek — and he cares, like both of them do. That’s what you’re getting.”

Five teams passed on Jeter in the 1992 draft, after the Yankees had gone 71-91 the previous season. Four teams passed on Posey in the 2008 draft, after the Giants had gone, yes, 71-91 the previous season.

After Tampa Bay, Pittsburgh, Kansas City and Baltimore chose other players, the Giants grabbed Posey and paid him \$6.2 million — more than the Rays paid the top pick, Tim Beckham, a shortstop from a Georgia high school who has not reached the majors. It might be the wisest \$6.2 million the Giants ever spent, both for his talent on the field and comportsment off it.

Like Jeter, Posey is polite and respectful. He answers questions concisely, never revealing too much and never veering far from a team-oriented message. He is a reliable spokesman for the valuable brand of a popular franchise.

“This is my 20th year in sports, and I have to say I’ve never seen anybody like Buster Posey,” Baer said. “I really haven’t. I remember seeing him in a game right after the draft, and he was going into the minor leagues. He has a level of maturity, he looks you in the eye, he calls you by your name.

“If he wasn’t a baseball player, he’d be an outstanding businessperson, an outstanding professor, whatever, because he’s really, really a smart guy that gets it. I can’t think of anybody better.”

Posey gave the ball from the final out of the 2010 World Series to closer Brian Wilson, who presented it to the City of San Francisco. On Sunday, Posey gave the ball to his manager, Bruce Bochy, who now seems certain to be elected to the Hall of Fame someday.

It is far too soon to fit Posey for a place in Cooperstown. But he is off to a fast start, with the 2010 Rookie of the Year award, a batting title this season and, most likely, his first M.V.P. award. He has already won the National League’s Comeback Player of the Year award, from MLB.com, for overcoming the broken leg that ended his season in May 2011. The team’s success, Posey said, has made the individual honors sweeter.

“This is the ending you want to a good year,” he said. “Personally, if you have a good year and you’re sitting at home and watching somebody else celebrate, I don’t think it means as much as actually getting there and celebrating yourself. The reason you play the game is to help the team win.”

When it was over, in the joyous swirl of teammates and executives and family in the Giants’ clubhouse, Baer found Posey outside Bochy’s office and wrapped him in a hug. He thanked Posey for his dedication to returning from the injury, and for representing everything the Giants try to stand for.

“I said, ‘You’re the glue, you’re at the center of that, thank you,’ ” Baer said. “And then he says, ‘Let’s produce a gaudy ring.’ ”

Campers learn, impress in FSU Winter Clinic

Former All-American Sean Gilmartin attended Mike Martin's camp in 2006

8:26 PM, Dec 26, 2012 |

Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

It was the number of seats inside Howser Stadium that immediately caught Sean Gilmartin's attention when he attended Florida State's Winter Clinic in 2006.

Gilmartin, a prep player from California at the time, couldn't believe that many fans – Howser Stadium's capacity is 6,700 – attended FSU baseball games.

"I really didn't realize the full impact of what big-time Division I baseball is all about until I walked into that stadium," Gilmartin said Wednesday from his family's home in California.

"I was taken back by all the seats and seeing how many people came to the games."

Of course, Gilmartin's first trip to Florida and Tallahassee worked out well.

The left-handed pitcher/outfielder landed on the Seminoles' recruiting radar following his attendance at FSU coach Mike Martin's Winter Clinic, a staple since the late 1990s.

Gilmartin eventually signed with FSU and developed into an All-American pitcher and first-round draft selection of the Atlanta Braves in 2011.

"It was a pretty fun experience to see a different part of the country and get a different look and feel how different parts of the country recruit," said Gilmartin, 22, who reached Triple-A in the Braves' organization last season.

Martin's annual Winter Clinic for players ages 10 to 18 starts Thursday, and more than 140 campers are expected for the pair of two-day sessions.

The camp gives FSU's coaching staff the opportunity to teach as well as evaluate high school-aged players. Assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. says the latter is important this time of year, when recruiting is limited to contact on campus.

FSU was one of the first schools nationally to hold December camps. Now, they are commonplace at many schools.

"It just really made a lot of sense to have the opportunity to see kids, in addition to helping us get back into the teaching mode with the season around the corner," Martin Jr. said.

"You would be amazed how many players have gotten on that (recruiting) radar. You can then turn around and watch them and track their development."

Chip Baker, FSU's director of baseball operations, helps direct the camp and hires staff that joins the Seminole coaches on the field. Former FSU All-American Tyler Holt, in the Cleveland Indians organization, is part of the staff.

"These camps are a great opportunity to teach and learn, and keep everyone sharp," Baker said. "We separate the (age groups) and try to explain why."

Martin Jr. stressed the importance of players of all ages learning good habits, saying those habits turn into actions and "actions become who you are."

Gilmartin, who will soon return to Atlanta from California to continue his preparation for the start of spring training in February, encouraged campers to enjoy the camp and learn from it.

"I really didn't go into that camp (at FSU) with huge expectations, like trying to hit the ball 700 feet in my first at-bat," Gilmartin said. "Go in and do what your capable of doing."

Double-duty planned for Winston

Heralded QB to play baseball for Seminoles

10:03 PM, Dec 30, 2012 |

Comments

Written by

Corey Clark

and Jim Henry

Florida State's football and baseball coaches are in agreement – Jameis Winston is, as coaches like to say in their contemporary vernacular, the real deal.

The heralded Winston signed with the Seminoles to play both football and baseball. And he is finally going to get that chance in a few weeks.

First, at quarterback, for real. And then in potential multiple roles (first base, outfield, relief pitcher) in baseball.

"He's going to play baseball and do spring football," FSU coach Jimbo Fisher said Sunday.

"We're working completely around it. He's not going to miss practice. He's not going to miss any reps. But we're going to mix the baseball around and work the hours."

Winston, a 6-foot-5, 207-pound freshman, has not played in a football game this season heading into Tuesday's Orange Bowl.

He is expected to enter spring drills, at least on paper, third in the pecking order behind rising redshirt junior Clint Trickett and redshirt sophomore Jacob Coker.

Yet, many believe Winston could leapfrog the duo and win the starter's job. Even Fisher has said as much.

Winston was just as impressive in cameo baseball workouts (one hour per week) with assistant coach Mike Martin Jr., earlier this month.

Winston's a switch-hitting outfielder/first baseman and a right-handed pitcher who has been clocked in the low 90s. with a plus curveball.

"We got a quick glimpse of Jameis and it's impressive," Martin said.

"It has been pretty freakish. It's like, 'Holy cow.' It's the jump he's made. I tell him one thing and it sinks in, he's doing it the right way."

Fisher, an avid baseball fan who regularly attends Seminole games and is close to coach Mike Martin and Martin Jr., says the two staffs will work together.

The baseball Seminoles open their season Feb. 15; spring football practice is scheduled to start in mid-March.

"They've got a plan for him to do a lot of things," Fisher said of baseball.

"He's the real deal. And he's a real player on our side. We understand. We're not going to jeopardize anything for him to compete for the quarterback job. We'll work together. We'll work around whatever is best for the young man."

While other FSU football players have also played baseball for the Seminoles in the past, Martin Jr. is excited to see if Winston on the diamond.

"He's going to be somewhere in the mix competing for jobs," Martin Jr. said.

"He's a neat guy, that's what really encourages us. The guys love him.

"He has the feel for the game. That's the biggest thing. This guy has a feel for the game and really wants to be good at it. He has that inner drive to be something special."

FSU baseball player hospitalized after sky-diving accident

5:13 PM, Jan 3, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

Florida State senior baseball player Stephen Spradling is recovering in a Melbourne hospital after suffering multiple broken bones in a sky-diving accident on Sunday afternoon.

According to FSU assistant coach Mike Martin Jr., the second-year Seminole has a broken pelvis, broken hips, broken ribs and a broken bone in his back. When he is released from the hospital, he'll likely have to be in a wheelchair for at least two to three months.

"They think he's going to be able to walk," Martin Jr. said. "They're pretty confident as far as walking. He'll probably never play baseball again, which is irrelevant right now."

Spradling, who has long participated in extreme-sports type activities, is probably lucky to be alive.

Martin Jr. said that when Spradling was about 100 feet off the ground, preparing to land, another sky-diver was coming directly at him. If the two collided, they likely both would have died. So Spradling pulled hard on his chute to avoid the other person, which propelled him even faster toward the ground.

After his crash-landing, he was rushed to Holmes Hospital in Melbourne, and he'll be there for weeks to come.

Spradling recently underwent surgery to have rods and plates placed in his hip, according to Martin Jr.

"He does all the extreme stuff," the coach said. "Skateboarding, snow-skiing, sky-diving, anything you can think of. He loves doing that stuff. He's probably jumped hundreds of times out of planes. He and his brothers and his buddies. He's always been into that stuff."

"We're just so glad it wasn't worse."

Last year, as a junior-college transfer, Spradling hit .262 in 42 at-bats for the Seminoles. He was second on the team with 12 hit-by-pitches.

FSU baseball hits field for early drills

1:10 PM, Jan 7, 2013 |

Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State's baseball coaching staff has six weeks to settle on the Seminoles' opening-day lineup. But don't expect it to be permanent as FSU develops and defines its strengths and personality over the four-month season.

The best news is that the Seminoles have a strong foundation to build on as "four-man drills" -- sessions in which coaches can work with four players at a time on the field -- started today.

The first full-team practice is Jan. 25, and the Seminoles open the season at home against Rhode Island on Friday, Feb. 15.

FSU returns 20 players, including five positions starters and nine pitchers who threw at least 15 innings on last year's team, which tied an Atlantic Coast Conference-record with 24 wins and advanced to the College World Series for the 21st time in program history.

One trait that emerged from fall practice and caught assistant coach Mike Martin Jr.'s eye was the team's overall athleticism.

And he believes that's a positive as the new bat standards, adopted in 2011, continue to change the college game. Teams and players that typically benefit from the new BBCOR bats are faster and fundamentally sound at the plate, with solid skills on defense.

"We are going to force the defense into mistakes because of the way we are going to get down the line," Martin Jr. said.

"And I really think that's going to translate defensively in due time. It may not be a pretty situation early in general, but I think we are going to be there late."

One newcomer who has impressed with his overall athleticism is freshman D.J. Stewart. The left-handed hitting Stewart, a 6-foot, 230-pounder from Jacksonville, is expected to start in either center or left field and hit third in the lineup.

Stewart had five hits over the team's final three fall scrimmages, including a 16-0 exhibition win over the Ontario Blue Jays from Canada. Martin Jr. says Stewart's natural strength as a young hitter reminds him of former Seminole great J.D. Drew.

"He is going to be a good one," Martin Jr. said of Stewart.

"He's very driven and crazy strong. Strength-wise, I can't remember a freshman, maybe J.D. Drew who hits the ball as hard as D.J. does. He has some tools. He can run, he throws, and you throw in that (former Seminole) Tyler Holt-type mentality. He plays very similar to Tyler Holt, and fans will love him."

Another player's progress to keep an eye on is freshman Jameis Winston, who will juggle football and baseball this spring.

Martin Jr. said Winston will compete for a starting position and could fill the closer's role on the mound. He's also expected to contend for the starter's role at quarterback during spring football.

"Jameis is going to play a role on our team, pitching-wise and offensively, and he's going to be somewhere in the mix competing for a job," Martin Jr. said.

One of FSU strengths from last season doesn't expect to change -- pitching.

Starting pitchers Brandon Leibrandt and Mike Compton, who combined for 20 wins and 57 starts last season, have been named Louisville Slugger Preseason All-Americans.

Senior Scott Sitz and junior Gage Smith help anchor the bullpen with 57 appearances and 118 innings pitched last season.

Martin Jr. said an immediate concern heading into preseason practice is team defense, as it looks to replace several key performers from last season, including first-round draft selection and All-American James Ramsey in center field, Devon Travis at second base, Jayce Boyd at first base, and Sherman Johnson at third.

"That's our biggest concern, getting them in the right spots and really teaching the game and how to hold the opposing offense at bay and smothering people with defense," Martin Jr. said.

"That's what we did last year. We kept ourselves in game when we weren't hitting. We got it going late in the year with our bats, but we won enough to position ourselves, and we did it because of pitching and defense."

FSU baseball team reports for '4-man drills'

Annual 'four-man' drills began Monday for Seminoles

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State's baseball coaching staff has six weeks to settle on the Seminoles' opening-day lineup. But don't expect it to be permanent as FSU develops and defines its strengths and personality over the four-month season.

The best news is that the Seminoles have a strong foundation to build on as four-man drills (coaches can work with four players at a time on the field) started Monday.

The first full-team practice is Jan. 25, and the Seminoles open the season at home against Rhode Island on Friday, Feb. 15.

FSU returns 20 players, including five positions starters and nine pitchers who threw at least 15 innings from last year's team that tied an Atlantic Coast Conference record with 24 wins and advanced to the College World Series for the 21st time in program history.

One trait that emerged from fall practice and caught assistant coach Mike Martin Jr.'s eye was the team's overall athleticism.

And that's a positive as the new bat standards, adopted in 2011, continue to change the college game. Teams and players that typically benefit from BBCOR bats are faster, fundamentally sound at the plate with solid skills on defense.

"We are going to force the defense into mistakes because of the way we are going to get down the line," Martin Jr. said.

"And I really think that's going to translate defensively in due time. It may not be a pretty situation early in general, but I think we are going to be there late."

One newcomer who has impressed with his overall athleticism is freshman D.J. Stewart. The left-handed hitting Stewart, a 6-foot, 230-pounder from Jacksonville, is expected to start in either center or left field and hit third in the lineup.

Stewart had five hits over the team's final three fall scrimmages, including a 16-0 exhibition win over the Ontario Blue Jays from Canada. Martin Jr. says Stewart's natural strength as a young hitter reminds him of former Seminole great J.D. Drew.

"He is going to be a good one," Martin Jr. said of Stewart.

"He's very driven and crazy strong. Strength-wise, I can't remember a freshman, maybe J.D. Drew, who hits the ball as hard as D.J. does. He has some tools. He can run, he throws, and you throw in that (former Seminole) Tyler Holt-type mentality. He plays very similar to Tyler Holt and fans will love him."

Another player's progress to keep an eye on is freshman Jameis Winston, who will juggle football and baseball this spring.

Martin Jr. said Winston will compete for a starting position and could fill the closer's role. He's also expected to contend for the starter's role at quarterback during spring football.

"Jameis is going to play a role on our team, pitching-wise and offensively, and he's going to be somewhere in the mix competing for a job," Martin Jr. said.

One of FSU strengths from last season doesn't expect to change — pitching.

Starting pitchers Brandon Leibrandt and Mike Compton, who combined for 20 wins and 57 starts last season, have been named Louisville Slugger Preseason All-Americans.

Senior Scott Sitz and redshirt junior Gage Smith help anchor the bullpen with 57 appearances and 118 innings pitched last season.

Martin Jr. said an immediate concern heading into preseason practice is team defense as it looks to replace key performers from last season, including first-round draft selection and All-American James Ramsey in center field, Devon Travis at second base and Sherman Johnson at third base.

"That's our biggest concern, getting them in the right spots and really teaching the game and how to hold the opposing offense at bay and smothering people with defense," Martin Jr. said.

"That's what we did last year. We kept ourselves in game when we weren't hitting, we got it going late in the year with our bats, but we won enough to position ourselves and we did it because of pitching and defense."

Seminoles beef up for 2013

Gonzalez, Leibrandt, others look to display improve strength

Jan 17, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

The difference might not be noticeable from day to day or even week to week. But when Florida State assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. reflects on the physical changes in shortstop Justin Gonzalez over the past four years, he's almost at a loss for words.

Asked to describe the improvement Thursday afternoon, the Seminoles' hitting coach lamented not having a picture of Gonzalez from 2009 lying around.

"He's a totally different guy," Martin Jr. said. "He was a rail."

Gonzalez, who will serve as captain for FSU's baseball team this season, is one of several Seminoles who made strength training a larger priority this past offseason.

After arriving from Miami as a 165-pounder in the summer of 2009, Gonzalez is proud to say he now tips the scales at 205. It has been a gradual process — putting on about 10 pounds per year — but Gonzalez said he finally feels that he's at the perfect size.

"I've met my goal," he said Thursday afternoon. "Now it's just maintaining that through the season."

Of course, the Seminoles' senior shortstop is not the only one. After a solid offseason under strength and conditioning coach Adam Ross, several FSU baseball players say they will enter preseason practice next week with much greater size and strength

Sophomore pitcher Brandon Leibrandt, who emerged as the Seminoles' ace in 2012, said he has packed nearly 15 pounds of muscle on his 6-foot-4 frame. Instead of playing summer ball following last season, he instead stayed in Tallahassee and worked with Ross on improving his strength and stamina.

"I feel heavier in a good way," Leibrandt said. "I feel stronger, a little more explosive, and hopefully it will relate to a little more velocity."

Fellow sophomore pitcher Mike Compton, who combined with Leibrandt to go 20-5 last season, said he's hoping the added muscle will lead to longer outings and fewer ailments.

"It's more about the endurance part — the durability part — of pitching," Compton said.

For the hitters, such as Gonzalez, FSU's coaches hope the added strength will lead to improved power numbers and fewer strikeouts. That will be essential, as the Seminoles look to replace the production provided by departed stars James Ramsey, Jayce Boyd, Devon Travis and Sherman Johnson.

"It enables you to wait longer as a hitter," Martin Jr. said. "The stronger you are, the longer you can wait (on a pitch). And the longer you can wait, you can make better decisions on whether to swing or not."

Said Gonzalez: "You don't have to try as hard. Balls will carry more, and hopefully find the gaps that they need to."

Spradling improving

Though his mind is focused primarily on his 2013 club, which will officially begin preseason practice next Friday, FSU head coach Mike Martin Sr. said he often thinks about one player who won't be with the Seminoles this season.

Stephen Spradling, a reserve outfielder last season, was expected to be back on the roster this spring. But the senior was hospitalized following a late-December skydiving accident, and he will have a long recovery process just to be able to walk again.

"He is back home, and I guess in the beginning stages of rehab," Martin Sr. said. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the first of April, I don't see Stephen Spradling around here."

Martin Sr. said he originally hoped to keep Spradling on his roster as a gesture of the team's support, but it wasn't possible because the Boynton Beach native is not currently in school.

Leibrandt, Compton look to build on super freshman seasons

Jan 21, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Ira Schoffel

While answering a question about second-year pitchers Brandon Leibrandt and Mike Compton, Florida State baseball coach Mike Martin stopped himself mid-phrase.

“We don’t say the last word,” Martin said with a smile.

The first word, of course, was “sophomore.”

The second might have been “slump” or “jinx” ... but you weren’t going to hear either come out of the positive-thinking Martin’s mouth.

When Florida State conducts its first full preseason practice this Friday, the Seminoles will be led by two of the top young pitchers in the country. Leibrandt, a 6-foot-4 left-hander, went 8-3 last season with a 2.82 ERA. Compton, a 6-2 righty, went 12-2 with a 2.87 ERA.

They both were named Freshman All-Americans in 2012, and they both enter this season on various preseason award lists.

But Martin knows as well as anyone that success as a freshman doesn’t always translate to dominance as a sophomore.

“The main thing you want to do is be sure they don’t think they’ve got this thing all figured out,” Martin said. “They’ve got to understand that they’ve got to work just as hard, if not harder, than they did last year.”

Said second-year pitching coach Mike Bell: “The biggest thing with guys who have so much success as freshmen is knowing how to stay level-headed. They can appreciate the success they had, but they also have to continue to stay hungry and strive to improve.”

With that in mind, Martin and Bell focused on a number of ways each pitcher could improve during the off-season.

As well as Compton and Leibrandt performed in 2012, neither was perfect. They both endured a handful of rough outings. They both had shortcomings that opponents will look to exploit when they meet again.

So once the Seminoles returned from last year’s College World Series and took a brief break, Compton and Leibrandt got back to work.

For Leibbrandt, that meant adding nearly 15 pounds of good weight to improve his velocity and durability; working on a new pitch (a cut fastball); and also improving his defensive skills. Because opposing lineups have had a difficult time stringing together consecutive hits against Leibbrandt, the Seminoles expect him to face more bunt attempts and base-stealers this season.

“He’s going to have to control the running game,” Bell said. “Being a big left-hander, you know he’s going to see a lot of bunts. And teams are going to try to figure out different ways to score.”

For Compton, the main goal was adding a change-up to go with his fastball and slider. And FSU’s coaches were elated with what they saw of Compton’s new pitch during fall practice.

“He’s throwing it so much better,” Bell said. “He’s always had such pinpoint control. So developing that third pitch is going to really help.”

As promising as things look right now, however, the sophomore pitchers and their coaches know that the hard work has only just begun. While no one is using that negative “sophomore” phrase, all they have to do is look back at former FSU star Sean Gilmartin’s career to understand the challenge.

One year after being named the nation’s top freshman pitcher in 2009, Gilmartin went 9-8 with a 5.24 ERA as a sophomore. Then as a junior, he was back to his dominant self and ended up being a first-round pick of the Atlanta Braves.

If it can happen to Gilmartin, it can happen to anyone. So as much as they appreciate the preseason recognition, Compton and Gilmartin insist they are as hungry as ever.

“It’s nice and all,” Leibbrandt said. “But at the end of the day, you’ve still got to go out there and prove it to the rest of the country.”

Said Compton: “You just kind of block it out, because it really means nothing. It’s preseason. If anything, it puts more of a target on your back.”

FSU Hall of Famer and college baseball 'wizard' Ron Fraser leaves legacy

Coley Harvey | Orlando Sentinel FSU reporter
7:09 a.m. EST, January 21, 2013

TALLAHASSEE -- The weekend now passed was a difficult one for baseball fans across the country.

It was marked by the deaths of three giants in the game. One of them, was a former Florida State player who quite simply would not take "no" for an answer. Ron Fraser, the FSU Hall of Famer and legendary former head coach at Miami, died in South Florida on Sunday at 79.

"He really was a good guy who shared his knowledge with younger coaches," FSU coach Mike Martin Sr. said. "I'm going to miss him. He was a good man."

It was Fraser's insistence to ESPN in the 1980s to televise college baseball that arguably changed the sport for the better. Not only did it rise in popularity from that point forward, but the competition got better. At the same time, Omaha, Neb. became more than just a Midwestern town on the banks of the Missouri River. The site of college baseball's annual national tournament-finale, Omaha became college baseball's Holy Land; the Mecca of mash, the Providence of ping.

Because of his innovative mind, Fraser was dubbed the "wizard of college baseball."

Read more about Fraser's impact on the sport in this obituary written by the South Florida Sun Sentinel Hurricanes reporter, Michael Casagrande.

Fraser's death came on the heels of two others who also had major impacts on the overall sport.

On Saturday morning, word trickled around the Twittersphere that former major league manager and Hall of Famer Earl Weaver had died. Known for arguing with umpires and his belief that power hitting won ballgames, the longtime Baltimore Orioles skipper left a lasting impression on the league.

Later that night, fellow Hall of Famer Stan "The Man" Musial, a St. Louis icon, also passed. The left-handed hitter was one of the game's best the plate. He had 3,630 hits throughout his big league career.

Fraser was inducted into FSU's Hall of Fame in 1981 after having previously pitched for the Seminoles between 1954-57. He began coaching at Miami in 1963 and won national titles in 1982 and 85. Fraser took the Hurricanes to 12 College World Series in Omaha

Martin remembers Fraser as a 'Seminoles at heart'

Jan 20, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

Although he made his greatest contributions to the sport of college baseball during his Hall of Fame career at the University of Miami, Ron Fraser never stopped loving Florida State University.

That was one of the many recollections that came flooding back for FSU baseball coach Mike Martin on Sunday after learning that his longtime friend had passed away at the age of 79.

According to the Associated Press, Fraser died following a lengthy bout with Alzheimer's disease. Martin said the illness robbed Fraser of the opportunity to enjoy his golden years — but the last time the pair talked, Martin said it was as if Fraser never left the game.

"We lost a good man," Martin said. "I loved him. I respected him. I appreciated what he did for the game of college baseball. And from a personal standpoint, Ron Fraser was a Seminoles at heart."

"When he retired (in 1992), we had a nice celebration for him up here. Both of us were in the College World Series his last year in college coaching. He's certainly going to be missed."

Fraser was on the pitching staff at Florida State in the mid-1950s and was inducted in the FSU athletics Hall of Fame in 1981. At the time, he had already been coaching the Hurricanes for nearly 20 years.

"You could just feel that," Martin said of Fraser's love for FSU. "This was a special place for him. He went to school with Dick Howser and Burt Reynolds. And he was a friend to a lot of Seminoles."

"The competition was heavy. The rivalry was great. But Ron kept everything in perspective."

As word spread of his death Sunday, Fraser was remembered for his aggressive style of coaching and his vast marketing skills. Martin chuckled at the memories of feeling surrounded by rabid Miami fans at Mark Light Stadium, back when the Seminoles and Hurricanes played six games — three home and three away — every regular season.

"In the early '80s when we played them, there were fans within two feet of the foul line," Martin said. "He'd have 7,500 people in there, and he wasn't about to turn any of them away."

And Fraser didn't simply bring fans to the games in Coral Gables; Martin said the legendary Hurricanes skipper deserved much of the credit for fan interest in college baseball around the country.

"Ron Fraser is responsible for college baseball being what it is today," Martin said. "He's the one that got it all going in terms of popularity. He was the guy who started taking college baseball to more of a minor-league level, with the way he attracted fans with mascots and contests. He just deserves so much credit for making college baseball what it is."

FSU starter Compton out indefinitely

Sophomore sidelined by right elbow strain

Jan 24, 2013 |

Florida State will open preseason baseball practice on Friday without starting pitcher Mike Compton.

The sophomore right-hander is out indefinitely with a right elbow sprain.

Compton, who led the Seminoles with 12 wins in 2012 as the No. 2 starter behind fellow freshman Brandon Leibrandt, is receiving treatment and will be reevaluated in two weeks.

FSU, ranked No. 20 in Baseball America's preseason poll released on Thursday, opens the season Feb. 15 with a three-game home series against Rhode Island.

"It's disappointing but we are going to do exactly what the doctors tell us to do and we will find out in a couple of weeks the progress he's making through this layoff," FSU coach Mike Martin said.

Compton's 18 starts last season ranked second behind Liebrandt. Both were named Freshman All-Americans and enter this season on various preseason award lists.

Martin said senior Scott Sitz will move into the No. 2 role in Compton's absence. Either freshman Luke Weaver or junior Peter Miller will be inserted in the No. 3 slot.

The trio combined to make 29 starts last season.

FSU will utilize a fourth starter for its mid-week home game against Jacksonville on Feb. 19. The Seminoles don't play two mid-week games until the regular season's third week against Presbyterian (March 5-6).

"It just gives somebody an opportunity," Martin said.

Sitz, who went 4-3 with a 3.72 ERA in 13 starts, opened last season in the bullpen before moving into the rotation.

His best performance came in the College World Series, where he worked a season-high 6.2 innings with eight strikeouts against UCLA.

Miller, who opened last season in the weekend rotation, finished 5-2 with a 3.89 ERA.

And Weaver, known for his lively fastball, appeared in 16 games (six starts) and had 40 strikeouts in 41 innings pitched. He went 1-0 with one save and a 5.93 ERA.

Martin said Compton will continue to focus on conditioning and selected drills for the next two weeks.

"Like any competitor, he was looking forward to getting out here and now that he's pushed back, I am sure that's disappointing to him," Martin said.

FSU baseball receives top rankings in preseason

Polls and publications set high expectations for Seminoles led by top-pitching staff

8:56 PM, Jan. 27, 2013 |

Written by

Perry Kostidakis

As much hype as the Florida State football team got in the preseason, there's another team on campus that has much higher expectations for success.

That would be the baseball team, who last year was within one game of making the College World Series Championship game. The 'Noles are No. 9 in the USA Today coaches poll, in addition to being No. 20 by Baseball America, No. 17 by Collegiate Baseball, and No. 19 by Perfect Game.

This squad is a loaded one, as the Seminoles are set to return 20 players (five of which are position starters) as well as four players who were selected in the MLB First-Year Player Draft: Jameis Winston (15th round, Texas), DJ Stewart (28th round, NY Yankees), John Sansone (39th round, Detroit) and Hayden Jordan (49th round in 2010, Baltimore).

Senior infielder Justin Gonzalez will serve as captain for these 'Noles, the center of a core of returning stars that include a pair of sophomore Preseason All-American pitchers Mike Compton and Brandon Leibrandt, and sophomore Jose Brizuela.

"I would think with the question marks that we have, that this is a more exciting year that I can remember," head coach Mike Martin said. "We have so many young guys that have never played in a program like this."

Amongst those young guys is Winston, who some might recognize as one of the three quarterbacks vying for the starting position following the departure of EJ Manuel.

"Hopefully, I can be friends [with everyone on the team] and we can win a championship," Winston said to the Tallahassee Democrat. "Everybody is my teammate, and I just [want to] play my part."

"If anybody can do [two sports], from what I've seen, Jameis can do it," Martin also said to the Democrat. "The upside is huge. He listens, he grasps. I am anxious to see the progress he makes in the next few weeks."

Under Martin, who has been with the team since 1980, the team has gone 1723-594-4 with 33 consecutive regional tournament appearances and 15 trips to the College World Series. The Seminoles have also made it to at least the NCAA Super Regionals every year since 2007, and hope that this year is the one that they finally make the final push towards a championship.

A Fan Day is scheduled for Feb. 2, where fans will be able to get autographs, meet the team, and watch a scrimmage. The season opens Feb. 15 against Rhode Island, and as with all sporting events, admission is free for all FSU students with a valid FSUID.

FSU baseball closer role not a done deal

FSU must replace All-American and top draft selection Benincasa

Jan 26, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Nobody seems to be worried – yet.

After featuring one of the best closers nationally last season in Robert Benincasa, Florida State could open its baseball season in less than three weeks without a closer.

Actually, the Seminoles have candidates to fill that role, but there are moving pieces to the puzzle. And it all starts with the health of No. 2 starter Mike Compton, who is out indefinitely with right elbow soreness.

Compton, who led FSU with 12 victories last year as a freshman, will be reevaluated in two weeks. FSU welcomes Rhode Island to Howser Stadium Feb. 15-17.

"Until we know exactly what's going on with Michael, we may not have a closer on opening day," FSU coach Mike Martin said.

"We may just let it play itself out."

Benincasa, of course, ended games last season for FSU.

The hard-throwing right-hander had 16 saves and a sparkling 1.32 earned-run average in 41 innings. He was even more impressive in Atlantic Coast Conference play with a 0.47 ERA and 31 strikeouts and four walks in 19 innings.

"There are some big shoes to fill there," senior pitcher Scott Sitz said and smiled, quickly adding, "but I am not worried."

Candidates to fill those shoes include a pair of right-handed newcomers in freshman Jameis Winston and junior-college transfer Robby Coles.

Winston, also in the mix in the outfield, is the program's latest two-sport star and reserve quarterback on the football team. Coles played at Wakulla High and went 18-3 in two seasons at Chipola College.

Martin said a potential starter could be moved into the closer role as well, mentioning junior Peter Miller and sophomore Luke Weaver. The duo combined for 30 appearances (16 starts) and 82.2 innings last season.

Redshirt junior Gage Smith is expected to remain in middle relief, where he was a valuable weapon last season with a team-high 39 appearances, a 5-0 record and a 2.89 ERA.

FSU pitching coach Mike Bell said the closer role combines confidence, durability and mental toughness.

"You've been basically been doing nothing for seven, eight innings but admiring the work of others," Bell said. "But you need to develop routines, be able to stay within yourself and compete at a high level."

Compton, meanwhile, remains a key piece to the puzzle.

He continues to participate in selected drills and conditioning as he receives treatment on his right throwing elbow.

"I am making sure when the time comes that I am able to throw and nothing is lost," Compton said.

"That's the main thing, not trying to play catch up."

Winston, Seminoles open baseball practice

Quarterback looks to earn playing time

Jan 25, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Football or baseball?

Jameis Winston says he can't play one without the other.

Winston is the next Florida State quarterback who will attempt to juggle football and baseball.

The Seminoles opened preseason baseball practice on Friday at Howser Stadium, and an excited, smiling Winston joined his newest teammates in garnet and gold.

Winston, a 6-foot-5, 207-pounder, took some early batting practice on the field, displaying a powerful right-handed swing, before the start of team stretch and drills.

Winston is expected to compete for playing time in center field and on the pitcher's mound, specifically in the closer's role with the departure of All-American Robert Benincasa.

The Seminoles have a number of other voids to fill in preparation for their season opener Feb. 15 against Rhode Island. Plus, No. 2 starter Michael Compton is sidelined indefinitely with right elbow soreness.

"Hopefully, I can be friends with them and we can win a championship," Winston said. "Everybody is my teammate, and I just (want to) play my part."

Winston said he couldn't escape baseball during the Seminoles' football season even if he tried. Howser Stadium sits next to the football practice fields.

"I was passing baseball all year," he smiled. "I have a strong passion for it."

Winston, who was redshirted in football, said he hit in the batting cages as much as possible last fall. The right-hander is currently concentrating on building his arm strength.

Kenny Felder and Danny Kannel are former Seminole quarterbacks who also played FSU baseball.

Felder skipped his senior football season and signed with the Milwaukee Brewers in 1992 for \$450,000 and Kannel played in 28 games over his freshman and sophomore seasons (1992-93),

FSU coach Mike Martin believes Winston can juggle the demands of both sports.

"If anybody can do it from what I've seen, Jameis can do it," Martin said. "The upside is huge. He listens, he grasps. I am anxious to see the progress he makes in the next few weeks."

Spring football starts in March. While Winston will enter third in the pecking order at quarterback, many believe he can contend for the starter's role.

At the moment, however, Winston's focused on baseball.

And he could be among the newcomers expected to contribute immediately, joining fellow freshman D.J. Stewart in the outfield, junior-college transfer Marcus Davis at first base and others, according to Martin.

Martin said the coaching staff has plenty of work to cover over the next three weeks.

"Last year with all of those returning players it was more of just being sure they were ready physically," Martin said. "You don't worry about the mental part of it.

"This club being as young as we are with the opportunity with so many new guys to be in the lineup, we have the mental part, we have the physical part and we have just the overall view do we know what we are doing. There's an awful lot going on right now, in my mind and their mind to get ready to play a season."

Position battles come into focus for FSU baseball

Versatility gives infield depth

Jan 29, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

If he had his druthers, of course, Florida State baseball coach Mike Martin would have preferred that first baseman Jayce Boyd and second baseman Devon Travis returned for their senior seasons.

But there's something about opening preseason practice with heated battles at several positions – particularly spots in the infield – that gets the veteran coach's juices flowing.

"There's two or three spots (that are) wide open," Martin said before a recent workout. "The competition is fantastic."

Florida State actually lost three of its starting infielders from a year ago; Boyd and Travis left early to play pro ball, and third baseman Sherman Johnson graduated before embarking upon his professional career.

That leaves senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez and junior catcher Stephen McGee as the lone returners.

After four days of practice – the Seminoles opened camp last Friday – it's too early to say how all of the starting positions are going to shake out.

But third base appears to be nailed down by sophomore Jose Brizuela, who started in left field last season, and freshman John Sansone has emerged as the leader at second base.

Brizuela came to FSU as an infielder and has a season's worth of at-bats under his belt. Sansone is a highly acclaimed Pennsylvania product who came to college despite being drafted in the 39th round by Detroit last summer.

And sophomore John Nogowski, a former North Florida Christian star who appeared in 36 games as a freshman, is competing with junior-college transfer Casey Smit at first base.

"We're pleased with where we're at," FSU assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. said. "And we like that we have some versatility. Having that type of versatility will be invaluable as we go through the ACC schedule and hopefully a postseason run."

That versatility comes in many forms.

Sophomore Giovanni Alfonzo is expected to serve primarily as Gonzalez' backup at shortstop, but he has worked at second base and third base as well. Sansone and Smit could also fill in at either second or third base.

And freshmen Alvin Swoope and JJ Gould provide depth at second and third base, respectively.

“If God forbid something happens (to a starter), somebody has to step up,” Alfonzo said. “Whether it’s myself or one of the new guys that came in, we all have to be ready to go at any position. Right now, I feel comfortable at all three.”

While it’s difficult to imagine that the Seminoles’ new-look infield will produce the type of offense that last year’s group accounted for – Boyd, Travis and Johnson were three of the Seminoles’ top four hitters – FSU’s players and coaches are optimistic about their skills on defense.

“The guys that we have out there are here for a reason,” sophomore pitcher Brandon Leibrandt said. “And they’ll be able to do their job just fine.”

Said Gonzalez: "I'm telling you right now, we're not going to be missing any beats anywhere in the infield. The guys look really impressive, I think the coaches are really pleased with the product they're putting on the field, and it's going to be an exciting season no doubt."

FSU announces pitcher Compton will miss season

Jan 31, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

FSU sophomore Mike Compton, who is the Seminoles' No. 2 pitcher and a preseason third-team All-American, will undergo "Tommy John" elbow surgery and miss the 2013 season.

Compton, a right-hander who earned Freshman All-America honors last season, went 12-2 with a 2.87 ERA in 2012.

"It was disappointing for all of us to hear the news regarding Mike Compton," FSU coach Mike Martin said in a release. "We are hopeful he will be ready to go in 2014. Mike was one of our leaders in the clubhouse and in the classroom as he posted a 3.95 GPA this past fall. He will definitely be missed but we also see this as an opportunity for someone else to step in and fill the No. 2 spot in the rotation."

Along with sophomore ace Brandon Leibrandt (LHP), Martin is looking at senior Scott Sitz (RHP), junior Peter Miller (RHP) and sophomore Luke Weaver (RHP) as the team's four starting pitchers heading into the season opener on Feb. 15.

Weaver looks to build on freshman season

FSU must replace injured Compton

Jan 31, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Assistant sports editor

Luke Weaver admits he put too much pressure on himself last season.

The Florida State freshman pitcher arrived in Tallahassee from Orlando with talent and goals.

Weaver, however, quickly learned that combining the two during the transition from high school to college doesn't always go smoothly. The hard-throwing right-hander was certainly impressive at times, but lacked overall consistency.

Weaver believes splitting time between the starting rotation and bullpen helped his development.

"It helped me both as a pitcher and a person," said Weaver, who went 1-0 with a 5.93 ERA in 41 innings.

"I kind of put too much on my plat, and the move to the bullpen helped me get acclimated to college baseball."

With Thursday's announcement that No. 2 starter Mike Compton, the Seminoles' win leader last season with 12, will undergo Tommy John elbow surgery today and miss the 2013 season, the focus immediately turned to the Seminoles' rotation.

"It was disappointing for all of us to hear the news regarding Mike Compton," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "He will definitely be missed but we also see this as an opportunity for someone else to step in and fill that spot in the rotation."

Weaver is among candidates competing for a starter's role behind sophomore ace Brandon Leibrandt (8-3, 2.82 ERA) heading into the season opener Feb. 15 against visiting Rhode Island.

"It's definitely a big loss," Weaver said of Compton.

"You hate when that happens to anybody, especially him though. He comes to the field every day, wanting to get better. He's just a calm, fun guy to be around. It hurts us. We know there's a big challenge to (fill that role)."

Martin said he is looking at senior Scott Sitz, junior Peter Miller and Weaver as the team's starting four pitchers. Pitching coach Mike Bell is anxious to see how players respond to the challenge.

Compton, a freshman All-American last season, had developed soreness in his right throwing elbow during fall practice. He had been undergoing treatment and was expected to be reevaluated next week. "What it does, it creates a void of quality innings," Bell said.

“That leaves an opportunity for somebody else to step in, just as (Compton) stepped in last year as a true freshman. Not that he was unknown but it was an unknown of who are Saturday guy was going to be last year.”

Sitz, who has 52 career appearances, is hoping to carry the momentum of his College World Series start against UCLA last year – eight strikeouts in 6.2 innings – into his senior season.

“The mindset is the same as it was before,” Sitz said. “It's still a battle.”

Miller (5-3, 3.89 ERA) has thrown well in practice, and Weaver believes he’s better prepared this season, both physically and mentally. The talent and goals haven’t changed.

Weaver played in the prestigious Cape Cod League last summer and focused on developing a slider that would compliment his fastball and change-up.

“That’s always been the iffy pitch for me,” said Weaver, who made 16 appearances last season, six as a starter.

“That’s the one thing (coaches) really harped on, and I worked day in and day out getting that (pitch) down. I have a new grip I am comfortable with and it has gone well so far.”

FSU baseball coaches working to finalize lineup

Seminoles must replace top four hitters from 2012

Feb 6, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Numbers don't lie.

Florida State must replace its top four hitters from last baseball season following the departure of seniors James Ramsey and Sherman Johnson and juniors Jayce Boyd and Devon Travis.

The quartet was responsible for more than 54 percent of the runs scored and 48 percent of the Seminoles' run production with a combined 201 RBIs.

Yet, building a batting order also is making sure players are positioned correctly. The last thing coaches want is having the wrong players batting in the wrong situations or failing to utilize their most productive hitters.

Former FSU leadoff hitters Tyler Holt and Shane Robinson each struggled initially when inserted at the top of the order before they excelled. And No. 2 batters over the years in coach Mike Martin's lineup included sluggers J.D. Drew and Paul Sorrento.

Last season, Johnson, Travis, Ramsey and Boyd were penciled in the lineup one through four in 63 of 67 games.

"Your one and two hitters hit in crucial situations in a normal baseball game in that eighth and ninth inning -- it's amazing how it works," FSU assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. said.

"It's important having the right guys at the top because they are going to come up at that crucial moment. We also want to have balance. You want to make sure you are not too top heavy that a pitching staff can relax five, six through nine.

"We still have a few things to figure out."

With FSU's season-opening weekend against Rhode Island Feb. 15-17 less than 10 days away, the Seminoles are working to finalize their lineup and batting order.

And that's specifically their top four hitters, starting with leadoff.

Leadoff candidates include sophomore outfielder Josh Delph and junior-college transfers Brett Knief and Casey Smit. Delph led all FSU freshman hitters last season with a .267 average. Outfielder Knief, who also played one season at North Carolina, and infielder Smit each hit above .330 last season.

Delph hit leadoff as a youth player and a few times in high school.

"You are only really a lead-off hitter that first at-bat of the game, but you want to see a lot of pitches and make sure everyone on the team knows what to expect," Delph said. "Sometimes I get the urge to hit that first-pitch fastball, but the key is to get on base and see a lot of pitches."

Returnees Stephen McGee and Justin Gonzalez also give the Seminoles options in the order. McGee led the ACC in walks (32) and was second in on-base percentage (.459) despite hitting .230 primarily from the No. 5 slot. Gonzalez hit behind McGee for a majority of the season and was second on the team in home runs (nine) and finished with 20 extra-base hits.

Martin Jr. added that newcomers D.J. Stewart and Marcus Davis are also swinging well in scrimmages.

"I think regardless of how it turns out, our one through five hitters are going to be really solid," McGee said.

Questions and numbers aside, Martin Jr. is certain of this much. He said fans can expect a tweak in the Seminoles' style of play offensively.

"We are going to try to put people in motion, hit and running a little more," Martin Jr. said.

"Going from first to third is something we've spent a lot of time on this spring. That's going to be something our fans aren't used to seeing. We are going to force the action, trying to get guys moving. We are more athletic this year."

Rotation, roles a work in progress

Closer role remains unsettled

Feb 7, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Losing starting pitcher Mike Compton for the season to elbow surgery has forced Florida State to juggle its rotation and bullpen. That was a given.

Still, that's not to say the Seminoles were left shorthanded as they continue preparations for their season opener against visiting Rhode Island Feb. 15-17.

Pitching coach Mike Bell likes his staff's development in preseason drills. Questions remain as players progress into game mode, specifically at closer, and certain roles have yet to be defined. The latter expects to carry into the season, which isn't unusual.

"It's about guys accepting their jobs, doing their roles and picking up bits and pieces of the game," Bell explained.

FSU's starting rotation also continues to come into focus, with sophomore ace Brandon Liebrandt (8-3, 2.82 ERA) and senior Scott Sitz (4-3, 3.72) likely scheduled as Friday and Saturday starters.

Junior Peter Miller (5-2, 3.89), in the weekend rotation early last season, and sophomore Luke Weaver (1-0, 5.93) expect to fill out the starting slots. Compton, last year's No. 2 starter, underwent right elbow surgery last week and is expected to return next season.

"Losing Compton, what it does, it takes a chink out of your bullpen where you feel you might have been a little deeper with maybe a power arm on the backside, or an experienced player," Bell explained. "Now you have to slide one of those guys up to a starter, so it makes your pen a little weaker."

On the flip side, however, Bell said Compton's absence creates opportunities for others and chances to develop players into starting-type roles.

Jameis Winston, who will split time between spring football and baseball, has thrown well as he builds arm strength and endurance. However, the right-hander's role on the mound remains uncertain despite being earmarked for the closer role.

Pitching on consecutive days in preseason practice can be difficult to schedule. Plus, Winston, expected to contend for the Seminoles' starting quarterback job, is also competing for time in the Seminoles' outfield.

"Winston becomes your wild card," Bell said.

"Does he have the ability to close or is he another arm out of the pen? That's to be determined. You like the stuff, you like the potential, you like what you see out of it. But, you also want to see in the moment,

in the situation, will he be able to handle it. We are probably leaning towards Winston, but it (close) could be by committee, too."

Bell's bullpen options from the left side are headlined by returning sophomores Bryant Holtmann and Kyle Byrd and junior Brandon Johnson - the trio had a combined 62 appearances last season. Bell also projects Byrd as a future potential starter.

The right side is anchored by Gage Smith, whose 39 appearances led FSU pitchers and tied for the most in the ACC last season. Newcomers in the mix include Robby Coles, who pitched at Wakulla High and Chipola College, Kenny Burkhead and Hayden Jordan.

Bell said Coles is an "old-school, throwback guy" who has focused on improving his pitch location. Coles had 18 wins in two seasons at Chipola.

"I'd love to see him take that role, as a late guy, closer-type guy," Bell said. "I think he has that in him, the durability to go back-to-back days. The key to him, like all guys, is location. We have to make sure we locate

Game week for FSU baseball

Feb 10, 2013 |

Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Plenty of questions surround Florida State's baseball team heading into its season opener on Friday. In fact, the Seminoles expect to be a work in progress for much of the season's initial month.

Yet, that hasn't changed Mike Martin's expectations, and the Seminoles' veteran coach has been pleased by his team's work ethic and competitiveness in preseason practice.

"We've seen some guys kind of stand up and take notice," Martin said.

While the Seminoles' starting lineup hasn't been finalized for the opener against visiting Rhode Island at Howser Stadium, Martin knows this much:

Sophomore left hander Brandon Leibrandt and senior right hander Scott Sitz will start on the mound in the first two games.

And position starters include returnees Stephen McGee at catcher and team captain Justin Gonzalez at shortstop; Jose Brizuela, who started 62 games last season in left field, at third base; and freshman John Sansone at second base.

Martin expects potentially a season-long outfield competition and possibly a platoon system at two positions.

Right field might be the most settled at the moment with Josh Delph scheduled to start against right-handed pitchers and junior college transfer Brett Knief against left handers.

Freshman D.J. Stewart and junior-college transfer Marcus Davis are in the mix in left field, while Stewart, senior Seth Miller and two-sport star Jameis Winston are candidates in center field.

Martin said former North Florida Christian star, sophomore John Nogowski, has played well and is "certainly setting himself up to be the starting first baseman."

Martin also remains unsettled on the team's No. 3 starter between sophomore Luke Weaver and junior Peter Miller, but isn't worried.

"We are confident with both those guys," Martin said.

"Who pitches third means the other one pitches fourth. And we've got very important fourth games. So it's really not a concern. I really feel good about both of them."

The bullpen is anchored by right hander Gage Smith, who had a team-high 39 appearances last season, and former Wakulla High and Chipola College starter Robby Coles and Winston are candidates at closer

FSU starting rotation set for opening weekend

Feb 12, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State's starting lineup for the opening of baseball season this weekend is coming into focus.

Specifically with the starting rotation.

FSU coach Mike Martin announced his rotation on Tuesday for the Seminoles' three-game series against visiting Rhode Island – sophomore ace Brandon Leibrant (8-3, 2.82 ERA) on Friday, senior Scott Sitz (4-3, 2.72) on Saturday and junior Peter Miller (5-2, 3.89) on Sunday.

Sunday's starting role was uncertain between Miller and sophomore Luke Weaver (1-0, 5.93).

Miller, who opened last season in the weekend rotation, made 10 starts with four relief appearances last year.

Weaver, who had 16 appearances with six starts as a freshman, is expected to start the Seminoles' first midweek game next Tuesday against visiting Jacksonville.

FSU was forced to juggle its rotation with the loss of Mike Compton, last year's win leader with 12 who will miss the entire season following right elbow surgery.

Rhode Island has been picked to finish second in the Atlantic 10, in voting conducted among the league's head coaches.

The Rams return six position starters from last year's club, including 2012 A-10 Player of the Year Jeff Roy, who hit .356, and All-Conference selections Pat Fortunato, Pat Quinn and Tim Caputo.

Rhode Island also welcomes back 2011 All-Conference pick Mike LeBel, who missed the majority of last season with an injury.

The Rams finished 33-25-1 last year.

'Jaboo' Set to Start in FSU Debut?

A month before the quarterback competition officially begins, two-sport student-athlete Jameis Brandon Mellor
Seminoles.com Managing Editor

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Florida State's highly anticipated quarterback battle doesn't officially begin until March 20 when spring football practice commences but Jameis Winston may have already earned one starting job.

The FSU baseball team begins its 2013 season Friday against Rhode Island and Winston, the two-sport student-athlete that redshirted as a rookie football player last season and will be in a four-player battle for the starting quarterback job next month, could potentially be in one of two starting spots for the 'Noles in his first collegiate baseball game.

"I would say left field is getting to be where if one starts, the other is going to be [designated hitter]," longtime FSU baseball coach Mike Martin said. "I'm talking about 'Jaboo' [Winston] and [junior-college transfer] Marcus [Davis]."

In the weeks leading up to the season, Winston's early role while he juggles baseball and football was thought to be most likely on the mound at closer. But Martin's announcement to gathered media Tuesday as the rain fell steadily on Dick Howser Stadium was significant, albeit not overly surprising.

After all, the talented switch-hitting Winston was considered one of the nation's top prep baseball players coming out of high school last year in addition to being a five-star quarterback prospect. He was talented enough as a pitcher and outfielder that the Texas Rangers drafted him in the 15th round of the Major League Baseball Draft last summer despite it being well known that Winston had every intention of continuing his football and baseball career at Florida State.

Now about eight months after enrolling at FSU and a month-and-a-half after concluding a football season that saw him watch from the sideline and run the scout-team offense, Winston is on the verge of not just seeing his first official collegiate action in either sport but doing so in a starter's role as well.

"It's a lot of fun and I am glad to have this chance -- whatever my role is -- but I just want to win," Winston said. "That's it. That's all that matters. Above all else, my goal is to be in the College World Series."

In addition to his designated hitting and work in the outfield, the 6-foot-4, 220-pounder still has that chance to help the Seminoles get back to Omaha on the mound.

His potential starting role in left field or as a "DH" doesn't take him out of the equation at closer, where the 'Noles may use a committee approach to cap off ballgames after losing Robert Benincasa to the Washington Nationals organization.

"I think the game will dictate [who the closer is]," FSU pitching coach Mike Bell said. "You see nights in the big leagues where the closer has been used one or two different nights and they've got to have someone else close the game. Not to say it's going to be best available option that night but I think we

are going to try to let the game dictate which way we go and I think we'll see somebody rise to that occasion."

Jameis Winston could start in the outfield or at designated hitter Friday, FSU coach Mike Martin said.

Whether or not that somebody Bell is predicting can be Winston remains to be seen but his schedule with football will certainly play a factor in how much he contributes on the diamond -- no matter if he is starting in left field, serving in the designated hitter role or closing out games with the baseball in his hand.

Once football practice begins and the competition under center with Clint Trickett, Jacob Coker and Sean Maguire officially heats up, Winston likely won't miss any football practices and therefore may not travel for any road games. The Seminoles have a single game in Jacksonville against Florida (March 26) and three-game sets at Virginia Tech (March 29-31) and Miami (April 5-7) on their baseball schedule while spring football practice is in full swing.

The annual Garnet and Gold Game is schedule for April 13 at 2 p.m., signifying the end of spring practice and, in his case, Winston's full availability for Martin's squad.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," Winston said. "And we have a plan to make it all work."

FSU's Sansone takes job at second base

Pennsylvania native to start at second base

Feb 13, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

John Sansone was raised 50 miles outside of Pittsburgh, learning at an early age how to cheer for the city's sports teams.

Sansone first remembers hearing about Florida State as a youth from an older cousin who attended graduate school at the university.

Sansone also heard stories how the Seminoles baseball team over the years played exhibitions against professional teams.

"I just thought that was so cool they got to play against a major-league team," Sansone said.

Sansone's interest in FSU only intensified after he attended the program's summer baseball camp in 2010. The feeling was mutual during Sansone's return visit in 2011, when coach Mike Martin offered the three-sport star from New Castle, Pa., a scholarship.

Sansone is one of FSU's new faces scheduled to make his debut in Friday's season opener against Rhode Island at Howser Stadium.

Sansone, a 5-foot-11, 200-pounder, will start at second base as a part of the team's revamped infield.

The former prep shortstop also saw time at third and first base in fall practice before he was moved to second base at the start of spring practice.

Senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez, the only returning starter from last year's infield, has been impressed by Sansone's poise and willingness to learn. Sansone is replacing one of the program's most popular and productive players in Devon Travis.

"He's a very quick learner, very athletic," Gonzalez said.

"The one thing he reminds me about Devon is that he's pretty quick with his hands, he can turn a double play pretty quickly. He's also eager to learn on every play and every pitch, and it's easy to work with someone like that who is open to learning new things. He's a humble guy who works hard."

Sansone, who hit .597 with seven home runs and earned All-State Pittsburgh Player of the Year honors as a prep senior, says his game is built on hustle and trying to "be in the right place at the right time" defensively.

While Martin said Sansone is a "typical freshman who has a long way to go," he also has been impressed by Sansone's work ethic.

“There are a lot of things about playing second base that he has to learn and he’s obviously playing one of the most important positions on the field,” Martin said.

“I am very pleased with what I’ve seen in his development. He’s a hard-working guy, he doesn’t take any days off, and I am anxious to see how he progresses as we continue to go through the season.”

Sansone, a 39th-round draft selection of the Detroit Tigers last summer, feels at home at FSU. Especially when he hears the current Pennsylvania weather reports from family and friends – snow showers and 30-degree temperatures.

“I fell in love with FSU, and everything about it, when I first saw it,” Sansone said. “I knew this is where I wanted to be.”

Florida State baseball excited for Opening Day

Seminoles begin season with weekend series against Rhode Island

10:17 PM, Feb. 13, 2013 |

Written by

Perry Kostidakis

Play ball.

After fall ball, drills and practices, the No. 8 Florida State baseball team kicks off its season Friday against the Rhode Island Rams, the first of a triple-header occurring this weekend.

"I see so many people saying, 'we're only a week away!' and it's fun that they're looking forward to the opening of baseball season," said head coach Mike Martin, who is entering his 34th season.

Anticipation is high for the team, which last year was one game away from clinching a spot in a national championship series, and it'll all come to a start when the 'Noles and Rams meet on Friday.

Rhode Island, who did not make the NCAA Tournament last year, finished third in the Atlantic-10 Conference with a 33-25 record.

They're a young team, with 17 freshmen to nine seniors, but they return with six position starters who are figured to be led by junior center fielder Jeff Roy, a preseason All-American by the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association (NCBWA) and the 63rd best player in the nation by College Baseball Daily.

In 2012, Roy was either first or second on the team in every offensive statistical category, recording 84 hits, 59 runs, and earning a .421 average in A-10 games.

He'll be facing off against a Florida State pitching rotation that hopes to be as successful in 2013 as it was in 2012, despite losing several players to graduation and preseason All-American sophomore pitcher Mike Compton to Tommy John surgery.

Sophomore Brandon Leibrandt, another preseason All-American who went 8-3 last year with an ERA of 2.82, will be the core of the pitching lineup and will start for the 'Noles on Friday.

Saturday will belong to senior Scott Sitz (4-3, 2.72), while junior Peter Miller (5-2, 3.89) will start Sunday after winning a position battle against sophomore Luke Weaver. Weaver will start next Tuesday against Jacksonville.

Freshman Jameis Winston, who is set to dominate Florida State sporting headlines for the next few months due to his double-sport life (Winston is figured to be in competition for the starting quarterback position this spring), was thought to be destined to have a role as a closer, but instead may see time in the outfield, his preferred position.

It'll come down to either Winston or junior-college transfer Marcus Davis for the position at left field, and even if Winston clinches a starting role, he still may be called to close for the 'Noles.

“I think the game will dictate [who the closer is],” FSU pitching coach Mike Bell said. “You see nights in the big leagues where the closer has been used one or two different nights and they’ve got to have someone else close the game. Not to say it’s going to be best available option that night, but I think we are going to try to let the game dictate which way we go and I think we’ll see somebody rise to that occasion.”

The Seminoles open play against Rhode Island Friday, Feb. 15 at 4 p.m., and then play again Saturday at 2 p.m., and Sunday at 12 p.m.

The game will be broadcast on ESPN3.

Nogowski poised for sophomore season

Former NFC star expected to start at 1B

Feb 13, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

John Nogowski's freshman season at Florida State last year went about as well as expected.

The former North Florida Christian standout listened and learned. He made the most of his opportunities behind starter Jayce Boyd at first base, and at designated hitter in 34 starts.

Nogowski also handled the expectations that surround Tallahassee players who play for the hometown Seminoles.

"No question, it's not easy for local guys to step right in and live up to the hype," said FSU assistant coach Mike Martin Jr., who traveled a similar path from Maclay High and one season at Manatee Community College to FSU in 1993.

"But there's no question he had a good offseason, and put in the work. He dropped 10 to 12 pounds, and that is going to make him more versatile around the bag and on the base."

Nogowski is expected to start at first base in FSU's season-opener on Friday against Rhode Island.

FSU coach Mike Martin said Nogowski, in competition with junior-college transfer Casey Smit, has played well and is "certainly setting himself up to be the starting first baseman."

Nogowski, a .250 hitter last season with 23 RBIs, is determined to pick up where he left off last season. He finished with nine multi-hit games and posted a stellar .972 fielding percentage with just one error in 36 attempts.

"I came in here with the expectation I would be at first," said Nogowski, who helped NFC to state titles as an eighth-grader and as a senior in 2011.

"But that doesn't change your effort, in that you want to give 110-percent and play hard and things will fall in the right way."

Nogowski, a 6-foot-1, 210-pound sophomore, is part of the Seminoles' young, new-look infield that returns just one starter in senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez.

Sophomore Jose Brizuela, who started in left field last year, has moved to third base. Freshman John Sansone has emerged as the starter at second base after he also saw time at third and first base in practice.

Nogowski, who made 53 appearances overall with 140 at-last season, can also lean on lessons learned last season.

Not to mention pass them on to the team's newcomers.

“I think one being the longevity of the schedule, the ups and downs you have throughout the season and really trying to stay on that even plain – not get too high or too low – and try to stay in a good place (mentally) for every single game,” Nogowski said.

Nogowski also feels more confident and comfortable at the plate, where the Seminoles must replace their top four hitters from last season.

Strength and conditioning training have improved Nogowski’s range at first base, where Boyd last season was known for his impressive glove skills.

“I have really focused on picking the ball, because I think that goes a long way saving a few errors for your infielders and even getting a few outs that you normally might not get,” Nogowski said.

“I am trying to be really smooth around the bag, soft hands, picking up the ball.”

With the season opener quickly approaching, Nogowski admits he’s counting down the hours. And that feeling of excitement never changes regardless of experience.

“We are at the point where we are kind of raring to go,” Nogowski said.

Double duty

With baseball under way and spring football looming, Jameis Winston is fine

Updated: February 13, 2013, 8:20 AM ET

By David M. Hale | NoleNation

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Jameis Winston has a plan.

The plan comes cloaked in a sly smile and an overwhelming air of confidence, which offers assurances that everything will click together perfectly if for no other reason than Winston believes it will.

Still, the details of his plan to balance football and baseball remain a closely guarded secret, with Winston offering only vague hints.

"This spring is going to be fun," he said.

Indeed, there might be no more tantalizing storyline, more audacious situation or more high-profile athlete at Florida State this spring than Winston and his quest to become the Seminoles' starting quarterback on one field and starting left fielder -- and potentially closer, too -- on another.

The 6-foot-4 freshman already is something of a mythical figure. A year ago, he was the nation's top quarterback recruit. He also was drafted in the 15th round of the Major League Baseball amateur draft by the Texas Rangers. He never has thrown a pass in a college game, but he already has burnished the myth by supposedly throwing footballs over a fraternity house on campus. He'll take his first cuts for FSU's baseball team this weekend, and head coach Mike Martin is considering giving Winston's low-90s fastball a look at the back end of the bullpen, too. ESPN analyst Trent Dilfer recently suggested Winston could be the first overall selection in the NFL draft in 2015, but right now, Winston says he's primarily focused on baseball.

"It's about a 60-40 thing," Winston said. "I'm mostly 60 with baseball, because I've got to get back in the groove with things, and about 40 on football because I've got to stay fit and ready for the spring."

This is where the plan comes in.

For now, baseball can be the priority. The Seminoles' season kicks off this weekend, and Winston has the luxury of focusing on the diamond for the next few weeks. But spring football starts in March, and that's when Winston's attention will be split -- at least according to his coaches.

Martin said he has met with Jimbo Fisher, and the rules for Winston are simple: Football first, baseball second. But ask Winston, and things aren't quite so cut and dry.

"I know I'm both," he said. "During baseball season, I'm a baseball player. During football season, I'm a football player."

For fans, this mantra can stir some concern. After all, Winston already has been deemed the savior at Florida State. He'll be the next Heisman Trophy winner, a bigger, stronger version of Texas A&M's Johnny Manziel, a dual threat destined to carry the Seminoles back to the promised land. Hyperbole comes with the territory.

Before all that happens, Winston has to win the starting job, and it's easy to assume that splitting his attention between football and baseball puts him at a distinct disadvantage compared with Clint Trickett or Jacob Coker -- two veterans with only the football playbook to occupy their attention.

Not surprisingly, Winston isn't worried.

"I'm just going to go out there and try to get better," he said. "If I know I'm trying to be my best and trying to get better, there's nobody that's going to be able to stop me from doing what I want to do."

What Winston wants to do is follow a path few have traversed successfully. Football -- particularly under Fisher's demanding watch -- is a full-time job. Baseball requires a skill set constantly refined. The demands are so immense that, with the exception of an elite few like Bo Jackson and Deion Sanders, a choice eventually must be made.

And yet, Winston hasn't considered any option other than etching his name alongside Jackson and Sanders.

"Their mind didn't get pushed in either direction," Winston said. "So that's what I'm thinking."

So the next few weeks are all about baseball. His arm feels strong, and he's getting back into the groove at the plate.

When spring football begins, that becomes the priority. There will be days, Martin said, when Winston will practice with Fisher in the afternoon then suit up for a baseball game that evening. It's a balance Martin said he believes Winston is prepared to handle, though there are concerns.

"Keep that green jersey on him," said Martin, halfheartedly laughing off the possibility of an injury stunting Winston on either field.

Ignoring the possibilities is difficult, after all. Both Martin and Fisher have coached their share of marquee athletes over the years, but Winston's plan exceeds even that elite status.

What separates Winston, however, is that the confidence he exudes isn't self-absorbed. He inspires everyone to believe.

"[Baseball] will not hinder him in football," Fisher said. "He won't miss a day of practice. He'll be in his meetings and practices every day. Both sports are very important to him, and he's able to do both."

If Winston doesn't win the starting quarterback job, that's OK. He was perhaps the most ardent cheerleader on FSU's sideline in 2012, and he'll embrace that role again if necessary. If his baseball career stagnates under the demands of football, that's a price he can accept. He wants to experience a College World Series whether he has carried his team there or simply been along for the ride. Balancing the demands of baseball and football isn't a chore, Winston said. It's a luxury. He's not thinking too far ahead. His plan is simply to enjoy as much of it as he can. "I'm competing year-round, I've got that burning desire inside me" Winston said. "Balancing the two is the most fun. When you've got to pick one, it's hard. I love this sport and that sport. When you get to balance them, that's fun."

Opening day represents a new start

SS Gonzalez to enjoy senior season

Feb 14, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Justin Gonzalez remembers his first collegiate at-bat on opening day in 2010.

Gonzalez, inserted into the game an inning earlier at second base against Georgia State, led off the bottom of the eighth inning for Florida State at Howser Stadium.

As the right-handed hitting freshman settled into the batter's box, one thought crossed his mind.

"I told myself that the first pitch he throws, I don't care where it's at, I am swinging," Gonzalez said and smiled, adding that he remembers his legs shaking due to nerves.

"It happened to be a fastball and I hit a chopper over the third baseman for my first hit. After that, I felt like I was unstoppable. Hopefully, this year it's the same thing."

Gonzalez and the Seminoles open the 2013 season today at 4 p.m. against visiting Rhode Island at Howser Stadium.

Gonzalez, a senior and the program's starting shortstop for the third consecutive season, headlines a team that features plenty of new faces in eight freshmen and seven junior-college transfers.

Sophomore Brandon Leibrandt (8-3, 2.82 ERA) is scheduled to make his second consecutive opening-day start.

FSU swept Rhode Island in three games last year in late April, but it wasn't easy – the Seminoles won the final two games 2-0 and 6-5.

The Rams, selected to finish second in the Atlantic 10, return six positions players from last year, including A-10 Player of the Year Jeff Roy and All-Conference selections Pat Fortunato, Pat Quinn and Tim Caputo.

Gonzalez expects one of FSU's biggest challenges will be keeping its emotions in check on opening day due to the excitement that surrounds it. He's also excited to see how the team's newcomers respond.

"I feel like a freshman coming in, not know what to expect," Gonzalez said.

"But I am excited for these guys, I am excited for this club. I feel like it's going to be a real special year and just hopefully we can get off to a good start."

Selected in the 27th round by the Los Angeles Dodgers last summer, Gonzalez opted to return for his senior season.

And it's one he wants to savor.

"Watching (James) Ramsey last year, the way he enjoyed the experience and never pressed really, he just had fun with it," Gonzalez said. "That's the attitude I am looking to take this year, it's the last time to experience this and I want to soak it all in."

HOLTMANN MAY GET A SHOT

Sophomore left-hander Bryant Holtmann (Breese Central) may get a chance at cracking the Florida State rotation due to Mike Compton's season-ending Tommy John surgery. Compton is the Seminoles' No. 2 starter. Florida State is No. 9 in the USA Today Coaches preseason poll and No. 11 in the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association rankings.

The 6-foot-5 Holtmann emerged as a bullpen standout during his freshman season, filling the situational lefty roll to the tune of a 3.20 earned-run average and 2-0 record. Holtmann pitched in 24 games, striking out 17 in 25.1 innings. Of the 24 hits he allowed, only four were for extra bases. Holtmann also pitched two scoreless innings in the College World Series.

Holtmann was one of several freshmen in 2012 to gain valuable in-game experience, and Seminoles assistant coach Mike Bell said the Florida State staff is looking at those players for a successor to Compton.

"Hopefully, one of those freshmen (from last year) can step up and be a quality starter," he said. "So many of them got game experience a lot quicker than other freshmen in the nation. (Compton's injury) leaves an opportunity for someone else to step in."

Florida State was 50-17 last season and won the Atlantic Division regular-season title of the Atlantic Coast Conference. The Seminoles host Rhode Island in a three-game, season-opening series starting Friday.

Florida State baseball team reloads for another Super Regional run

By Bob Ferrante

TALLAHASSEE —

Florida State coach Mike Martin is used to making wholesale replacements year after year with his baseball team. But few challenges will be as daunting as the one he and his assistants face this season.

Gone are the team's top four hitters, including St. Louis Cardinals first-round draft pick James Ramsey and former Palm Beach Central standout Devon Travis (a 13th-round pick by the Detroit Tigers). The group combined for 30 home runs, 76 doubles, 201 RBIs and scored 252 of FSU's 459 runs.

FSU has reached the Super Regionals in 12 of the 14 years since the format was introduced — including five in a row. But if the Seminoles are to return to that round and again challenge for a College World Series spot, they will need significant contributions from a group of 15 newcomers.

"I'm anxious; I'm ready to get started," said Martin, who begins his 34th season as FSU's coach today at home against Rhode Island. "Just looking forward to seeing how we develop as the season goes along. We're going to experience some ups and downs. We do every year."

While the loss of the team's top four hitters could have been softened by the return of the Seminoles' top two pitchers, FSU coaches learned two weeks ago that sophomore right-hander Mike Compton would have Tommy John surgery on his elbow and miss the season. Compton went 12-2 with a 2.87 ERA, earning freshman All-America honors a season ago.

"He will definitely be missed but we also see this as an opportunity for someone else to step in and fill the No. 2 spot in the rotation," Martin said.

FSU's unquestioned No. 1 starter is sophomore Brandon Leibrandt, who was 8-3 with a 2.82 ERA as a freshman in 2012. The son of former major-leaguer Charlie Leibrandt is a control pitcher who keeps the ball low and finds success by inducing ground balls.

Leibrandt doesn't overpower hitters with his fastball, but in 99 innings he had 83 strikeouts and allowed just 29 walks. He has added about 10-15 pounds in the offseason and has also been working to add a fourth pitch, a cut fastball.

"I feel heavier in a good way," Leibrandt said. "Stronger, a little more explosive and hopefully it will relate to a little more velocity."

Leibrandt will pitch today on Friday as FSU opens the season at home against Rhode Island. Senior right-hander Scott Sitz (4-3, 3.72 ERA) and sophomore right-hander Peter Miller (5-2, 3.89 ERA) will start in the games on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.

The pitchers will have a familiar face behind the plate. Former Port St. Lucie High standout Stephen McGee, a junior, returns after catching all 67 games last season.

But FSU lost three of four infielders and has just senior Justin Gonzalez back at shortstop. Gonzalez is FSU's returning leader in home runs (nine), hits (54), runs (42) and RBIs (42).

The 6-foot-2 Gonzalez weighed just 165 pounds when he arrived in Tallahassee as a freshman, but he now weighs in at 205 pounds.

"When you put on that weight you don't have to try as hard," Gonzalez said. "You just let the pitcher supply the power. Putting an extra 40 pounds behind that swing definitely helps out a lot. Balls will carry more and hopefully find the gaps."

FSU's outfield is still a work in progress, and Martin said he's looking at a number of platoon situations. Right fielder Josh Delph, who is FSU's leading returning hitter at .267, could lead off. Freshman DJ Stewart has impressed coaches, and could also earn a starting job in center field.

Jameis Winston, who is vying for the starting quarterback job on FSU's football team this spring, will also make his college baseball debut. Winston could play left field and might close games after FSU lost Robert Benincasa, who had 16 saves and was drafted by the Washington Nationals last June.

"Jameis Winston has been very impressive," Martin said.

FSU will also lean on a few junior-college standouts to fill some of the gaps. Brett Knief could start in the outfield, Marcus Davis could be the designated hitter or left fielder and Casey Smit could see playing time at first base.

"Knief, Davis and Smit will be counted on to play a lot this year," Martin said. "It is good that they have gotten some experience at the junior college level. But they are still freshman as far as I am concerned until they've played a few games. It is a lot different at this level."

Local players for FSU

Giovanny Alfonzo;Lincoln Park Academy;5-11;175;So.;INF

Stephen McGee;Port St. Lucie;6-3;230;Jr.;C

Alvin Swoope;Treasure Coast;5-8;175;Fr.;INF

Dylan Silva;American Heritage;6-1;215;Fr.;LHP

New Castle News

February 15, 2013

College Baseball: Sansone earns starting spot as freshman at Florida State

Joe Sager

New Castle News

NEW CASTLE — Baseball is John Sansone's passion.

He spent countless hours fielding ground balls, taking batting practice and working on his speed and strength while growing up in Neshannock.

Nothing has changed now that he's a college freshman. That investment continues to pay off for Sansone, who is attending Florida State University on a baseball scholarship. He earned the starting job at second base for the Seminoles, who open their season today against Rhode Island in Tallahassee, Fla.

"I am so thrilled. Coming from a small town like New Castle, I'll never forget the good, quality people I met and the good values I learned in my hometown," he said during a phone interview after a class yesterday. "It's crazy I am getting a chance like this. I am so excited. Everything is going great. I am really enjoying my time right now."

Really, it's no coincidence he's earned the chance to start for Florida State. Sansone's dedication paid off in high school as he led Neshannock to the past two WPIAL Class A championships.

Last spring, Sansone batted .597 (40 for 57) with 40 RBIs, 34 runs scored, 12 doubles, six triples and seven home runs, all of which were tops in Lawrence County. He added 18 stolen bases for the Lancers. He wrapped up his high school career with a .479 batting average (127 for 265) with 110 RBIs, 112 runs scored and 22 home runs.

Once he got to Florida, the 5-foot-11, 200-pounder went to work during the fall baseball practice season.

"It was pretty much the same, in terms of how we do things in spring — practice and scrimmaging. We went a lot longer in the fall. I think we went five or six weeks straight, with a couple off days in there," he said. "It was awesome. I did kind of get tired in the fall, but it was fun playing in the sun when, back home, it was starting to get cold."

A shortstop in high school, the Seminoles moved Sansone to the right side of the infield, where graduation left them with two openings.

"Most of the fall, I was at first base. The last week of fall, they moved me to second," he said. "Ever since I got back for the spring, I was at second the whole time. I just did good battling with the other position

players. I guess you could say I won the spot.”

Florida State head coach Mike Martin, entering his 34th season, wants Sansone and first baseman Casey Smit to solidify the infield.

“John Sansone is a freshman and Casey Smit is a junior college transfer and they are going to need some time to get their feet under them,” he said. “I am anxious to see how they adjust as we go through the season.”

Sansone benefited from the extra preparation he put in over the years with his father, John.

“Really, the older guys helped me a lot and the coaching staff is there, too. The pace of the game is so much faster in (NCAA) Division I,” he said. “Everything about it is faster. Once I get used to that, which I am starting to, I think I should be fine.”

Already, Sansone has had to make some adjustments at the plate to handle better pitching.

“I think it’s more the off-speed stuff that I will have to adjust to because it’s a lot better,” he said. “I had to change my stance a couple times. I don’t think my dad will be too happy about that. I had to adjust to the way I was swinging at certain pitches and recognizing certain pitches.”

A Sport Management major, Sansone earned a 3.0 grade-point average in the fall. He doesn’t believe baseball will interfere greatly with his academic schedule.

“The only time we actually travel is on the weekends,” he said. “I have only one class on Friday and I’ll probably only miss a couple tests, which I can make up.”

Sansone is eager to start the regular season. The Seminoles, ranked No. 9 in the USA Today Coaches Poll, are hoping to return to the College World Series this year.

“Everyone here is excited. As a team, we just want one goal for everyone; it’s not about individuals here,” he said. “It’s about one goal we have — to win the whole thing.”

Sansone’s parents, John and Mirella, will be on hand today to watch his debut. An aunt and cousin will join them for the weekend.

“The game is on ESPN3, so I know a lot of people back home are all getting together and going to watch it somewhere. That’ll be fun,” he said. “I know a bunch of people going to come down to the Maryland games (March 15-17).”

Next year, people may have a shorter trip to see Florida State, which is shooting for its seventh-straight ACC Atlantic Division title. Pitt joins the ACC in the fall, so it’s possible Sansone and the Seminoles could make a trip up north to play the Panthers.

“That would be crazy,” he said. “I can’t even imagine that.”

However, Sansone is focused on this year.

“I just want to do anything I can to help the team win,” he said. “I don’t really worry about my own stats. They are nice, but any way I can help the team win is a bigger stat for me.”

(Email: ncsports@ncnewsonline.com)

So far, so good for FSU's new-look lineup

Feb 16, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

Marcus Davis understands the skepticism.

The Florida State junior, in his first year with the Seminoles, knows just how much firepower the lineup lost from last season's College World Series team.

Devon Travis, Sherman Johnson, James Ramsey and Jayce Boyd are all in professional baseball now – and they took their 341 hits, 252 runs, 201 RBIs, 199 walks and 112 extra-base hits with them.

But that doesn't mean the FSU lineup will be a weakness in 2013.

"The buzz around college baseball is that we're going to be relying on our pitchers," said Davis, who hit a two-run home run in his first at-bat on Friday. "We have a great staff, but we've got some great hitters, too. And I think everybody came out today and tried to prove that."

Freshman center fielder D.J. Stewart, who batted third on Friday, doubled in a run in his first at-bat in a collegian. Two batters later Davis, who was a JUCO All-American at Walters State Community College, crushed a pitch over the right field screen to give the Seminoles a quick 3-0 lead.

Freshman second baseman John Sansone reached base three times and scored two runs, senior Justin Gonzalez added an RBI triple, sophomore John Nogowski had an RBI double and sophomore Jose Brizuela delivered a two-out, two-strike grand slam in the sixth inning.

All in all, not a bad debut for the 2013 Seminoles.

Ramsey, Boyd, Travis and Johnson aren't anchoring the lineup anymore. And their shoes are a long, long way from being filled, obviously. Still, Friday was a nice start for the new-look Florida State offense.

"You can't try to be somebody you're not," Davis said. "Those guys were great ballplayers. Everybody that left – the position guys – were great.

"But the new guys, we're trying to leave our stamp here."

Umpire's stumble one for the ages

Home-plate umpire Bruce Ravan won't ever forget the sixth inning of Friday night's season-opener. Nor for that matter will most of the 5,354 in attendance at Dick Howser Stadium.

When Marcus Davis' right elbow was nicked with a 1-2 pitch, Ravan tried to sprint from behind the catcher to signal a hit-by-pitch. Instead, he tripped over his own feet and began to stumble ... and stumble ... and stumble ... before finally succumbing to gravity and crashing to the ground about 15 feet from home plate.

The crowd reaction was like something out of a movie, as each false step by Ravan drew a louder “oh” until finally there was a crescendo of “Oooohhhh!” as Ravan completed perhaps the longest trip in Dick Howser Stadium history.

“I got rid of the bat and everybody started making (noise),” Davis said. “So I thought I hit somebody with the bat so I turned around and saw him stumbling. I didn’t know whether to catch him or (what). I just kind of froze, I guess.”

When Ravan hit the ground he lost his hat and facemask. He was quickly helped up by Rhode Island catcher Shane O’Connell. And Ravan, being a good sport, gave a tip of the cap to the fans as he walked back to home plate.

Florida State head coach Mike Martin admitted afterward it was one of the funniest things he’d ever seen on a baseball field.

“I thought he was cutting up,” Martin said. “I said, ‘He’s really putting on a show.’ And then: Down goes Frazier!”

It didn’t take long for the stumble to make its way to the popular sports blog, “Deadspin.”

As one fan yelled at Ravan in the eighth inning: “You’re already on the Internet, brother!”

Seminoles slam Rhode Island in season opener

Seminoles show power in season debut

Feb 15, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

The new guys in the lineup produced right away and the returning ace was his usual solid self for the No. 9 Florida State Seminoles in their season-opening 11-5 win over Rhode Island on Friday evening.

Freshman D.J. Stewart ripped an RBI double in the first inning and junior college transfer Marcus Davis followed with a long home run to right field as FSU jumped out to a 3-0 lead and never looked back.

"I got hit into a hitter's count and I just tried to make the best of the next pitch," said Davis, who played at LSU in 2010. "That's a great feeling. You don't really realize how loud these fans get until you do something good."

Sophomore Brandon Leibrandt allowed four runs in five innings, striking out six, walking one and throwing a total of 73 pitches. It was his second straight win in a season opener for the Seminoles.

"There's room to get better for sure," Leibrandt said. "I'm coming out of here feeling good about myself, feeling good about how the team looked. Just another first game."

And another victory for FSU, which has now won 15 straight season-openers.

After the three-run first, the Seminoles scored one more in the second on a Justin Gonzalez RBI triple to right field, two in the fourth on a Gonzalez RBI groundout and a John Nogowski RBI double and one more in the fifth on a wild pitch.

The Seminoles led 7-2 after five but Rhode Island got two right back in the top of the sixth with Mike Lebel's two-run homer to left field off Leibrandt. It was the last pitch of the game for the Georgia native, who was relieved by Bryant Holtmann.

"Brandon pitched well," FSU head coach Mike Martin said. "Probably should have gotten him after that long inning that we had. When a guy sits over here in this weather for probably 20 minutes ... it's something that you don't experience when you're getting ready (in the preseason)."

The bottom of the sixth inning was one of the stranger ones in recent memory at Dick Howser Stadium. Rhode Island reliever Brad Applin hit three Seminoles to load the bases, and as home-plate umpire Bruce Ravan tried to signal the final hit-by-pitch he tripped over his feet, stumbled for about 10 steps and then fell in the middle of the first-base line.

Two batters later sophomore Jose Brizuela stepped to the plate for the Seminoles. On a 2-2 pitch, he got a low change-up and golfed it over the screen in right field for his second career grand slam.

“The guy had good stuff,” said Brizuela, who also homered in the season-opener in 2012. “I was actually surprised he was throwing that hard. The pitch before that he threw a high fastball and I kind of check-swunged.

“When I came back I was thinking he was going to throw me a change-up, but who knows? He made a good pitch, it was really low, but luckily I put a good swing on it.”

Said Martin of Brizuela: “He is a guy that we’re hoping continues to improve and becomes a tough out. He’s got a year under his belt now and we expect him to get better.”

Rhode Island managed one run off reliever Luke Weaver in the ninth, but the FSU bullpen was solid in relief of Leibrandt. The trio of Holtmann, Robby Coles and Weaver allowed just one hit and one run in four innings of work for the Seminoles.

“All of them showed good velocity,” Martin said. “For them to go out and pitch four innings of one-hit baseball was very, very impressive.”

Florida State will send Scott Sitz to the mound today in Game 2 scheduled for 2 p.m.

Florida State runs away with blowout win over Rhode Island on Opening Day

Coley Harvey | Orlando Sentinel FSU reporter
8:13 p.m. EST, February 15, 2013

TALLAHASSEE -- It only took 25 pitches for the bats in the middle of Florida State's lineup to give the college baseball world this resounding assurance: the offense will be alright.

On the first day that Division I baseball was played in the Panhandle since the Seminoles breezed past Stanford in a Super Regional last June that clinched a 21st trip to the College World Series, FSU rode the heart of its young order Friday in an 11-4 win over Rhode Island that got the 2013 season off to a strong start.

The win was mostly powered by a three-run first and a four-run sixth that aided a five-inning, six-strikeout performance by starting pitcher Brandon Leibrandt. A near-full crowd of 5,354 witnessed the victory that kicked off the three-game weekend series with the Rams.

"When you start the opening day with a lot of new guys, you're a little bit cautious of what to expect," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "After the nine innings that I just saw, I was very pleased with the way we played. We had some very good at-bats, we showed good poise on the mound."

Among the many questions revolving around this team during the offseason were those centered around finding quality replacements for the second-, third- and fourth-place hitters in the lineup. Former Seminoles Devon Travis, James Ramsey and Jayce Boyd all left after being claimed in last June's major league baseball draft.

Travis was the ACC's leader in doubles two seasons ago. Ramsey was the conference's leaders in multiple offensive categories last spring. Boyd had a .376 batting average in his final season; two percentage points behind the team-leading Ramsey.

By jumping out to a quick lead against the Rams (0-1), the Seminoles' newest three-, four- and five-hole hitters made it known that there will be no drastic offensive slip this year. The group accounted for four RBI and scored four runs.

"The buzz around college baseball is that we're going to be relying on our pitchers," junior-college transfer and designated hitter Marcus Davis said. "We have a great staff, but we have some great hitters, too. Everybody came out [Friday] trying to prove that."

Davis was among those players attempting to do just that. After fellow newcomer, third-place hitter freshman D.J. Stewart, got the game's scoring going by dropping a 3-2 pitch into right-center field for an RBI-double, Davis belted his first home run as a Seminole.

Turning on a 2-1 fastball, Davis, the No. 5 hitter, blasted a towering two-run homer that bounced into the street that runs behind the right field fence. FSU took a quick 3-0 lead.

"You can't try to be somebody you're not," Davis said, referring to the departed heart of FSU's batting order. "Those guys were great ballplayers. Everybody who left, the position guys, they were great. They did a lot for this program.

"But the new guys, we're trying to leave our stamp here. I think it's more important with us in the clubhouse that we can do it more than anything else."

What the Seminoles (1-0) also were able to do offensively was score when the pressure mounted, and they needed runs the most. Of FSU's 11 runs, nine were scored with two outs. That includes Davis' homer, and it includes a grand slam that eighth-place hitter Jose Brizuela had in the sixth inning.

"It's a credit to Mike Martin, Jr. because he spends so much time with our hitters and makes sure that they're disciplined with two strikes and not giving in to the pitcher," Martin, Sr. said. "In other words, they're fighting for that last out of the inning."

Two-sport standout Jameis Winston, one of three football players who has a chance to start at quarterback in the fall, had a bit of a slow start in his career debut. At the plate, the true freshman went 0-for-3 with a walk. He recorded one out while playing left field, and nearly came away with another in the top of the sixth.

On the one that got away, after opening to his left and sprinting for the wall to catch a deeply hit fly ball, Winston got a little lost. He turned to catch the ball instead over his left shoulder. A split second after the turn, he realized the ball was upon him. He jumped, crashing into the ad-covered fence. When he did, the ball bounced off the top of the fence for a two-run home run.

Football coach Jimbo Fisher, who took in the ballgame with his oldest son, 11-year-old Trey, later jokingly told one reporter that he cringed a little when he saw Winston leaping toward the fence.

The home run came off the bat of Rhode Island third baseman Mike LeBel, and it ended the evening for Leibbrandt. Martin, Sr. said a long FSU half-inning just before the top of the sixth may have caused Leibbrandt to go a little cold.

In the bottom of the sixth, with the Rams trailing 7-4, Brizuela blew the game open with his grand slam. It was only the third home run of Brizuela's career, but it was his second grand slam. It also was the sophomore's second opening-day homer.

"I guess I'm making it a tradition," Brizuela said of the opening-day long ball.

Offensively, he isn't the only one out to make a new tradition. If Friday's game was any indication, the rest of FSU's bats are busy trying to forge their own legacy that will be able to compete with the ones that have preceded them.

Seminoles open season with weekend sweep

Florida State wins Sunday on walk-off two-run homer from DJ Stewart

9:38 PM, Feb. 17, 2013 |

Written by

Perry Kostidakis

Senior Staff Writer @perrykos

After Florida State baseball's win against Rhode Island on Saturday, head coach Mike Martin provided a gem of a quotation:

"If you are looking at this baseball game, you have to be pleased with the way we kept our poise and just battled. Sure it was chilly, but we fought and did what we had to do to win the baseball game and I am very proud of our young men."

Little did he know the Seminoles would show their true poise the very next day with their 8-6 rallying win over the Rams.

Down 6-2 entering the bottom of the eighth inning, the 'Noles got offensive production from sophomore Jose Brizuela (2 for 3, one RBI, two runs, one triple, one double, two walks), Giovanni Alfonzo (1 for 2, one RBI, one run, one walk), senior Seth Miller (0 for 3, one RBI, one run, one walk), and junior Casey Smith (0 for 3, one run, two walks).

"This was one that you're just so proud to be a Seminole," said Martin. "Our young men persevered; we are down 5-0 and our young men stayed tough at the plate. We put together some good at-bats and got ourselves back in the game."

After a scoreless ninth inning, the Rams and Seminoles went to an overtime tenth inning, and then saw freshman DJ Stewart (1 for 4, one home run, two RBIs, one run, one walk) hit a walk-off home run to clinch the win.

His home run plated senior captain Justin Gonzalez (1 for 5, one run) to bring the winning total to eight.

"I was looking for my pitch to hit and drive it," said Stewart. "I knew it was gone when I hit it. When I hit first and saw the ball clear the fence, I was pretty happy about the result."

Pitching was all over the place during the game, with junior Peter Miller starting the game and pitching 2.1 innings, giving up three hits and two runs while striking out two.

He was then relieved by sophomore Bryan Holtmann, and after giving up a run and three hits, he himself was relieved by sophomore Billy Strode.

Strode pitched two innings, and then was replaced by freshman Jameis Winston, who pitched into the tenth inning, striking out four batters and giving up three hits.

Junior Gage Smith was awarded the win after closing out the tenth inning.

"Jameis was very impressive," said Martin. "He kept his poise. The balk didn't bother him. He got us in the dugout and then Gage [Smith] came in and did a very good job to get the win. Billy Strode also did a nice job for two innings which kept us in the ball game."

After sweeping Rhode Island to start off the season, the No. 9 Seminoles will return to the field Tuesday, Feb. 19 at 4:00 p.m. against the Jacksonville Dolphins at Mike Martin Field.

FSU gets extra-inning walk-off homer to sweep Rhode Island

February 17, 2013 | By Coley Harvey, Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — After a recent conversation with his father Reginald, Florida State outfielder D.J. Stewart came to one particularly illuminating conclusion in the days leading up to FSU's season-opening series that paid off royally for the Seminoles on Sunday.

"You get so anxious towards the end of the game," the freshman recalled his dad saying. "Just let the game come to you."

Exactly three hours and 50 minutes into Sunday's series finale against Rhode Island, D.J. Stewart let a high and away, 10th-inning, 2-2 fastball come into direct contact with his bat. When he finished his hard, heavy swing, the ball dropped some 380 feet away, beyond the right-center field fence for a walk-off home run.

It was the first walk-off game-winner of D.J. Stewart's career.

Claiming an 8-6 extra-inning win over the Rams, the Seminoles secured their first series sweep of the season. The walk-off hit was FSU's second against Rhode Island (0-3) in as many seasons. Last year, Jayce Boyd had a game-winning hit that caromed off the same fence Stewart's home run flew over.

"Our young men persevered," coach Mike Martin said of the win.

Four innings in, all looked bleak for the Seminoles (3-0). Victory did not appear to be in their immediate futures.

Until the bottom half of the inning, they had struggled to get on base. Completely stymied by Rhode Island's Liam O'Sullivan, FSU was hitless until second baseman John Sansone finally ripped a two-out single into the hole between the Rams' third baseman and shortstop.

Before that, Seminoles starting pitcher Peter Miller had been run from the game when he was removed by Martin after 2 1/3 innings. Having thrown 75 pitches, Miller had already allowed four runs, walked four and allowed three hits. He wasn't solely at fault for the Seminoles' defensive collapse, though. Five total errors, including two by third baseman Jose Brizuela, made for a long afternoon in the field.

Brizuela now has five errors through his first three ballgames.

The combination of shoddy defensive play and poor early hitting and pitching had the Seminoles rendered mute early.

"The dugout was quiet for a little bit because we struggled," right fielder Brett Knief said. "But we knew we were going to come back."

FSU plated its first two runs of the game in the sixth, when Marcus Davis and Brizuela scored. The pair got the rally going when Davis blasted a one-out double into deep right, and Brizuela drove him in with a triple off the wall — in nearly the same spot as Stewart’s later homer.

Two innings later, four more runs came across to tie the game at 6 as a travel curfew approached. Once the game entered the 10th inning, no other innings could begin. The Seminoles either would have to win it, or finish with their first tie since April 2003.

One reason the Seminoles’ bats were able to mount the furious comeback was because of the innings FSU got from its bullpen. Specifically, freshman right-hander Jameis Winston gave his team three innings of one-run relief. His lone unearned run came when he balked in a runner from third, who had originally reached base on an error that led off his second inning of work.

Aside from a throwing error on a hard-hit ground ball back to him, it was his lone blemish on the afternoon. Winston allowed just two hits and struck out four in the seventh, eighth and ninth innings. In addition to a lively fastball, he felt a sweeping slider was the most effective of his pitches.

“When I got my arm slot right, I throw [the slider] just like I throw my fastball and it just started dropping right in there,” said Winston, who will audition for a role as FSU’s starting quarterback in August.

FSU returns to action Tuesday when it hosts Jacksonville at 4 p.m.

Stewart's walk-off HR lifts 'Noles

Winston makes pitching debut as FSU records sweep

Feb 18, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

D.J. Stewart takes pride in hitting third in Florida State's batting order. Regardless of his collegiate inexperience, the freshman understands what's expected of hitters in that important slot.

"I was kind of getting down on myself because I wasn't contributing," Stewart said. "Hitting in the three-hole, I have to drive in runs, got to get hits, and I wasn't doing that."

Stewart, a powerfully built left-handed hitter, made amends with one swing in the 10th inning Sunday.

His dramatic two-run home run over the screen in right-center field lifted No. 9 FSU over Rhode Island, 8-6, before an announced crowd of 4,182 at Howser Stadium.

Stewart's first walk-off home run at any level came in the nick of time for the Seminoles (3-0), who rallied for the second consecutive game against the Rams (0-3) to complete the three-game sweep.

The game was in its final inning due to a travel curfew looming for Rhode Island.

After a one-out single by Justin Gonzalez, Stewart deposited a 2-2 outside fastball over the wall for his first career home run. He was mobbed at home plate by teammates before fellow freshman Jameis Winston, the Seminoles' backup quarterback who had pitched three innings of relief in the game, tackled him.

"You can't punish a ball like that and not expect to get knocked out when you come to home plate," Winston said and smiled. A smiling Stewart countered, saying, "We have to tell him to stop doing that. You can't be a quarterback tackling people."

Naturally, there were plenty of smiles in FSU's dugout. And it was a team effort that helped the Seminoles avoid their first tie in 10 years (7-7 at Miami in 2003) and provided their first win on a walk-off homer since the 2010 NCAA Super Regional.

"It's nice to see everybody making contributions," FSU coach Mike Martin said.

The Seminoles rallied from an early 5-0 deficit and scored four runs in the eighth inning to tie the game at 6-6. Backups Giovanni Alfonzo and Brett Knief contributed in a big way during the rally. Alfonzo laced an RBI single to right field, and Knief tied the game with a double to left for his first career hit.

"They had the momentum for a majority of the game, but we kept fighting," Knief said. "We knew it would be a nine-inning game — it was more than that, it was fun."

And Winston was solid, too, in his first collegiate pitching appearance. He allowed an unearned run on a balk, but struck out four without a walk in three relief innings. The tall right-hander relied on a biting slider, throwing 36 of 58 pitches for strikes.

"It was fun because I came in in a tough situation," said Winston, who worked the seventh through ninth innings. "I was anxious out there on the mound (at first)."

FSU fans who braved the cold, sunny afternoon probably experienced the same feelings early on, as the Seminoles didn't register their first hit until the fourth inning. They also committed five errors and stranded 12 runners.

Third baseman Jose Brizuela, a starter in left field last season who has committed five errors in three games, led FSU with two hits.

Starting pitcher Peter Miller struggled with his command, walking four in 2¹/₃ innings. Relievers Bryant Holtmann, newcomer Billy Strobe and Winston combined for seven strikeouts and no walks in 6²/₃ innings of relief. Gage Smith threw a scoreless 10th inning to earn the victory.

"It was real accomplishment for this baseball team to win the way it did, because I'm telling anybody that will listen, URI is a very good baseball team," Martin said. "They're not average, they're very good. And they're going to be very difficult in the very near future."

Off today, FSU plays Jacksonville (1-2) at Howser at 4 p.m. on Tuesday. Sophomore Luke Weaver is scheduled to start for the Seminoles.

FSU baseball team shows patience, rallies for win

Johnson earns victory in relief

Feb 17, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State baseball coach Mike Martin preaches patience and resiliency to his team each day in practice.

The Seminoles carried those lessons into Saturday's home game against Rhode Island, and literally walked away with positive results.

The Seminoles scored five runs in their final two at-bats and erased a 2-1 deficit to upend Rhode Island 6-2.

An announced – and wind-chilled – crowd of 5,229 watched FSU (2-0) score its runs on two bases-loaded walks, a hit batter, a wild pitch, a solo home run from shortstop Justin Gonzalez and a sacrifice fly.

“If you are looking at this baseball game, you have to be pleased with the way we kept our poise and just battled,” Martin said.

“You don’t ever make any excuses – it was just a little bit chilly but it didn’t matter – we fought, we did what we needed to do to win a baseball game and I am very proud of our young men.

“A lot of things were so encouraging.”

Indeed. The Seminoles mixed in a solid relief performance from junior left-handed pitcher Brandon Johnson, who allowed one hit over the final three innings (a career high) to earn his second career victory.

“I had a good feel for my changeup, my fastball was spotting up and had a lot of movement on it,” said Johnson, whose older brother Sherman was the Seminoles' starting third baseman the past three years .

History was made, too, as FSU freshmen John Sansone and Jameis Winston recorded their first collegiate hits.

Sansone, the starting second baseman, blooped a single into center field in the fourth inning with two outs. He scored three hitters later on D.J. Stewart’s bases-loaded walk to push FSU in front, 1-0.

Winston, who started at designated hitter, followed with a triple in the fifth when Rhode Island right fielder Joe Landi missed a diving attempt on Winston’s sinking line drive. The ball bounced over Landi and rolled to the fence.

The hard-luck Rams (0-2) out-hit the Seminoles 8-7 but were unable to overcome 12 walks issued by four pitchers. Eight FSU hitters earned walks, paced by catcher Stephen McGee's game-high four.

FSU's final five runs in the seventh and eighth innings were manufactured in large part to four walks, a hit by pitch (Jose Brizuela with bases loaded) and a sacrifice fly from John Nogowski.

FSU's young players have quickly learned the value of patience.

"At first, I was thinking all these guys were going to be around the plate, they are going to be throwing strikes," Sansone said. "He (Martin) was so right. Being patient is definitely the key thing to do.

FSU senior Scott Sitz started the game and tossed four scoreless innings on 78 pitches.

Kyle Bird followed with a scoreless inning, while Gage Smith was nicked for two earned runs on two hits in the sixth as Rhode Island erased 1-0 deficit and led 2-1 heading into the bottom of the seventh. But the Rams were unable to hold on.

Gonzalez led off the eighth with his 20th career home run, a towering shot to right.

FSU pitchers contribute in sweep of Rams

Written by Jim Henry Democrat assistant sports editor
Feb. 19

tallahassee.com



FSU's Brandon Johnson picked up his second career victory with three scoreless innings of relief in the Seminoles' Saturday win over Rhode Island.

FSU vs. Jacksonville

- When/Where: 4 p.m., Wednesday (Howser Stadium)
- TV/Radio: None, 1270 AM

Florida State's pitching staff contributed in different, but important, ways in the Seminoles' weekend sweep of visiting Rhode Island.

In two of the three games, FSU starters pitched well and protected leads. After the Seminoles fell behind in the last two games of the series, the bullpen was effective in keeping the Rams within striking distance.

And, yes, FSU's closer role remains unsettled but options are available.

"Overall, the first weekend you have to kind of take it with a grain of salt," FSU pitching coach Mike Bell said.

"All the work, all the preparation on the front end, you really don't know what will happen until you get out there between the lines. But it was a good weekend to let some guys settle in and others will continue to develop."

Sophomore Luke Weaver starts for the Seminoles (3-0) against visiting Jacksonville (1-2) Wednesday at 4 p.m. at Howser Stadium. Weaver, who allowed an earned run in an inning of relief on Friday, made six starts last year with 16 overall appearances.

Sophomore ace Brandon Leibrandt (1-0) was FSU's lone starter to earn a win against Rhode Island.

Leibrandt tossed five innings and allowed four earned runs with six strikeouts. Senior Scott Sitz threw four scoreless innings on Saturday, while junior Peter Miller struggled with his command and lasted 2 1/3innings on Sunday.

"His stuff is there, it's just a matter of execution," Bell said of Miller, who was named the No. 3 starter over Weaver last week.

"There are little things within the game you have to manage. Learning how to slow the game down, learning to understand that it's a pitch-to-pitch process. He's got all the makings (ability)."

Relievers Gage West and Bryant Holtmann each had two appearances, with Holtmann throwing a team-high 3 2/3innings in the series. West earned the victory on Sunday.

Also, Brandon Johnson and two-sport star Jameis Winston were equally impressive, combining to throw six innings over two games and allowing one unearned run on a Winston balk Sunday.

Johnson earned his second career victory on Saturday and Winston dazzled despite limited preseason work. He didn't join the team until January following football season.

"We've seen glimpses of it (performance), but he's like most freshman who don't have fall practice," Bell said.

"There's a lot of upside, a lot to dream on. He's learning to understand about being in the moment of (a game). He wants to win and he's a great teammate."

Junior-college transfers Billy Strobe and Robby Coles, who played at Wakulla High and Chipola College, and sophomore Kyle Bird combined to throw four scoreless innings of relief.

The trio had five strikeouts, but Coles and Bird also had four of the staff's 14 walks in three games. Bell also said different players could be used in the closer role depending on the situation.

"For many of these guys it was good to get those first-game jitters of the way," Bell said.

FSU baseball waits a day to play JU

Game moved to Wednesday due to weather concerns

Feb 19, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. was in his office early Monday morning reviewing video of the Seminoles' weekend sweep of Rhode Island. His evaluation generated smiles and frowns equally.

"There's so many things going through my head in regards to what we can do to get better," Martin Jr. said.

"It's also opening weekend, and you can't take a whole lot from it, because of the nerves, the jitters, the excitement. It's hard for guys to go out and just play. But from here on out, that's what we are looking to do. Be more fundamentally sound and play solid baseball."

FSU (3-0) immediately jumps back into its schedule on Tuesday against Jacksonville (1-2) at Howser Stadium at 4 p.m.

Sophomore Luke Weaver, who surrendered an earned run in one inning of relief on Friday, is scheduled to start for the Seminoles. The Dolphins dropped their opening series to Radford.

Martin Jr. checked off the good from the Seminoles' three-game sweep of the veteran Rams, picked to finish second in the Atlantic 10 Conference.

FSU rallied for two victories, including freshman D.J. Stewart's walk-off home run in Sunday's extra-inning win. Patient Seminole hitters drew 27 walks and seven players, paced by third baseman Jose Brizuela (4 for 10), had multiple hits.

The not-so-good featured a team batting average of .234, which included 18 strikeouts, eight errors and too many missed opportunities and mental mistakes across the board.

"The decision-making at the plate isn't the greatest in terms of what to swing at, what to take, a bunch of stuff," Martin Jr. said.

"Defensively, we have to be more fundamentally sound. Instead of trying to get two (outs), just get one, instead we get none. Throwing to the wrong game, The intangibles of the game."

Martin Jr. liked his team's resiliency – the Seminoles scored 17 of their 25 series runs from the sixth through 10th innings. The team's newcomers also contributed in the series.

While two-sport star Jameis Winston struggled at the plate (1 of 8), he allowed one unearned run with four strikeouts in three relief innings on Sunday.

Stewart, of course, saved the day with his towering two-run home run over the screen in right-center field following a Justin Gonzalez single.

"D.J. got one (pitch) up in the zone, and that's the power he has," Martin Jr. said.

"Not many guys can hit the ball out in that part of the park, especially in the winter. He did some good things. But there were some pitches he and other guys have to hit, because they are going to come back with a nasty slider to get you out if you don't hit those pitches."

FSU holds on for 9-7 win over JU

Paul Thomas

Warchant.com Staff Writer

No. 9 Florida State held on for a 9-7 victory over the Jacksonville Dolphins on Wednesday afternoon at Dick Howser in front of 3,681 fans.

The Seminoles (4-0) were in control early behind a dominating performance from sophomore starter Luke Weaver, who allowed just one hit, no walks and struck out a career-high nine batters in six innings of work.

Justin Gonzalez and Marcus Davis each hit their second homeruns of the season. JU (1-3) made things interesting with a nine-run top of the ninth, before Robby Coles closed them out for his first-career save.

"It felt good every inning just going out there pounding the strike zone, not trying to do too much," Weaver said. "Let them try to do it, and it just worked out to where they weren't swinging too much and it worked out good."

Weaver (1-0) was in full command as the Dolphins could never get going against the Deland, Fla. native. Weaver struck out the side in the first inning and threw 60 of his 83 pitches for strikes. He allowed just one hit and another runner to reach on an error, neither base runner reached second base.

He made his first career start against JU last year, but lasted just 1.1 innings as he gave up six runs on three hits.

FSU head coach Mike Martin said the big difference for Weaver this season will be the improvement he's made with his slider.

"He went out there and just totally dominated with his fastball and the slider," Martin said. "(Pitching coach) Mike Bell has done a great job in coming up with that slider for him, he's always had a decent change, he's looking for it to get better I'm sure. But this is one of those games that you hope that Luke can grow from, because he certainly pitched a beautiful baseball game."

Gonzalez's solo homerun made it 2-0 in the third inning. JU starter Zach Gordon (1-1) allowed just two earned runs on three hits and two walks in his three innings of work, before the bullpen let things get away as he took the loss.

FSU posted seven runs in the fourth inning, all with two outs. Jameis Winston started the inning off with walk, followed by a John Sansone walk. The pair of freshmen came around to score on a double off the wall in right by Josh Delph. Delph got caught in a pickle on the play, but took third and came around to score on a throwing error by Dolphin shortstop Ethan Loosen.

Stephen McGee then added a pair of RBIs on a blooper to right that scored Gonzalez, who reached on a walk, and D.J. Stewart, who doubled to right. McGee came home on a two-run blast by Davis to right field.

"It's good for us as a team to know we're capable of stuff like that," said Davis. "Scoring that many runs in an inning alone is quite a feat, but to do it with two outs is even better."

With a 9-0 lead Martin emptied his bench, playing every available position player on his roster. Martin also got his first look at a handful of young relievers.

After Weaver left the game, Kyle Bird worked a scoreless inning, allowing just one walk. He was followed by Tallahassee Community College transfer Hayden Jordan, who allowed a pair of earned runs on four hits in the eight inning.

Things got a little squirrely in the ninth inning for the Seminoles as freshman Dylan Silva struggled to find the strike zone and his defense committed two errors behind him. Sylva was charged with five runs, all unearned, as he walked three runners and two more reached on errors.

With the lead down to 9-5, FSU turned to Coles to shut the door. Coles, a Chipola Junior College transfer, walked the first batter he faced, but settled in to strike out the next hitter he faced.

Coles then gave up a two-run single (both unearned runs were charged to Silva) to JU DH Braddock Rowe, who finished the game 2 for 5 with two RBI. The hit put runners on the corners and the go-ahead run at the plate with two outs. The righty settled in and recorded his second strikeout to earn his first career save.

"The game did not get away from us," Martin said. "They did a good job of battling and I'm proud of our young men for doing their job and keeping their poise and getting it done when it counted."

The Seminoles return to action on Friday as they began a three-game series in Tallahassee with South Florida.

Notable

During the fourth inning of the game FSU honored JU head coach Terry Alexander, who graduated from FSU in 1977. Alexander will retire after the season. This is his 34th season as the Dolphins head coach.

Alvin Swoope recorded his first career hit on the first pitch of his college career as he singled to left. Swoope committed a throwing error in the top half of the inning on his first fielding chance.

Wednesday's game was originally scheduled for Tuesday February 19, but both teams agreed to move it back a day due to scheduled storms in Tallahassee on Tuesday.

Weaver, 'Noles beat Dolphins

Jacksonville's late rally falls short

Feb 20, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State coach Mike Martin saw too many positives to harp on the negatives Wednesday.

Minutes earlier, the Seminoles held off the Jacksonville Dolphins 9-7 at Howser Stadium in a midweek showdown that lacked drama until the ninth inning.

FSU starting pitcher Luke Weaver had made sure of that in his first start of the season. The sophomore allowed a bad-hop single, no walks and struck out a career-high nine batters in six innings as FSU built a 9-0 advantage through seven innings.

The Dolphins (1-3) didn't go quietly once Martin emptied his bench and went to the bullpen.

They scored two runs in the eighth and five in the ninth with the help of two errors, four walks and five hits. Plus, they had the go-ahead run at the plate with two outs.

But Robby Coles, a former Wakulla High and Chipola College starter, wiggled out of trouble and ended the threat with a strikeout to earn his first collegiate save.

Martin credited the Dolphins, and the outcome probably shouldn't have been a surprise since eight of the last nine games between the state rivals have been decided by three runs or less.

"The game did not get away from us," Martin insisted. "They did a good job of battling and I'm proud of our young men for doing their job and keeping their poise and getting it done when it counted."

Martin's checklist was topped by the dominating performance of Weaver, who displayed a lively fastball that topped out at 94-mph and an improved slider. He fanned the first three Jacksonville hitters of the game and six of nine over three innings.

"This is one of those games that you hope that Luke can grow from, because he certainly pitched a beautiful baseball game," Martin said.

Weaver made his first career start last year against Jacksonville, but didn't make it out of the second inning as he allowed six runs on three hits. On Wednesday, Weaver allowed just two runners but neither reached second base. He pitched confidently with rhythm and pace.

"It felt good, everything was locked in," said Weaver, who threw 63 of his 83 pitches for strikes. "Every inning I was just going out there pounding the strike zone, not trying to do too much. Everything felt good."

The Seminoles (4-0) also scored seven two-out runs in the fourth inning. Every available player on the bench played, and 17 hitters had at-bats.

Catcher Stephen McGee paced FSU with two hits, two runs and two RBIs, and Justin Gonzalez and Marcus Davis belted home runs. Freshman D.J. Stewart, who has had at least one hit in his four first four games, went 2 for 3 against his hometown team.

First-year relievers Hayden Jordan, who played at Tallahassee Community College, and Dylan Silva made their collegiate debuts. Jordan allowed a pair of earned runs on four hits, and Silva struggled with his command and was charged with five unearned runs.

Coles ended the Dolphins upset hopes, but it wasn't easy. He walked his first batter with one out, fanned the next and surrendered a two-run single.

With runners on the corners and the go-ahead run at the plate, he struck out Alex McRae swinging.

"Once I got out there I knew it was crunch time," Coles said.

FSU renews rivalry with USF

'Noles and Bulls face off for first time since 2002

10:28 PM, Feb. 20, 2013 |

Written by

Perry Kostidakis

One week after sweeping Rhode Island in its first series of the season, No. 9 Florida State will take on the University of South Florida in a three-game series starting on Friday.

The Seminoles haven't faced off against their once-rival Bulls since a 2002 matchup in a NCAA Tournament Regional, where then top-ranked 'Noles dominated USF and won 13-6.

In school history, the 'Noles are 63-15 all time against the Bulls, and 41-13 versus them in the Mike Martin era, including a 6-4 record while ranked in the top 25.

The Bulls have been playing at huge extremes in their first three games of the season, losing two games in which they gave up 10 or more runs (1-10 against Louisville, 2-12 against Indiana), but then beating Purdue 20-2.

They've been lead offensively by sophomore Austin Luek (.667 BA), senior Chris Norton (.600 BA), and redshirt freshman Nik Alfonso (.556 BA), but with 20 of the teams 23 runs coming from one game, it's a very small sample size.

Senior Joey Lovecchio (one win, .00 ERA) is expected to get the start on Friday.

Florida State will be rushed back onto the field, getting only Thursday off due to their game against Jacksonville University being postponed from Tuesday to Wednesday because of the threat of thunderstorms in the area.

With sophomore pitcher Luke Weaver starting against the Dolphins, fellow sophomore Brandon Leibrandt should be ready to go Friday against the Bulls.

Friday's game will also serve as the third-annual ALS Awareness Game for the Seminoles. ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) is more widely known as Lou Gehrig's disease, as a result as the famous Yankee contracting the disease.

A neurodegenerative disease with no known cause or cure, the annual ALS Awareness Game started in 2010 when then Florida State pitcher Tyler Everett learned that his father had contracted the disease.

Haggard Plaza will house a table that will be providing information about ALS and also selling \$1 red bracelets to raise awareness. Fans who are willing to donate will be able to text "ALS" to 20222 and make a \$5 donation.

The Seminoles take on the Bulls from Feb. 22 to 24, starting on Friday at 4:00 p.m., then continuing on Saturday at 2:00 p.m., and ending Sunday at 1:00 p.m.

Admission is free with an FSUID, 7\$ for adults, and 5\$ for youth (5-18, 4 and under are free).

No. 9 FSU baseball looks to shake off early defensive woes

Feb 21, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

Mike Martin is quite pleased with his team's 4-0 start to the 2013 season.

But that doesn't mean the Florida State head baseball coach is content with what he's seen in the field so far. Not at all.

"Some of the things we have done defensively," Martin said, "have been a little bit surprising."

And not in a good way. Through four games the Seminoles have committed 11 errors, including five in a comeback win over Rhode Island on Sunday. Out of the 20 runs the Florida State pitching staff has allowed so far in 2013, eight have been unearned.

Everyone understands the Seminoles lost three veterans from one of the best infields in the United States in 2012. Third baseman Sherman Johnson, second baseman Devon Travis and first baseman Jayce Boyd are all playing pro ball now.

So, naturally, there was going to be a drop-off defensively for Florida State. Especially early on as the newcomers got comfortable at their new positions.

But 11 errors in four games? That's an eye-opening number for any college baseball team. Much less one that has always prided itself on its defense.

"We're young," said senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez, who has been flawless in the field so far. "There are going to be those early struggles. We don't have the veteran infield we had last year, but these guys are good. And they're out there for a reason. They're going to make their mistakes, but once they figure it out they're going to be very special."

Third baseman Jose Brizuela has five of those errors. In just 10 chances. It's obviously a small sample size and everyone around the FSU program insists Brizuela is a very capable fielder. But last year, Johnson had just six errors for the entire season.

Martin knows the sophomore is a talented third baseman. He sees it every day in practice. And he expects to see him carry it over to the actual games, starting this afternoon in the series-opener against South Florida (1-2).

"It's just been a little disappointing because I haven't seen this in practice," Martin said. "Had I seen some of this I'd say, 'All right. Nothing new.' But I have a lot of confidence in Jose Brizuela. He has fielded the ball very well (in practice)."

Florida State baseball starts season 7-0

12:47 AM, Feb. 25, 2013 |

Comments

Written by

Perry Kostidakis

The Seminoles swept the Bulls to remain undefeated. The No. 9 'Noles beat USF in a three-game series in spite of rain delays, winning all three games against the Bulls by scores of 14-3, 8-0, and 5-2.

The 'Noles (7-0) pulled off the sweep against USF (1-5) despite having to endure a postponement on Friday and then an eight-inning shortened game on Saturday due to rain.

"Obviously, it was a tough day as far as the weather is concerned," said head coach Mike Martin after the team's game on Saturday. "We are just very pleased with the approach we had to the game. We really played well. I thought our team played aggressively and did what they needed to do to win."

Junior Marcus Davis was a force to be reckoned with over the weekend, with his total stats for the three games being 7 for 11 hitting, three runs, five RBIs, and two home runs.

"Marcus is playing very well," said Martin, who earned his 42nd, 43rd, and 44th wins against the Bulls this weekend, now with an overall record of 44-13 against them. "But as much as anything, he has a very good grasp for the game. He has a good level head and his feet are on the ground; he knows it's a long season. He is off to good start and it is ok with me if he continues to hit this way throughout the year." Davis said he is pleased with the outcome.

"I'm happy so far," said Davis. "But today's over with and tomorrow's a new day. You got to keep pushing, you got to keep grinding. The game is going to humble you at some point, I am just trying to ride this as long as I can."

The Bulls looked overwhelmed and overmatched for the majority of the series, giving their biggest fight against Florida State in the third game, but their intended rally fell short and FSU clinched the sweep. The Bulls only managed five total runs the whole weekend, despite having scored 20 in one game against Louisville.

Starting pitchers for each game were sophomore Brandon Leibrandt on Saturday, and then senior Scott Sitz and junior Peter Miller on Sunday. Leibrandt pitched six innings, giving up five hits and three runs while throwing five strikeouts. Sitz pitched eight, allowing four hits and no runs, striking out six, and Miller pitched six, giving up two hits and no runs while striking out five.

All three pitchers were awarded the win, and freshman Jameis Winston was awarded the save in the third game, who entered the game in the final inning for sophomore Kyle Bird to close the game out.

Florida State has the week off before they face off against the Villanova Wildcats (1-3) in a three-game series starting on Friday, March 1, and extending through until Sunday.

Good news for the Seminoles and Tallahassee residents, forecasts are pointing to chances of rain for all three days are 0 percent.

Pitching helps Seminoles sweep Bulls

Sitz, Miller turn in quality starts; Gonzalez injured

Feb 24, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

The last time Florida State and South Florida met more than once in the regular season was 1989.

One might think USF coach Lelo Prado wouldn't want to play the Seminoles for another 24 years after the Bulls were swept in three games at Dick Howser Stadium over the rainy weekend.

Think again.

"I love coming here because it's a great atmosphere," Prado said. "We have to learn how to play in this kind of environment. We didn't do a very good job this weekend, and we have to learn how to do it."

Undefeated FSU beat USF, 8-0 and 5-2, in Sunday's double-header behind stellar starting pitching from Scott Sitz and Peter Miller. The duo allowed just six hits across 14 scoreless innings with 11 strikeouts and three walks.

"Quality starts from both of those guys," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "Best game I've seen Peter Miller pitch since he's been here. Sitzy just totally controlled the situation. Really, really pleased."

Outfielder Marcus Davis had three hits, including his fourth home run of the season, and three RBIs in the two wins. D.J. Stewart had three hits with three RBIs in the second victory. The Seminoles (7-0) outscored the Bulls (1-5) 27-5 over the three games.

But it wasn't all good news.

FSU played Sunday's games without injured senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez, who has been plagued by a sore right hip and is scheduled for an MRI this week. Gonzalez's return is uncertain, according to coach Mike Martin.

FSU doesn't play again until Friday against visiting Villanova.

Gonzalez was replaced in the starting lineup by sophomore Giovanni Alfonso, who went hitless but was flawless in the field with seven assists and four putouts.

FSU's pitching helped set the day's tone, with the games ending about 15 minutes before a thunderstorm with hail poured down.

Sitz tossed a career-high eight shutout innings, scattering four hits and two walks while striking out six for his first victory of the season. The right hander retired the final nine batters he faced after he allowed a lead-off double to Kyle Teaf to open the fifth.

Dating back to last year's game against UCLA in the College World Series, Sitz has strung together 13 2/3 consecutive scoreless innings. Over his last four starts, Sitz has allowed just two runs in 23 innngs.

"My slider was really working," said Sitz, who added his previous long outing was in the Alaskan Summer League following his freshman season.

"I was throwing it to both lefties and righties. Overall, I was pleased with the way it was breaking today."

Junior Peter Miller was just as effective, allowing two hits with five strikeouts over six scoreless innings to rebound from a subpar season-opening start two weeks ago against Rhode Island. Miller lasted just 2 1/3 innings in that game.

Freshman Jameis Winston retired the side in the ninth inning for his first-career save to complete the sweep. Martin hinted the right-handed Winston could be the Seminoles' closer moving forward.

"(FSU pitching) coach (Mike) Bell told me to relax and just go out there and play my game, not get over my head. I went out there and did that," said Winston, who threw just 16 pitches.

Prado had seen enough of FSU despite an impressive start from Nick Gonzalez in the first game. Gonzalez fanned 10 Seminole hitters.

The two teams will meet in a three-game series in Tampa in 2014.

"This weekend they got a lot of big hits with two outs and when you do that, you are going to win a lot of games," Prado said.

"Just a sound club. Solid pitching. Solid defense. You can't make mistakes with them and give them outs. If you do that, you are going to get beat. And we did that."

Behind strong pitching and bats, FSU claims second series sweep of season

Coley Harvey | Orlando Sentinel FSU reporter
6:05 p.m. EST, February 24, 2013

TALLAHASSEE -- If the trends that have taken shape in the early part of Florida State's season continue, the Seminoles may soon be coming up with a nickname for the final day of their weekend series.

Just call them "Sweep Sundays."

One week after blowing past Rhode Island in a three-game, season-opening set, the Seminoles blew past USF in both parts of a Sunday doubleheader to claim their second sweep of the year. After blasting the Bulls 14-3 on Saturday, FSU received quality pitching, power hitting and timely defense to beat USF 8-0 and 5-2 in the two games Sunday.

Inclement weather all weekend around Dick Howser Stadium had pushed the games back a day and forced the Sunday doubleheader.

"Obviously, the weather was kind of an adverse condition for us, but it was a good time for us to come together as a team and prove what we can do, and I think we did that this weekend," FSU outfielder Marcus Davis said.

The junior college transfer played a key role in all three wins over USF (1-5). In addition to reaching base nine straight times during one two-and-a-half game stretch, he belted a key eighth-inning home run that gave the Seminoles (7-0) the insurance they needed late in the closest of the contests.

On the first pitch of the inning, he turned around a fastball that was up and inside. After getting fastballs in that part of the strikezone all day, he knew to expect the pitch. The end result was the ball sailing past the high iron fence that rests atop the right field wall.

In seven games, Davis is batting .455 with four home runs, nine RBI and three doubles.

"This is the first opportunity I've really had to watch film of myself and I think that's a big part of it," Davis said of his early success. "You can go back and see and make adjustments that way."

Seminoles right-hander Scott Sitz isn't looking to make many major adjustments anytime soon.

In Game 1 of the doubleheader, the senior starter was nearly untouchable. He pitched eight innings, allowing four hits and striking out six. When he was removed before the ninth inning of the 8-0 victory, he was one pitch away from 100.

Such numbers shouldn't be too surprising. He's posted similar outings dating back to last June's NCAA Regional. In the four games since he allowed two runs in a Regional win over UAB, Sitz hasn't allowed anymore. That span lasts 23 innings.

"I don't want to get too confident and go out there and have a bad outing, so you just kind of have to stay within yourself," Sitz said.

This season, his slider has been working even better than he may have expected, and it has helped him record his 10 strikeouts in 10 innings this season.

Along with Sitz's start in the opener, junior Peter Miller finished the day with a six-inning gem of his own. Allowing just two hits, Miller struck out five and held a 3-0 lead before departing.

"Quality starts from both of those guys," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "Best game I've seen Peter Miller pitch since he's been here. Sitz, he just totally controlled the situation."

In the top of the eighth of Game 2, shortstop Giovanny Alfonzo -- he started both games because senior Justin Gonzalez was out with a preexisting hip injury -- took control of a potentially disastrous situation when he made a head's up play that preserved a 4-2 lead that USF was threatening to cut into.

With runners at first and second and Seminoles reliever Kyle Bird on the mound, catcher Ladson Montgomery had trouble immediately corralling one particular two-out errant pitch. Seeing that, both runners tried to advance. Montgomery saw them moving and tried to get the lead runner at third.

Montgomery's own throw to Jose Brizuela was a wild one. But Alfonzo was there to back up. When he did, the baserunner, believing he had a chance to take home, tried to advance. Alfonzo's return throw to Montgomery was right on target.

The out ended the eighth and preserved the two-run lead.

"No question that was the big play in the game," Martin said.

An inning later, freshman two-sport standout Jameis Winston came in for his first save opportunity. Martin has said the closer's job is Winston's to win. If he continues to get three straight outs on 16 ninth-inning pitches, the young right-hander may very well soon claim it.

With respect to Gonzalez, team doctors will evaluate him further this week. He'll undergo an MRI on Monday, Martin said. If the results of the MRI come out positively, he likely will try to play once again. If they don't, he may be shelved for about two weeks.

Florida State completed a three-game sweep of South Florida as it took both games in Sunday's double-header at Dick Howser Stadium.

The Seminoles (7-0) got 14 combined innings of shutout baseball from its two starters on Sunday afternoon. Scott Sitz pitched a career-high eight shutout innings in the first game as FSU cruised to an 8-0 victory. Not to be out done, Peter Miller tied his career-high with six scoreless innings in the 5-2 series finale.

"Quality starts from both of those guys," head coach Mike Martin said. "Best game I've seen Peter Miller pitch since he's been here. Sitz just totally controlled the situation. Really, really pleased. Had three

pitches going for him, Miller had three pitches going for him and that's what it takes to beat a club like South Florida."

FSU sweeps double-header, series from USF

Paul Thomas

Florida State completed a three-game sweep of South Florida as it took both games in Sunday's double-header at Dick Howser Stadium.

The Seminoles (7-0) got 14 combined innings of shutout baseball from its two starters on Sunday afternoon. Scott Sitz pitched a career-high eight shutout innings in the first game as FSU cruised to an 8-0 victory. Not to be out done, Peter Miller tied his career-high with six scoreless innings in the 5-2 series finale.

"Quality starts from both of those guys," head coach Mike Martin said. "Best game I've seen Peter Miller pitch since he's been here. Sitzy just totally controlled the situation. Really, really pleased. Had three pitches going for him, Miller had three pitches going for him and that's what it takes to beat a club like South Florida."

FSU took control early with a four-run first tinning behind two hits, two USF errors and a two hit by pitches. Marcus Davis drove in a pair of runs on a single up the middle in the first.

"It was good to jump out on them quick today," said freshman outfielder D.J. Stewart. "Get four runs from them in the first inning, kind of went dead a little bit between there. But getting runs for (the starting pitchers), they're great pitchers so one run, two runs, that's good enough for them."

After the rough first inning, USF starter Nick Gonzalez settled in nicely as he didn't allow another run the rest of the way. Gonzalez finished with 107 pitches thrown in five innings, allowed four runs, three earned, on three hits and four walks. He recorded a career-high 10 strikeouts.

FSU got back on track in the sixth inning as John Sansone drove in a pair of runs on a bloop single. Jose Brizuela had two RBI of his own as he was 1 for 1 with a double and two walks in the first game.

Freshman Kenny Burkehead made his collegiate debut with a scoreless ninth inning, allowing just one walk as he preserved the shutout.

Miller kept the Bulls (1-5) at bay in the second game as he allowed just two hits and one walk in his six innings of work. He struck out a career-high five batters and threw 73 pitches.

Stewart provided much of the offense in the second game as he was 3 for 4 with a double and three RBIs. All three runs were driven in on opposite field hits.

"The first game I was trying to do too much," he said. "I've been trying to do too much all weekend, just needed to let the ball get deep on me, needed to try to do something different. Stop trying to pull the ball and just let my hands work. If they came inside I'd try to pull it, but was just mainly trying to work opposite field today."

Mike Martin said Sunday's start was the best of Peter Miller's career.

USF threatened in the seventh inning as it loaded the bases with no outs against reliever Gage Smith, who inherited the first two runners on base from Bryant Holtmann. Smith got out of the jam with walk and a pair of ground outs, the Bulls did score on one of the ground outs to make it 3-1.

FSU added a run in the bottom half of the seventh on an RBI single from Stewart to score Sansone. The Bulls added a run in the eighth inning, but a terrific defensive play by Giovanny Alfonzo kept things from getting any tighter.

Alfonzo, who started both games in place of Justin Gonzalez who sat out with a hip injury, was in the right place at the right time. Kyle Bird's pitch caught away from Ladson Montgomery, who started behind the plate in the second game, to advance two USF base runners. Montgomery's throw to third sailed by Brizuela, but Alfonzo skidded in front of it and popped up to throw the runner out at home and end the inning.

"That was a great play because it was getting kind of tight," Davis said. "If that run scores it's a one-run game so that play was awesome. Gage came in and did well, Bird came in and did well and once (Alfonzo) made that play it was like 'OK everybody take a step back and let's try to get some insurance here.'"

It would be Davis who delivered the insurance run on the first pitch of the bottom half of the inning. Davis launched his fourth homerun of the season over the right field wall for a 5-2 lead heading into the ninth inning.

Freshman Jameis Winston retired the side for his first-career save in the ninth inning to complete the sweep.

"They were swinging," Winston said when asked what worked in the quick inning. He threw just 16 pitches to earn the save. "They were swinging early too. They were taking until they got a strike so I just put it in there. Coach (Mike) Bell told me to relax and just go out there and play my game, not get over my head. I went out there and did that."

Martin said that he thinks Winston could be the Seminoles' closer moving forward the rest of the season.

"He did a good job in that role tonight. Had no display of nerves and got it done. We're looking for somebody to assume that role."

Notable

Junior college transfer Ladson Montgomery drove in the first run of his FSU career in the fourth inning of the series finale. Montgomery doubled off the wall in right to score Casey Smit, who also reached on a double.

FSU recorded four stolen bases in the two games as Davis, Stewart, Brizuela and Josh Delph each swiped one bag.

The Seminoles wore their gold jerseys for both of Sunday's games, extending the winning streak in the gold uniforms to 15 games.

FSU blasts South Florida in rain-shortened game

Davis goes 4 for 4 with a HR in the Seminoles' 14-3 win

Feb 23, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

So far, this Division I thing is going pretty well for Florida State newcomer Marcus Davis.

The junior-college transfer was 4 for 4 with a home run on Saturday in the Seminoles' 14-3 rain-shortened win over South Florida. He is now hitting .467 through FSU's first five games of the season.

"I'm happy so far," Davis said, "but today is over with. Tomorrow is a new day. Got to keep pushing, got to keep grinding. The game is going to humble you at some point. So I'm just going to try to ride this until (it does)."

The game was supposed to be the first of a doubleheader on Saturday, but when a monsoon rolled through Dick Howser Stadium in the bottom of the eighth inning the decision was made to call the first game and postpone the second until Sunday morning.

So now the Seminoles (5-0) and Bulls (1-3) will play a doubleheader on Sunday, with the first game set to begin at 11 a.m.

"Very proud of these young men.," FSU head coach Mike Martin said. "I'm just pleased with the approach we've had for the last two days. It's unfortunate that we've only played one game but I'm very proud of these young men."

Brandon Leibrandt improved to 2-0 on the season on Saturday, allowing five hits and three runs in six innings of work. He got plenty of early help from his teammates at the plate as the Seminoles scored three in the first, two in the second and three more in the third.

Stephen McGee had an RBI double off the left field wall, Davis had a home run over the screen in right and leadoff hitter Josh Delph added a two-run double off the screen as the Seminoles made life miserable for the South Florida pitching staff.

In total, Florida State had 14 hits and drew 11 walks and five hit-by-pitches in 7 2/3 innings - the game was called in the bottom of the eighth with the bases loaded and FSU freshman D. J. Stewart at the plate.

"We played really well," Martin said. "I thought our team played aggressively. I thought we did what we needed to do to win."

And Davis, of course, was the star, adding a walk, an RBI single, a double to left center and another single to his perfect afternoon.

"I've been around baseball a long time," Davis said. "I've played with a lot of good players. It's obvious the nerves are gone and all that and I'm enjoying the transition so far."

Said Martin: "Marcus is playing obviously very well. But as much as anything he has a very good grasp of the game. ... He's got a good level head. His feet are on the ground. He knows it's a long season. He's off to a good start and it's OK with me if he continues to hit this way throughout the year.

Florida State's Jameis Winston missed his first career home run by less than a foot as his towering fly ball to right field in the eighth inning hit off the very top of the screen for a double.

Landon Montgomery also had the first two RBIs of his career for the Seminoles, who got three innings of no-run relief from lefthander Brandon Johnson.

FSU baseball looks to stay undefeated

Mike Martin and Seminoles battle Villanova

12:19 AM, Feb. 28, 2013 |

Written by

Perry Kostidakis

After taking on Rhode Island and USF in back-to-back, three-game series (with a single game against Jacksonville University thrown in between), Florida State baseball (7-0) returns to the mound Friday for a three-gamer against their second straight Big East opponent, the Villanova Wildcats (1-3).

Surprisingly, in their 65-year history, the Seminoles have never faced off against the Wildcats, and Friday's game will serve as their first meeting.

Villanova has only played four games this year, with two games against Monmouth and two against La Salle cancelled. They have, however, already faced a team of top-ten talent when they traveled to play Florida State's fellow ACC-member and rival for top team in the conference, North Carolina State. The Wildcats dropped that game 14-3.

The Wildcats finished the season last year at 28-27, and returned 19 players that represented more than 60 percent of the team's innings pitched and over 50 percent of the at-bats.

Offensively, Villanova is lead by senior second baseman Tyler Sciacca, who is currently hitting at a .529 average, followed by senior outfielder Steve Schrenk (.333) and senior outfielder Paul Rambaud (.308).

Pitching is handled mainly by junior Pat Young (3.33 ERA) and sophomore Josh Harris (3.00 ERA). Young is expected to get the start.

Florida State will look to continue its dominance this season, in which their average margin of victory is 5.14 runs, while they've held opponents to three runs-and-under four times.

Junior Marcus Davis will hope to repeat last week's performance this weekend against Villanova; against USF, he went 7-for-11, with three runs, five RBIs and two home runs, an effort that garnered him Louisville Slugger National Player of the Week and ACC Player of the week honors.

Friday will most likely continue pitching trends and see sophomore Brandon Leibrandt get the start, with some combination of senior Scott Sitz, junior Peter Miller, and sophomore Luke Weaver starting on Saturday and Sunday.

The Seminoles take on the Wildcats from March 2nd to the 3rd, starting on Friday at 4:00, then continuing on Saturday at 2:00, and ending Sunday at 1:00.

Admission is free with an FSUID, 7\$ for adults, and 5\$ for youth (ages 4 and under are free). Friday and Sunday's games will be broadcast on ESPN3.

Reunited again: Seminole infielders played travel ball together

Seminole infielders played travel ball together

Feb 28, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State's new-look infield suddenly has an old feel to it.

Specifically on the left side, where third baseman Jose Brizuela and shortstop Giovanny Alfonzo have reunited.

The sophomores were travel ball teammates – and infield starters next to each other – for a Miami-based team each summer during high school. They have history, chemistry and unique communication skills.

“We are talking the whole game, and know exactly what we're saying,” Alfonzo said.

“It's just like good old times,” Brizuela added.

Of course, these are also uncertain times for the Seminoles (7-0), who continue their 15-game homestand to open the season against Villanova (2-2) on Friday.

Senior shortstop and team captain Justin Gonzalez has been sidelined since last Sunday with hip soreness.

FSU coach Mike Martin said on Wednesday that he doesn't anticipate Gonzalez's return this weekend. The Seminoles play five games in six days with a midweek series against Presbyterian Tuesday and Wednesday.

Alfonzo, who made two starts last season at shortstop, was thrust into the starter's role in last Sunday's sweep over the Bulls. He went hitless but played well defensively, including throwing out a USF runner at the plate.

“He's a guy we feel very comfortable with,” Martin said.

“I thought he played very well when he got the opportunity this past weekend.”

After replacing three infield starters from last season's team -- now combined with losing its most experienced player – it's important Brizuela and Alfonzo continue to develop.

Brizuela, who started 62 games last season in left field, says he's feeling more comfortable and confident with his return to the infield. He committed his four errors this season in the opening weekend against Rhode Island.

Brizuela tweaked his stance in the field to give him more time to see the ball – he moved his left foot back slightly (drop step). He also added his approach defensively won't change with a new-old partner at shortstop.

Brizuela and Alphonzo attended different high schools but became immediate friends when teamed with All American Prospects

"I just have to field my base," Brizuela said.

"If I can get to a ball, I am going to try to get to it every time. If not, they are going to be backing me up no matter what. It's not really a change for me."

Alfonzo, whose father played 14 years of minor league baseball and uncle (Edgardo Alfonzo) played 11 years in the major leagues, has concentrated on improvements at the plate and on defense.

He has just four hits in 39 career at-bats. Alfonzo, who draws inspiration from Gonzalez, also likes knowing Brizuela is to his right at third base.

Just like old times.

"We have a lot of communication that I can't really say I have with a lot of other guys," Alfonzo said.

"It's awesome to know I came up here with him, and the fact that we can play with each other just like we have in the past, it's fun."

FSU pitchers seal the deal in sweep of Villanova

Seminoles sweep Villanova; Winston battles for save

Mar. 4, 2013 1:47 AM, |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

When he made his familiar walk to the mound late Sunday afternoon, Florida State baseball coach Mike Martin was tempted to make a change.

Freshman reliever Jameis Winston had walked two batters and hit another with a pitch, loading the bases and putting the Seminoles' two-run lead in jeopardy. And if Martin's only concern had been winning this particular game, he most certainly would have yanked the talented right-hander and called junior Gage Smith out of the bullpen.

But with an eye on the future and a belief that his young pitcher could work out of the jam, Martin simply offered some encouragement and made his way back to the dugout.

One sacrifice fly and one strikeout later, the threat was over, Florida State secured a 2-1 victory, and Winston was one step closer to becoming the Seminoles' full-time closer.

"If we're going to use him as our closer, he needs to get that feeling, and he needs to know what it takes to close it up," said Martin, whose team improved to 10-0 following the three-game sweep of visiting Villanova. "I think that it was a good learning experience for him. ... I wanted to see how he would do, and fortunately he got the job done for us."

Winston, who actually is at FSU on a football scholarship and will be in the running for the starting job this spring, started Sunday's game at designated hitter and went 2-for-3 with a double.

And even though things got dicey in the ninth, teammates and coaches said he never appeared to be rattled by the situation.

"His two-seam (fastball) was moving more than he was used to," FSU catcher Stephen McGee said. "But instead of adjusting to it, he kept trying to throw it and hope it wouldn't move as much. At the beginning, the control wasn't there. But he really handled the pressure very well.

"He controlled himself and started hitting spots."

Said Winston: "No one was really worried. Probably the fans were worried, but we were having fun. ... We're going to be playing some good teams, and there's going to be more situations like that. So I've got to be ready."

Sunday marked the second consecutive dominant performance in an impressive weekend from pitching coach Mike Bell's staff.

For the third consecutive game, Seminoles hurlers struck out 14 Villanova batters.

Junior right-hander Peter Miller (2-0) established a new career high with eight strikeouts in 5 1/3 innings, but he did experience some control issues. While allowing just three hits, Miller also walked four and hit two batters with pitches.

Junior righty Robby Coles worked next, striking out the first three batters he faced and pitching 2 2/3 scoreless. Then Winston finished things off to record his second save.

“It wasn’t pretty at the end,” Bell said. “But it was a good learning tool for us, and a learning tool for him also.”

Florida State’s offense, meanwhile, was relatively quiet after putting up 30 runs in the first two games of the series. Wildcats left-hander Josh Harris allowed just two runs (one earned) off six hits in seven innings. He struck out two and walked none while falling to 1-1 on the season.

“We had to earn everything that we got,” Martin said.

Other than Winston, no FSU batter recorded more than one hit. Second baseman John Sansone had the Seminoles’ lone RBI on a double that scored Seth Miller in the fifth.

Assistant coach Mike Martin Jr., who handles the Seminoles’ hitters, said he didn’t see any major problems with their approach or effort Sunday.

“It’s nothing to get concerned about,” Martin Jr. said. “You just chalk it up to baseball. We had some decent swings. Hit some balls at ‘em and didn’t have much to show for it.”

Sitz, Davis lead FSU baseball to 7-0 win

Mar 2, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

By the ninth inning Saturday, the Animals of Section B had to start plastering their “K” placards on a second pole inside Dick Howser Stadium’s grandstands.

There was no more room on the first. Not after senior right-hander Scott Sitz tied a career high with nine strikeouts and Florida State relievers Bryant Holtmann and Gage Smith added five more.

With the Seminoles’ pitching staff in complete command and junior outfielder Marcus Davis providing punch at the plate, Florida State rolled to a 7-0 victory against visiting Villanova.

“Obviously very pleased with Scotty,” said FSU coach Mike Martin, whose team improved to 9-0 on the season. “I thought he had another exceptional outing. ... I’m just very pleased that he’s showing us that he can throw to both sides of the plate and throw the change-up and curveball for strikes.”

Sitz allowed just three hits in six innings — all singles — and walked one. He retired 18 of the 22 batters he faced.

It was just the latest in a line of strong appearances from Sitz, who improved to 2-0 and has thrown 19 2/3 consecutive scoreless innings, dating back to last year’s College World Series.

“Hoping to keep that streak going for as long as I possibly can,” Sitz said with a smile. “I felt like the biggest thing was the command of my fastball. My change-up and my slider were OK today, but the big thing was command of my fastball. That’s what got me out of jams when I needed to.”

Of course, there weren’t many jams at all. FSU’s pitchers allowed just four hits all day, while recording 14 strikeouts with two walks.

The Seminoles’ offense wasn’t quite as prolific as it was on Friday, when the Seminoles pounded out 22 hits and 23 runs, but it didn’t have to be.

Junior outfielder Marcus Davis continued his torrid start to the 2013 season by going 3-for-4 with a pair of RBI doubles. He also legged out an infield single and scored three runs.

Through nine games, the junior college transfer is batting .500 with four home runs, five doubles and a team-high 14 RBIs.

According to FSU’s coaches, however, the most impressive part of Davis’ performance Saturday was the fact that he played at all. After colliding with the left-field fence on a Villanova home run one day earlier, Davis experienced soreness in his right elbow and shoulder Saturday morning.

“The wall kind of beat me up a little bit,” Davis said with a laugh.

“He wasn’t about to say, ‘I can’t go today,’” Martin said. “He came out here and played a big part in this win for us.”

The Seminoles also received an offensive boost from sophomore John Nogowski, who went 2-for-3 with an RBI double of his own. The former North Florida Christian star earned the start at first base after coming off the bench Friday and delivering a 3-for-4 performance.

“Hitting in the five-spot is where we thought he would hit when we first started,” Martin said. “I think he’s showing that he’s continuing to battle for a spot.”

The Seminoles again played without senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez (hip) and freshman centerfielder D.J. Stewart (wrist).

FSU will look to sweep the three-game series Sunday at 1 p.m.

Strong start for Coles

Wakulla High grad shows knack for notching strikeouts

By Ira Schoffel

Robby Coles is used to enjoying success on the pitcher's mound.

After a stellar career at Wakulla High, he posted an 18-3 record during two seasons at Chipola College. But not even Coles could have expected his first season at Florida State to get off to this kind of start.

In four appearances, the junior right-hander has pitched six innings of shut-out baseball. He has allowed just two hits — both singles — while striking out 13 batters.

"The key for me is working the ball down in the zone," Coles said after working 2 2/3 strong innings Sunday against Villanova. "As long as I can do that, everything else kind of takes care of itself."

Coles struggled a bit in his first outing as a Seminole, allowing two walks in one inning of relief during FSU's season opener against Rhode Island. But in his second appearance, on Feb. 20 against Jacksonville, the Crawfordville native started a streak that likely will be one of the highlights of his season.

Coles struck out Jacksonville's final batter to record his first career save and then continued that trend into last weekend's sweep of Villanova. On Saturday, he struck out all five batters he faced. And then in Sunday's series finale, he fanned the first three batters he faced.

Over the course of three appearances, Coles struck out nine consecutive batters.

The streak ended when the Wild-cats' No. 3 hitter, Tyler Sciacca, was able to ground out to shortstop while facing a 3-2 count.

"That was fun," Coles said. "I wanted to keep it going as long as possible, but you know it's not going to last forever."

Streak or no streak, FSU pitching coach Mike Bell said the Seminoles have been extremely pleased with what Coles has done in his brief time at FSU.

"Any time you're getting strike-outs," Bell said, "one, you're getting ahead of hitters. You're also commanding your pitches. And he's throwing three pitches for strikes. He's got a lot of movement on his fastball with the ability to throw the slider and change for strikes, and he did a great job for us this week-end."

While he has worked primarily in a set-up role so far, Coles could still factor into the race to be the Seminoles' closer. What FSU's coaches likely won't do is move him into a starting role. Not because he can't handle the longer outings, but because they love his durability.

Comparing him to former FSU reliever Kevin Lynch, the Semi-noles believe Coles is capable of being effective in short or long relief.

“He throws what we call a ‘heavy baseball,’” FSU coach Mike Martin said. “He’s a guy that enjoys going out and competing. He’s not one to shy away from any situation. And he’ll certainly be counted on to help us in roles that we’re not really sure of right now. Except that he’s gonna get the ball when he’s ready.”

McGee, Weaver pace undefeated FSU

Redshirt junior catcher blasts first career home run

Mar 5, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Stephen McGee is powerfully built and physically fit. Yet, the Florida State catcher is not known as a power hitter at the plate.

McGee's ability to work deep into counts, reach base and advance runners adds important value to the Seminoles' offense, even in the cleanup role. Still, McGee is determined to add more pop to a lineup that is missing two key contributors.

"I know I have the power, it's just putting everything together and making it happen," McGee said.

McGee made it happen on Tuesday, blasting his first career home run to help undefeated FSU beat Presbyterian 9-2 at Howser Stadium.

McGee's two-run blast off the scoreboard in left field came on a 2-2 count in the fifth inning, and it was the redshirt junior's first home run in 367 career plate appearances.

McGee, who also finished with a career-high four RBIs, was mobbed at the plate by his teammates and sported a look of happy relief following the game.

One of the first congratulatory text messages he received was from older brother Mike McGee. Mike, a former All-American at FSU (2008-11) who had 52 career home runs, is in the Seattle Mariners organization.

"It's a huge pressure off my shoulders," smiled Stephen McGee, a 6-foot-3, 230-pounder.

"I've been waiting for that for a long time. I knew it was going to come eventually. My previous two at-bats I pulled off the ball. That time I let the ball get deep, took a good swing and let the ball travel. It's such a great feeling."

Sophomore starter Luke Weaver felt pretty good, too.

The right hander turned in another brilliant performance, allowing just three hits with no walks and eight strikeouts in six innings to improve to 2-0.

In his last three appearances, including two starts, Weaver has surrendered four hits and no walks with 19 strikeouts in 13 scoreless innings.

FSU coach Mike Martin called Weaver's performance one of his best with the Seminoles.

"I feel really good where I am at mechanically and with everything, and I want to keep rolling with it," Weaver said.

"I am staying within the game plan. (Last season) I was trying to be too perfect with every pitch, trying to strike everyone out."

FSU turned in another team effort to push its record to 11-0 heading into today's second game against the Blue Hose (8-5).

Presbyterian, in its sixth season at the Division I level, entered on a seven-game win streak and 3-0 in the Big South Conference.

It avoided the shutout with two runs in the ninth inning against reliever Kenny Burkhead.

Former Taylor County pitcher Connor Bishop also threw a scoreless inning of relief for the Blue Hose.

Marcus Davis and Giovanny Alfonzo both drove in a pair of runs for the Seminoles, while Davis and Seth Miller each scored two runs. Kyle Bird tossed two scoreless innings in relief of Weaver.

FSU continues to play without senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez (hip) and freshman center fielder D.J. Stewart (wrist).

McGee, who had made 78 career starts at catcher, helped in the power department on Tuesday. He's wants to make it a habit, too, swinging earlier in the count when needed.

"When he hit that ball, it was like we won the World Series, we are so pumped for him," Weaver said.

"He's a big guy and has the pop."

McGee's home run and two-run double helped push FSU's lead to 9-0 in the sixth inning.

"I didn't even know it was his first home run," Martin said.

"I just know that Stephen McGee has been invaluable to our baseball team both as a leader and as a guy that plays the game right way day in and day out."

Martin said sophomore left hander Billy Strode will start today, though Martin plans to utilize three to four pitchers in the game.

McGee's first home run, career high 4 RBI lead FSU to win

D.C. Reeves

The flush feeling of a home run off the bat was so faint in his memory bank, FSU catcher Stephen McGee wasn't going to take a chance. He hustled down the line while his deep shot comfortably cleared the left field fence and careened violently off the scoreboard net.

That's what 366 plate appearances without a college home run can do.

McGee turned No. 367 into home run No. 1 while leading FSU to a 9-2 win over Presbyterian at Dick Howser Stadium on Tuesday.

"It's been so long, I didn't even know what it really felt like," McGee said of the two-run shot that gave FSU a 5-0 lead in the fifth inning. "When I hit it, I thought (it could be a home run). But I was too precautious to (celebrate) or do anything like that so I started taking off just in case."

Making his 78th consecutive start behind the plate dating back to the start of the 2012 season, much of McGee's work at FSU has centered on selflessness. A reliable, sturdy defender at a physically taxing position, McGee isn't known for his slugging with bat in hand. Most of his offensive value had been limited to his ability to get on base (.524 OBP entering Tuesday) since taking the starting job last year.

Then came Tuesday with the home run and a two-run double in the sixth inning that gave him a career-high four RBI and gave FSU a 9-0 lead.

"I didn't even know it was his first home run," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "I just know that Stephen McGee has been invaluable to our baseball team both as a leader and as a guy that plays the game right way day in and day out."

That explains the animated cavern of teammates waiting as McGee touched home plate.

"They were more excited I think," McGee said with a smile. "This has been a long time coming. It was real awesome to see them as excited as I was."

While McGee produced at the dish, starter Luke Weaver (2-0) continued his early-season dominance on the mound, getting the win with six shutout innings, allowing three hits and striking out eight. In Weaver's four appearances this season - two starts - he has thrown 14 scoreless innings, allowing just four hits while striking out 21.

"Luke pitched extremely well," said Martin, who called Weaver's performance one of his best at FSU. "You saw a guy that was extremely poised, a guy that was getting it done."

Reliever Kyle Bird threw two more scoreless innings before Presbyterian (8-5) tallied two runs off of Kenny Burkhead in the top of the ninth.

FSU left fielder Marcus Davis kept up his offensive production, breaking the game open in the sixth but before McGee's double with two-run single to make it 7-0. Davis has totaled 16 RBI in FSU's 11 games this season.

Continuing to start at shortstop in place of the injured Justin Gonzalez, Giovanny Alfonzo notched two RBI the unconventional way. He opened the scoring with a sacrifice fly in the second inning to give FSU a 1-0 lead, then was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded in the fourth inning to bring another run home.

In the end, the long-awaited highlight belonged to McGee.

"It's a huge pressure off my shoulders," he said. "I've been waiting for that for a long time. I knew it was going to come eventually, I know I have the power, it was just about putting everything together and really making it happen."

Notables: Florida State coach Mike Martin said that Billy Strode will get the start against Presbyterian on Wednesday (4 p.m. ET). However, Martin plans to use 3-4 pitchers during the game ahead of the Seminoles' ACC opener against Boston College on Friday.

"We've got to get guys innings (Wednesday)," Martin said. "Billy gets the start, but we are not looking at Billy going as many innings as our starter went (Tuesday)."

Delph provides a jolt, leads FSU to baseball win

Outfielder blasts HR, records four hits in win

Mar 6, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

After watching teammate Stephen McGee end his home-run drought on Tuesday, Josh Delph apparently wanted to see what all the fuss was about.

About 24 hours after his teammate connected on his first career home run, Florida State's leadoff hitter did the same on Wednesday — driving a fly ball over the screen in right field in the third inning of the Seminoles' 10-4 win over Presbyterian.

Delph also added three more hits on the day for Florida State, which improves to 12-0 overall as it heads into ACC play this weekend with a home series against Boston College.

"I didn't think it was gone," Delph said with a smile. "I've hit the top of the screen so many times I thought that's what's going to happen again. But I got it in the air and I heard everyone in the dugout going crazy so I knew there was a chance. And the wind got it a little bit, so that definitely helped."

After the game, Florida State coach Mike Martin was surprised to learn it was Delph's first career homer, but wasn't the least bit shocked that all four of Delph's hits on Wednesday came off left-handed pitching.

"Joshua has not struggled against lefties," Martin said of the left-handed hitter. "He's always been one that stays in there very well. I learned that last year when he played every day. So that's a good sign."

Delph's first hit came in the middle of the Seminoles' seven-run second inning. Florida State scored all seven runs with two outs, with Delph, John Nogowski, Jose Brizuela and Brett Knief all producing run-scoring base hits.

In a rarity, Brizuela and Brett Knief both had two hits in the inning as the Seminoles sent 12 men to the plate.

Then Delph came up in the bottom of the third with John Sansone on base.

He turned on a 1-0 pitch and sent it sailing toward the right-field screen. When it landed on the other side of the fence — and as his teammates raced toward home plate to greet him — Delph was able to celebrate his first homer in 163 career at-bats.

"It's real exciting to get the first one out of the way," he said.

Florida State's final run of the game came on a bullet RBI double off the screen from freshman D.J. Stewart, who had missed the last four games for the Seminoles with an injured right hand.

Stewart said it felt fine on Wednesday.

“The trainers did a great job of getting me back,” said Stewart, who had two hits in the win. “My first round in (batting practice) I could feel it a little bit, but once I got my adrenaline going, it went away as soon as the game started. So it was fine.”

Said Martin: “It was great to have him back in the lineup today.”

Reliever Gage Smith was awarded the win for the Seminoles, who used six pitchers in the game. Sophomore Billy Strode started and allowed one run in 1 2/3 innings, and freshman Jameis Winston closed it with a 1-2-3 ninth.

“I think the fact that we won was certainly important and we’re very proud of the way our young men played,” Martin said. “But more importantly, we were able to get our guys work.”

FSU baseball ready to open ACC play

FSU welcomes in Boston College this weekend to open conference slate

Mar 7, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

Through 12 games, the Florida State baseball team has a perfect record.

But head coach Mike Martin knows the early preseason schedule was just a precursor to this weekend, as the Seminoles begin ACC play Friday with a three-game home series against Boston College.

“It’s good that we feel our pitchers are set and ready to go this weekend as we open conference play,” Martin said.

The Eagles come into this weekend with a 3-8 record, with losses to Elon, Ohio and Georgia State. Although they did beat South Florida on Tuesday night, 10-4, they are hitting just .224 as a team with 17 extra-base hits in 11 games.

Now they’ll be facing an FSU pitching staff that currently has a 2.00 ERA, with 113 strikeouts in 108 innings pitched. The Seminoles haven’t faced much quality competition themselves so far, but the numbers the FSU pitchers have put up through 12 games are mighty impressive.

In fact, Florida State’s sophomore ace, Brandon Leibrandt (3-0, 4.96), is the only starter on the FSU staff with an ERA above 1.32. Combine that with an offense that is averaging 9.3 runs and more than 19 base-runners per game, and you have a team with a perfect 12-0 record heading into ACC play.

“We know that now we’re playing a bunch of teams that won’t make mistakes maybe that some of the clubs that we have played recently have made,” Martin said. “We won’t be given a lot of fourth or fifth outs.

Miller, Brizuela push FSU's streak to 15

Mar 11, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Boston College baseball coach Mike Gambino saw his team outthit Florida State on Sunday.

Yet, the Eagles barely avoided a shutout and were swept in the three-game series to open Atlantic Coast Conference play by an armed Seminoles team.

As in one that has relied on extremely efficient pitching.

Starter Peter Miller threw 5 2/3 shutout innings with seven strikeouts and third baseman Jose Brizuela added three hits and four RBIs to lead undefeated FSU past BC 9-1 at Howser Stadium.

Relievers Jameis Winston and Brandon Johnson combined to keep the Eagles (3-11 overall, 0-3 ACC) from mounting a charge despite outthitting the Seminoles 12-11 and stranding 12 runners.

FSU's pitching staff lowered its ERA to (1.73) heading into Tuesday's first road game of the season at Florida.

"One of the biggest differences I saw this weekend was the walks – they don't walk guys," Gambino said.

"It's really hard. Little League or the big leagues, it's hard to get three hits in a row. For a young club like ours, we haven't seen guys, top to bottom, who can pitch like that. It's a tough staff to game plan against."

An announced crowd of 4,269 not only enjoyed a sunny, 70-plus-degree afternoon, it watched the Seminoles improve to 15-0. It marks just the third time FSU has opened with 15 consecutive wins, and the first since starting 23-0 in 2007.

Miller (3-0) turned in a third consecutive strong performance, pushing his scoreless streak to 17 consecutive innings. But he also had to thank Winston, who induced a ground-ball out with the bases loaded to end the top of the sixth inning.

Winston was nicked for a run in the eighth inning and left with the bases loaded and one out. But Johnson avoided additional trouble when he threw a first pitch, double-play ground ball.

"Anytime you're able to win three games on a weekend in an Atlantic Coast Conference series, you have to be extremely pleased, and I was," FSU coach Mike Martin said.

"I thought Peter Miller pitched 5 2/3 of very good baseball and we got good relief out of Jayboo (Winston) and Mamba (Johnson)."

Leading 4-0, the Seminoles ended any drama with a five-run seventh inning that was punctuated by a two-run double from John Nogowski and a two-run triple from Brizuela.

Brizuela also had a two-run single in the second inning. But he raced all the way home when BC left fielder Logan Hoggarth misplayed the liner and allowed it to bounce by him to the wall.

"When I looked up on my way to third, I saw Meat (Mike Martin Jr.) sending me," Brizuela said. "I was dead (tired) honestly, but I kept hustling and at the end I just slid there and just tried to rest a little on the ground."

Nogowski finished with two hits, while left fielder Brett Knief added two hits and scored three runs. The game also marked the first time FSU freshman second baseman John Sansone, who went 0 for 4, didn't reach base.

Sophomore Luke Weaver (2-0) will start on Tuesday against Florida, which lost at home to Indiana on Sunday to fall to 8-9. FSU last won in Gainesville in 2007.

FSU baseball hits road to face Gators

FSU last won at UF in 2007

Mar 12, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

The Florida Gators are below the .500 mark at 8-9.

They were beaten in last weekend's home series by Indiana, which pounded out 36 hits in three games.

The Gators already have used 15 pitchers season, almost half of whom are freshmen.

But Florida State coach Mike Martin knows better than to underestimate the Gators.

"They are a young club, but they have the necessary ingredients," Martin said. "You don't beat Miami two out of three if you are not a good baseball team."

The undefeated Seminoles (15-0), ranked fifth nationally in this week's ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll, renew their rivalry against UF tonight at 7 in Gainesville.

Despite the Gators' inconsistency — they entered last weekend on a four-game win streak but dropped two of three to Big Ten favorite Indiana — FSU expects a stern test.

The showdown marks the Seminoles' first road trip of the season after opening with 15 consecutive home games. FSU also is off to its third-best start in school history, and best mark since it opened 23-0 in 2007.

History was set last year, too. But not in the Seminoles' favor.

The Gators swept the regular-season series against FSU for the first time since 1958.

Sophomore right-hander Luke Weaver (2-0, 0.64 ERA) is scheduled to start for the Seminoles, who last won in Gainesville six years ago.

Weaver understands the importance of game. FSU is coming off a weekend sweep against Boston College to open Atlantic Coast Conference play, and the Seminoles are at Maryland this weekend.

"It can add a big boost to our club, and it's always great to beat them," Weaver said of the Gators.

UF is 5-5 against in-state teams this season, capturing wins against Jacksonville (2-0), Miami (2-1) and Central Florida (2-1). The Gators were swept by Florida-Gulf Coast and also dropped a game against North Florida.

FSU pitching coach Mike Bell said Weaver and the Seminoles' staff, which boasts a stellar 1.73 ERA, must continue to pitch with confidence. And a good start helps, too.

FSU has allowed just one first-inning run this season.

"We are going to give up hits, that's part of the game," Bell said.

"We are going to pitch to contact, we are going to stress playing good defense behind it so we can make plays, roll some double plays, and give ourselves a chance."

FSU briefs: Leibrandt named ACC pitcher of week

Mar 12, 2013 |

Written by

| Democrat staff reports

Florida State's Brandon Leibrandt was named ACC Pitcher of the Week after his dominating performance against Boston College in the opening game of the teams' series last Friday.

Leibrandt led FSU to a 4-0 shutout victory against the Eagles. He tied a career high by working 8.0 innings and limited BC to just one hit. The sophomore southpaw no-hit the Eagles for 7.1 innings before John Hennessy singled through the left side of the infield for the Eagles' only hit of the game.

On the year, Leibrandt is 4-0 with a 3.33 ERA in four starts.

Neubacher earns bid to NCAA Championships

After earning his second straight trip to nationals Monday, FSU junior Tom Neubacher will compete at the 2013 NCAA Championships in Indianapolis, Ind., on March 28-30. Neubacher scored 728.45 points over 12 dives on the 1-meter springboard en route to earning second place at the NCAA Zone B Qualifier in Nashville, Tenn.

"Tom did a great job," FSU head diving coach Patrick Jeffrey said. "I'm really impressed with how he kept himself in there until he made his move and then he just rocked it, saving his best dive for last. I'm just so excited to have another diver heading to nationals, and I can't wait for us to get there."

Neubacher tallied 339.05 points from prelims, which was good enough for fourth place heading into finals.

The Windermere, Fla., native made his move in the fourth round after he scored 67.50 points on a reverse two-and-a-half somersault tuck, moving him into second place after two of his closet competitors missed their dives.

Neubacher distanced himself in the fifth round, before posting a career high 83.70 on an inward two-and-a-half somersault tuck in order to own second place, securing an automatic qualifying spot.

FSU softball looks to extend win streak

Coming off an impressive weekend at N.C. State, the Florida State softball team heads back into non-conference action when it hosts FIU in a doubleheader on this evening at 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. Florida State then hosts Tennessee State on Wednesday evening at 6 p.m.

Powered by a high-octane offense and quality pitching, the Seminoles (17-8) are riding a season-best seven-game win streak heading into today's action. In that time frame, Florida State has hit .309 (59-for-191) with 11 home runs, 14 doubles and 44 runs scored. The Seminoles have averaged just over six runs per game during the stretch.

Within the seven-game string of success, Florida State pitcher Monica Perry is 3-0 with no runs allowed; she has 20 strikeouts in 19 innings pitched. Sophomore Lacey Waldrop is also 3-0 in the win streak and has 33 strikeouts in 20.2 innings.

FSU sand volleyball team splits pair of matches

Weaver pitches FSU past UF to end six-year drought in Gainesville

Seminoles break streak in style

Mar 12, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

GAINESVILLE — Mike Martin knew exactly how long it had been since a Florida State baseball team last won here at McKethan Stadium, but he wasn't about to share that information with his players.

Not until the final out was recorded.

Once centerfielder DJ Stewart caught a lazy fly ball to end the ninth inning and preserve fifth-ranked Florida State's 4-1 victory late Tuesday night, FSU's head coach gathered his players along the right-field line and shared with them their accomplishment.

For the first time since 2007, the Seminoles would make the drive back to Tallahassee while savoring a victory against their arch rivals.

"I'm obviously very excited, because it's been a long time," said Martin, whose team improved to 16-0 on the season. "It's been tough down here."

"That's hard to think about since we're such a good team," said sophomore pitcher Luke Weaver, who earned the win on the mound with a sterling performance. "We're just glad to finally get that off our chest and hopefully get six years in a row for us."

Weaver, who was exceptional in his first two starts against inferior competition, was dominant against the Gators.

The hard-throwing right-hander pitched 6 1/3 innings and allowed just one run on three hits; he struck out five and walked two. Weaver's only real mistake came on defense when he dropped a toss from first baseman John Nogowski while covering the bag in the fourth inning.

If Weaver had recorded the out, FSU's shutout would have remained intact. Instead, the Gators (8-10) scored their only run of the night.

"He really was impressive," Martin said of the DeLand native. "With three pitches, fastball to location ... it was really one of his better outings. Especially under these conditions."

It was a complete reversal from one year ago when Weaver, then a freshman, lasted just two innings in a 9-2 loss in this stadium. Weaver (3-0) didn't leave this time until his pitch count reached 102, and he had already silenced many in the crowd of 4,709.

"Coming here last year ... I didn't have the outing I wanted," Weaver said. "It was a short outing and didn't do well. But this one was great. It wasn't my best start of the year, but I found a way to do it."

Florida State's offense attacked UF starter Danny Young (0-1) in the first inning, with junior catcher Stephen McGee driving in a run with an RBI double.

The Seminoles extended their advantage to 3-0 in the fourth when sophomore shortstop Giovanni Alfonzo slapped a two-run single to right field. Alfonzo, who moved into the starting lineup when senior captain Justin Gonzalez went down with a hip injury, went 2 for 4 and played solid defense.

"I'm getting a lot more comfortable," Alfonzo said. "Especially with everything that Gonzo's taught me. It's unlucky circumstances (for Gonzalez), but I'm feeling more comfortable. Everything's falling into place now."

After Florida sliced its deficit to 3-1 on Weaver's error, the Seminoles quickly answered with another run in the sixth – this time when leadoff hitter Josh Delph was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded.

Relievers Gage Smith, Bryant Holtmann and Robby Coles then closed the door from there, allowing no runs on two hits in the final 2 2/3 innings.

Martin was most pleased with Coles, a junior college transfer who was a newcomer to pitching in this type of environment. After hitting the first batter he faced with a pitch, Coles retired the next four batters he faced to earn his second save.

"I've never pitched in front of this many fans for the other team," said Coles, a former Wakulla High star. "It was crazy at first. But then I just took a deep breath and was like, 'All right. Got to get some outs.'"

Weaver, FSU push past host Florida in first meeting

By Brad Milner | News Herald Writer

Published: Tuesday, March 12, 2013 at 23:26 PM.

GAINESVILLE — Florida State's Luke Weaver limited Florida to three hits through 6 1/3 innings, as the Seminoles held back the Gators 4-1 in a college baseball game on Tuesday.

Weaver moved to 3-0 and FSU remained unbeaten at 16-0 in the first meeting between the teams. They also will square off March 26 in Jacksonville and April 9 in Tallahassee. Florida fell to 8-10.

Giovanni Alfonzo was 2 for 4 with a two-run single in the top of the fourth inning to stake the Seminoles to a 3-0 lead. FSU scored its initial run in the first inning on Stephen McGee's two-out double off Florida starting and losing pitcher Danny Young (0-1), who lasted 3 1/3 innings while giving up three hits with three strikeouts and one walk.

Florida relief pitcher Ryan Harris hit Josh Delph with a pitch with the bases loaded to plate John Nogowski to cap the scoring in the sixth. Harris was the second of five Florida pitchers, with the final three holding the Seminoles scoreless through 3 2/3 innings. Mosley graduate Seth Miller doubled for FSU, which had seven hits.

Harrison Bader was 2 for 4 with a lead-off single and a run scored in the bottom of the fourth to cut the deficit to 3-1. Weaver held the Gators at bay with five strikeouts and two walks while tossing 102 pitches. Chipola College product Robby Coles had one strikeout in the ninth for his second save of the season.

Florida opens Southeastern Conference play on Friday against Kentucky. FSU is at Maryland for a three-game Atlantic Coast Conference series also starting on Friday.

No. 5 FSU baseball earns 4-1 win at Florida

March 13, 2013 | By Joe Morgan | For the Sentinel

GAINESVILLE — In Kevin O’Sullivan’s first five seasons at Florida, the Gators were undefeated against Florida State at McKethan Stadium.

Then Seminoles (16-0) hurler Luke Weaver came along.

The sophomore kept the Florida lineup off balance for 6.1 innings in No. 5 Florida State’s 4-1 victory on Tuesday night in Gainesville. Weaver surrendered one unearned run on two hits, struck out five and walked only two.

“He threw the ball really good tonight,” O’Sullivan said of Weaver. “He threw the ball down in the zone. He mixed his pitches. He did a really good job, and he deserved to win tonight.”

Justin Shafer added: “He threw strikes, and we didn’t swing well.”

Weaver got all the run support he needed in the top of the fourth. Clinging to a 1-0 lead, Seminoles shortstop Giovanny Alfonzo hit a two-run single to right field, upping Florida State’s lead to 3-0.

Florida (8-10) pushed across a run in the bottom half of the inning, but that’s all the Gators could muster against Weaver, who entered Tuesday’s game with a 0.64 ERA.

While covering first base on a two-out Taylor Gushe grounder, Weaver dropped a toss from first baseman John Nogowski, allowing Harrison Bader to score from third.

UF struggled to score, but it had plenty of opportunities.

“We’ve got to do a better job offensively,” O’Sullivan said. “We hit three balls hard all night.”

-- No. 2 starter Tucker Simpson pitched in relief during Florida’s 4-1 loss to Florida State. The freshman gave up one hit and struck out two in 1.1 innings of work.

“He only threw 45 pitches on Saturday (against Indiana), so I wanted to get him some work,” O’Sullivan said.

-- In his first career start, freshman Danny Young took the loss. He threw 71 pitches in 3.1 innings, gave up three runs on three hits with one walk and three strikeouts. O’Sullivan said he started Young because he was impressed with how the freshman pitched in a scoreless inning of relief during Sunday’s 7-4 loss to the Hoosiers.

“I thought he the ball really good,” O’Sullivan said. “I thought we ran his pitch count up a little too high, but he threw strikes. I was really pleased.”

Weaver paces FSU in 4-1 win over UF in Gainesville

Paul Thomas

Warchant.com Staff Writer

GAINESVILLE, Fla.- Once again the recipe for No. 5 Florida State on Tuesday night was pitching and defense as it improved to 16-0 on the year, with a 4-1 win over Florida. It was the Seminoles first win in Gainesville since 2007, when it got off to a school-best 23-0 start.

Luke Weaver (3-0) was in full control as he allowed just one unearned run on three hits and two walks in 6.1 innings, striking out five.

Sophomore shortstop Giovanny Alfonzo went 2 for 4 with two RBI, while Stephen McGee and Josh Delph each drove in a run.

"Obviously when you look at the game you start with the pitching," FSU head coach Mike Martin said. "There's no question that was the difference in the ball game. Weaver had a great outing."

It was the third straight start for Weaver, who lowered his season earned run average to a measly 0.44 for the season. The only run came in the bottom of the fourth on an error by Weaver, after he dropped a toss from John Nogowski on his way to first base, allowing Harrison Bader to score from third.

The sophomore left the game after 102 pitches, with two runners on and one out in the seventh inning. Gage Smith picked him up as he induced a pair of groundouts to escape the jam.

After an up and down freshman season, Weaver said his start to 2013 has been a huge confidence boost. That's why when his velocity was down late in the game, he knew he just had to locate his pitches and let his defense work behind him.

"The changeup was there the whole game," Weaver said. "The slider was here and there. Towards the back of the game I couldn't really throw a strike. The velocity was down a little with the fastball so I just tried to spot it up as best I could."

McGee put FSU on the board in the bottom of the first with an RBI-double to right center. FSU scored two more in the fourth inning on a two-run single to right by Alfonzo off of reliever Ryan Harris, who replaced UF (8-10) starter Danny young after 3.1 innings.

Alfonzo added a hit in the eighth inning, after making a nice defensive play to end the seventh inning for Smith. Martin said he's been impressed with how the sophomore infielder has performed the last 11 games in place of injured senior Justin Gonzalez.

"Gio had some good at-bats and certainly the two-run single was huge," Martin said. "I'm seeing a young man become very comfortable with himself out there. We're just very excited with the progress he's making, because there is a good chance that he will be our shortstop."

The Seminoles added another run in the sixth inning as Delph was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded. FSU had a chance to be further extend the lead in the inning, with the bases loaded and just one out, but reliever Daniel Gibson entered the game and recorded two quick outs.

FSU also couldn't take advantage of a leadoff double by Seth Miller in the ninth inning either. FSU left 10 runners on base in the game.

"We had a chance to bust it open a couple times and you've got to credit the University of Florida, they did a great job of getting key outs," Martin said. "What was really exciting was the fact that we went right back and did our job of getting them out."

Bryant Holtmann took over in the eighth inning on the mound for FSU and had to leave the game with shoulder discomfort after recording two outs and allowing two hits.

Robby Coles took over and hit the first batter he faced to load the bases, but bounced back with an inning-ending ground ball. Coles worked a perfect ninth inning, including a strikeout for his second save of the year..

"That pitch got away from me," Coles said. "I probably didn't throw as many pitches as I should have warming up. But once that happened I was like 'Alright settle down. Take a deep breath and just get in there and get outs'"

Tuesday was FSU's first game away from Dick Howser Stadium this season. They'll head to College Park, Md. this weekend for a three-game series against the University of Maryland.

The win not only snapped a six-year drought for FSU in Gainesville, but it also snapped a three-game losing streak to the Gators, who won all three match-ups last season.

"I'm obviously very excited because it's been a long time, been tough down here," Martin said. "It was just a well-played ball game on both sides.

Notable

Martin said that he thinks Holtmann's injury was just some muscle discomfort and he could pitch against Maryland this weekend.

"We think that's just a little muscular problem," Martin said. "We'll give him a couple days off and hopefully he'll be ready to go this weekend at Maryland."

After failing to get on base Sunday for the first time all season, freshman John Sansone reached base three times Tuesday, twice on an error and once on a walk.

Seminoles lose SS Gonzalez for the season

Mar 13, 2013 |

0 Comments

Senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez, the captain of Florida State's baseball team, has undergone hip surgery and will miss the remainder of the 2013 season.

Here is the official release from FSU.

Florida State's Justin Gonzalez will miss the rest of the 2013 season as the senior shortstop underwent surgery on his right hip. A full recovery is expected following six to eight months of rehabilitation.

"To lose Justin Gonzalez, a three-year starter and our captain is obviously a difficult pill to swallow," said head coach Mike Martin. "But knowing that Justin will be there for his teammates is an inspiration and is gratifying to me as a coach.

"I am deeply saddened that he will not be on the field but I am very grateful to have him in our presence for the rest of the season."

Gonzalez made just five starts in 2013 before suffering the season ending injury. The Miami, Fla., native hit .278 with a triple and two home runs as he registered five runs and five RBI. Gonzalez was perfect from the field in 16 fielding chances at shortstop.

"Obviously, none of this was planned," said Gonzalez. "It breaks my heart that I had to go through with the surgery. After meeting with doctors out in Colorado, there was no other option than to have the surgery.

"As far as baseball is concerned, I had to look at the long-term rather than the short-term. I will still serve as captain this year but it will just be in a different role. I plan on being there to motivate and support my teammates throughout the season. There is one thing I know, I will be back; it will only be a matter of time."

Gonzalez entered the season as the Seminoles top returning hitter from last year's squad that advanced to the College World Series and finished fourth. Gonzalez hit .256 in 2012 with nine home runs, 11 doubles, 42 RBI, and 42 runs scored.

Florida State will seek a medical redshirt for Gonzalez and is expected to return for the 2014 season.

Coles steps into closer role for Seminoles

Former Wakulla High star earns praise from coaches

Mar 15, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

Robby Coles did a lot of good things during his first six appearances as a Florida State baseball player.

He earned a save in one game and pitched effectively in several others. But all of those performances came at home against inferior competition.

What Coles did against Florida on Tuesday night in Gainesville was entirely different. He not only pitched out of a bases-loaded jam to record his second career save, but he did it against the most talented team he has faced on this level, and on the road in front of 4,000-plus Gator fans.

“What was so impressive was the poise ... he just said, ‘OK, I know what I need to do. Do it,’” Florida State head coach Mike Martin said. “And he did. It takes a special competitor to achieve that success. On the road? It was very impressive.”

Coles, a former Wakulla High star, was so impressive that Martin has called off his early season search for a closer — at least for the time being. Before preseason practice started, the Seminoles thought the durable right-hander would be the leading candidate to replace departed star Robert Benincasa.

But it wasn’t until FSU’s coaches saw how Coles responded to adversity on the road did they feel certain he was ready.

So when the Seminoles take on Maryland in a three-game series this weekend in College Park, Md., Coles likely will get the ball in all save situations.

“That’s how we’re going to approach the next few games,” Martin said. “And see how it goes from there. He’s a guy that seems to be in need of the ball. You don’t want to leave him out two or three straight games. He loves to compete.”

Unlike Benincasa, who was one of the nation's top relief pitchers in 2012, Coles could see extended action when he comes out of the bullpen. Martin said he would not have second thoughts about going to the junior in the eighth inning, as he did Tuesday night against the Gators.

“The more he throws, the more comfortable he becomes,” Martin said. “I think he’s been on the mound the last two of three games that we’ve played, and he is the guy that we’re looking at to have the ball in his hand very similar to the way ‘Benny’ did.

“The only difference is that ‘Benny’ didn’t get it in the eighth many times. We’re gonna give Robby the ball in the eighth if we have to.”

Coles couldn't be off to a better start to his Florida State career. In his seven appearances, he has pitched 9 1/3 innings without surrendering a run. He has allowed just two hits, while walking four and recording 15 strikeouts.

"Once I signed here, I figured that's what they were going to do with me," Coles said of the closer role. "So I've had that mindset the whole time. I'm hoping that I get it. I'm just going to keep doing what I'm doing right now and hope I get it."

DeLand High product Luke Weaver finds his pitch with Florida State

Former Bulldog will show off new slider against Stetson

By [Sean Kernan](#)
STAFF WRITER

Published: Monday, March 18, 2013 at 11:19 a.m.

Luke Weaver was just playing a little catch with his father during Christmas break when he discovered a new grip to throw a slider.

The Florida State sophomore knew he was on to something that might complete his repertoire and fit in nicely with a low-to-mid-90s fastball, as well as his always reliable changeup.

"I was trying to keep my arm in check, getting ready to come back in the spring, just playing catch with my dad," Weaver said. "I was messing around with some grips and arm angles, and I found a grip that I liked and just kept throwing it. I was like, 'Wow! I might have something here.'"

Weaver's suspicion proved correct. His slider has made him a more complete pitcher. The numbers bare that out: 3-0, 0.44 ERA and 26 strikeouts in 20 1/3 innings as he heads into Tuesday's scheduled start against Stetson at 4 p.m. at Dick Howser Stadium in Tallahassee.

Mark Weaver remembers what it was like being on the receiving end of his son's new-and-improved slider.

"Boy, when it started breaking hard like that, his confidence and his face just lit up," the proud pop recalled. "Man, I knew he had it. I was so excited for him because over the years he's had so many coaches — from travel ball and high school — who worked with him on that, and he's had very little luck."

So, the DeLand High product continued to tinker with his new slider when he returned to Tallahassee after the holidays. He couldn't wait to show pitching coach Mike Bell, who had been working with him to develop the hard breaking pitch. Weaver refined the slider during a few bullpen sessions, and he knew he had added a weapon to his arsenal.

"I was just really ecstatic, because I just loved the way it was breaking and I thought there was a good future with it," the 6-foot-2, 170-pound right-hander said.

Weaver, a 19th-round draft choice by the Toronto Blue Jays in 2011, is a more complete pitcher than he's ever been. Coupled with instruction provided by Bell and midweek starting opportunities given to him by FSU head coach Mike Martin, the former DeLand Bulldog is now a three-pitch hurler who is simply dominating opponents.

Weaver won't ever forget the reaction he had after throwing the new pitch to his father.



FSU Athletics / Ross Obey

Florida State pitcher and DeLand High product Luke Weaver is off to a 3-0 start with a 0.44 ERA and 26 strikeouts in 20.1 innings in his sophomore season.



“The first time I threw that (slider) to my dad I just kind of stepped back,” said Weaver, who has limited opponents to a .114 batting average and issued just three walks. “I was just super pumped about it because that was the pitch that was holding me back. Now, my slider is challenging my changeup as my second-best pitch. That’s a good problem.”

Yes, a good problem for Weaver that equals a bad problem for his opponents, and last week that meant trouble for the Florida Gators.

Weaver struck out five Gators and scattered three hits while giving up one unearned run in 6 1/3 innings in a 4-1 victory in Gainesville. His parents, Mark and Merry Weaver, and brother, Jake, attended the game, which was the first of three scheduled this year between the Sunshine State rivals.

“That was a big win for us,” Weaver said. “Last year was really disappointing with the three losses we had (against Florida). We felt like we should have won each one, but kind of felt like we didn’t play well for a full nine innings, and they got around to beating us. ... Our coach told us after the game that it had been six years since we beat them in Gainesville. That was a big surprise to me. It was great to beat them at their place.”

The Seminoles remained fifth in the USA Today Coaches poll and National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association rankings after beating Florida and taking two of three at Maryland in Atlantic Coast Conference play last weekend. FSU is 18-1 going into Tuesday’s game against Stetson, which is 10-9 after winning seven of its last 10 games.

Weaver has contributed much already to a Seminoles team that is loaded with starting pitching — three of the four starters boasted ERAs under 1.00 last week.

“He is attacking hitters and is really just trusting his stuff,” said Martin, who has seen the 19-year-old mature before his eyes in the last year and a half.

“There is no doubt that the real cream rises to the top when you’re facing hitters one through nine who are capable of beating you. You don’t have that in high school and can get away with a lot of stuff. But on the college level, Luke now understands that he has got to bear down one through nine.”

Weaver’s development also included a 2012 summer stint in the prestigious Cape Cod League after FSU went to the College World Series.

“I think he applied that knowledge (from Bell) in the Cape, where he had some success,” Martin said. “He came back and continued to work hard in the fall and pitched well. Luke has really established himself as one of the best pitchers on our staff, as evidenced by his good start.

“I can’t say enough about the importance that Luke Weaver has brought to this club, as he has pitched deep into ballgames this year and (has had) success against very good competition. I am very, very excited to see how he progresses as we go through the season.”

Weaver described his freshman season (1-0, 5.93 ERA, one save in 16 games) as “hit-or-miss” and felt his March 21 victory over Stetson — a 9-1 home win in which he didn’t allow an earned run in seven innings — was his turning point in going from thrower to pitcher.

“Throughout high school and travel ball, usually pitchers are just throwers, just try to strike everybody out. But when you get to college baseball, it’s a whole different game,” Weaver said. “You really have to start pitching and not throwing. That was a big lesson I had to learn, and I’m finally settling down.”

Weaver admitted he certainly doesn't know it all about pitching. In fact, his next project is to add a forkball or split-finger fastball.

Copyright © 2013 News-JournalOnline.com —
All rights reserved. Restricted use only.

Guess what pitch he'll be throwing to his dad the next time father and son have a catch?

FSU baseball team opens busy week vs. Stetson

Weaver scheduled to make 4th start of season

Mar 19, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State's first extended road trip of the baseball season proved to be an ideal learning experience, not to mention a success, even if the Seminoles dropped their first game of the season.

FSU (18-1) captured three of four games, posting an always-important win over rival Florida and rallying to win their second ACC series of the season over Maryland in difficult weather conditions.

The tests continue for the Seminoles, who open a five-game homestand over six days today against Stetson (10-9) at Howser Stadium. No. 7 Georgia Tech (17-2) arrives Friday for a three-game ACC series.

Assistant coaches Mike Martin Jr. and Mike Bell are anxious to see how the Seminoles respond this week.

FSU was out-hit in two of three games at Maryland, while the only starter to earn a win was senior Scott Sitz on Saturday.

Sophomore Luke Weaver (3-0), who leads the ACC in ERA (0.44) and opponent batting average (.114), will make his fourth start of the season today.

"Some of our guys did not have their best stuff (against Maryland) and were pitching in some tough conditions and really had to gut it out," Bell said.

"That led to some bullpen opportunities, and I think you are seeing some guys getting more comfortable. I thought the guys did a good job of picking each other up."

Catcher Stephen McGee went 6 for 11 in the Maryland series to pace the offense.

FSU boasts just four players with double-digit starts hitting above .300

'Noles rally past Stetson

Pitcher, QB Winston earns 1st career victory

Mar. 19, 2013 11:56 PM, |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

The Howser Stadium scoreboard told one story, and the Florida State Seminoles told another. Even comeback victories serve as key moments in a team's development.

"It was a little sluggish for seven innings, but we have faith in each other to come back and win, but that can't happen again," FSU third baseman Jose Brizuela said.

"It's a great feeling, but you don't want to put yourself in that situation."

The situation was this on Tuesday against visiting Stetson:

The Seminoles, who received one first-place vote and are ranked fifth in this week's ESPN/USA Today Top 25 Coaches poll, were limited to two hits and trailed the Hatters 3-1 entering the bottom of the eighth inning.

But FSU (19-1) further demonstrated its resolve and took advantage of the generous Hatters (10-10) to plate four unearned runs. Stetson dropped a pair of fly balls and uncorked a wild pitch in the inning.

Freshman reliever Jameis Winston, who reports for the start of spring football practice today and will compete for the starter's role at quarterback, made the most of his designed appearance.

The right hander threw a scoreless eighth and ninth innings to earn his first career victory. He didn't allow a hit and struck out one.

"I had a good feeling that something good was going to happen, so I had to create some energy," said Winston, whose baseball schedule will be dictated by football.

"It was fun coming in there at the last inning knowing we were down (earlier in the game) and everybody was pumped up because we knew we didn't want to lose at home."

FSU starter Luke Weaver, who entered as the ACC leader in ERA (0.44) and opponent batting average (.114), allowed a pair of earned runs on seven hits and one walk in 6 2/3 innings. He struck out four.

"We had a pretty good approach against Weaver and I thought we swung the bats pretty good," said Stetson center fielder and former Chiles High star James Rasmussen. "We struggled a little bit (in eighth) but it's nothing we can't fix."

The teams combined for six errors (Stetson four, FSU two) and three of the game's eight runs were earned. The Seminoles also were out-hit 8-5. Yet, timely hits from Giovanni Alfonso and Brizuela in the eighth helped ignite FSU's comeback.

Brizuela also sparked a quick ninth inning with a nice play and throw on a chopper to his left for the first out. The Seminoles conclude their midweek series against Stetson today at 4 p.m. before welcoming No. 11 Georgia Tech Friday.

“We just have to come out with great intensity,” Brizuela said. “We are going to bounce back. Even though we got a win, we know what we need to do (today) in order to win and be ready for Georgia Tech.”

Four-run eighth inning pushes FSU past Stetson 5-3

Paul Thomas

Warchant.com Staff Writer

For seven and a half innings the Stetson Hatters did everything right against the Florida State Seminoles.

Fortunately for the fifth-ranked Seminoles, the two teams played nine innings on Tuesday night at Dick Howser Stadium. The Hatters dropped a pair of fly balls and committed a wild pitch in bottom of the eighth as FSU erased a two-run deficit to defeat Stetson 5-3.

Two-sport star Jameis Winston earned the first win of his career as he pitched a perfect eighth and ninth inning, striking out one as FSU improved to 19-1 on the year.

"I'm proud that we won the ballgame, yes we were fortunate," FSU head coach Mike Martin said. "No question. But it's still (a win) and I'm proud of those young men for getting it done."

Stetson (10-10) led 3-1 entering the eighth inning after a three-run seventh inning as they chased FSU starter Luke Weaver from the game. Weaver allowed a pair of earned runs on seven hits and one walk in 6.2 innings, striking out four batters.

The Hatters tied the game at 1 on a double by Tyler Bocock to left. DJ Stewart misplayed the ball and allowed Robert Bruce to score an unearned run from first base. Stetson pushed across another run on an RBI single by Kevin Fagan.

The third run came around to score on a throwing error by Jose Brizuela at third base.

In addition to producing at the plate, Fagan turned in a terrific performance on the mound in his first-career start. The freshman allowed just two runs, one earned on three hits and three walks while striking out six in seven innings.

"Fagan was absolutely beautiful," Martin said. "He kept us totally off-balance, he spotted his pitches well, you really have to give him credit."

Fagan came out to start the eighth inning, but after giving up a leadoff single to Giovanni Alfonzo, his day was done after 106 pitches. HE gave way to Cameron Griffin who gave up three unearned runs in the inning as he took the loss.

FSU loaded the bases with no outs for Brizuela. The sophomore delivered an RBI single to right, and another run came home to score one batter later as DJ Stewart grounded into a double-play.

After Stephen McGee was intentionally walked, John Nogowski hit a pop up right that was dropped, giving FSU a 4-3 lead. It was the second dropped pop up of the inning for Stetson, and McGee came around to score on a wild pitch for a 5-3 lead.

"It was a little sluggish the first seven innings but we've got faith in each other to come back and win," Brizuela said. "But that can't happen again."

Stetson committed four errors in the game, while FSU had two of their own. Brizuela's throwing error was his 10th error of the season. The third baseman said he wasn't bothered by the mistakes, because he has also been making plenty of difficult plays in the field.

"I know I'm making a lot of errors, but you know what it's part of the game and I'm not going to let it bother me," he said. "I'm still making great plays, I still feel comfortable out there and I'm just going to keep playing the game I've been playing."

Brizuela sparked a quick 1-2-3 ninth inning as he made a nice play going to his left on a chopper to third, as Winston worked his second perfect inning of relief.

One day before the start of spring practice, Winston said it felt good to record his first win of the season on the mound.

"I had a good feeling that something good was going to happen, so I had to create some energy," Winston said. "It was fun coming in there at the last inning knowing we were down (earlier in the game) and everybody was pumped up because we knew we didn't want to lose at home."

Spradling on road to recovery

Written by Jim Henry Democrat assistant sports editor

Mar. 19

tallahassee.com

Stephen Spradling positioned his wheelchair behind the walker. He raised himself and tightly gripped the walker for support and stability. Slowly and cautiously – right foot first – Spradling took his most important steps in 74 days.

Last Thursday was a remarkable moment considering what Spradling has endured the past three months.

The Florida State baseball player's recovery from a horrific skydiving accident on Dec. 30 is ahead of schedule. The fact the senior outfielder survived his fall from the sky can be considered a miracle. And his decision to attend the Seminoles' home series this weekend against Georgia Tech reflects his willpower.

Spradling's list of injuries from a problematic landing included a broken pelvis (front and back), a broken bone in his lower back, two broken ribs, a shredded bladder and internal bleeding. He underwent two blood transfusions and emergency surgery during his first two days in a Melbourne hospital.

"I am blessed that I am alive and will be able to do things again," said Spradling, an experienced skydiver and extreme sports enthusiasts who made 35 appearances in his first season for the Seminoles last year.

"It has given me a new perspective certainly. It could have been worse. I will always like skydiving, I think it's an amazing thing. There's no other feeling like it, to be honest. It's the closest thing to flying. Will I go back up? Probably not. I always told myself I would skydive until something happened to me. It's my time to put it (parachute) away.

"But I will miss aspects of it."

Windy conditions

Sebastian, located on the East Coast, just north of Vero Beach, is considered a premier location for skydiving over the Florida coastline. While the weather was clear the morning of Sunday, Dec. 30, it wasn't the most ideal setting for skydiving due to wind conditions.

Yet, Spradling, 23, and his older brother Matt, 25, were cleared to jump as B licensed skydivers – the pair had completed more than 100 jumps each since earning their certification three years ago. Stephen Spradling was also a member of FSU's Skydiving Club last year.

And the mood was upbeat as skydivers from around the state converged on Sebastian Municipal Airport for its week-long festival of jumps, music and food.

Spradling was home in Boyton Beach on holiday break from FSU. He made the hour drive north to join Matt, who was camping at the skydiving facility. The brothers contemplated not jumping due to the winds, but others were in the air, so they loaded into the plane around 11 a.m.

When the plane reached 13,500 feet, Spradling, Matt and two other skydivers exited. The jump, from start to finish, was expected to last less than four minutes. Spradling estimated there were probably 30 other skydivers (normal amount) in the air, all headed towards a open, grassy landing area (larger than a football field) below.

"The jump went well, and my (parachute) opening went well," said Spradling, who can reach up to 200 mph during a freefall prior to opening his chute. "As I was coming down for a landing, the wind was real strong. I felt it on my canopy. It (wind) is always a concern, but I've handled those conditions."

The real danger suddenly appeared in front and slightly below Spradling. Another skydiver was headed towards him.

"I don't think the person ever saw me," Spradling said. "I immediately knew I had to do something to get out of the way so that we wouldn't collide in mid-air – and most likely both of us be killed."

Spradling estimated he was 100 feet above the ground when he pulled his left riser to make a left turn to avoid the approaching skydiver. All Spradling remembers was quickly glancing towards the ground.

With modern parachutes under ideal conditions, a proper landing can be as easy as stepping off a curb. This was more like stepping off a curb into rush-hour traffic.

No recollection

Wind flows over objects closer to the ground, just like water flowing over a rock. Spradling believes he got caught in a downward flow of air the instant he made his turn, accelerating him towards the ground.

Spradling doesn't remember what happened next. It's a blur, he said.

Spradling was told he slammed into the ground feet first, bounced and flipped a few times. When Spradling, who was wearing a protective helmet, opened his eyes and realized he was alive, his first instinct was to try to stand. But the lower half of his body felt disconnected. His entire body was engulfed by a severe burning sensation.

"The pain was unbearable, it's hard to explain," Spradling said.

Spradling said it was a "God thing" that he landed on his feet at impact. He figures his instinct from skydiving training (and early years as a gymnast) was to collapse, bend his knees and roll, and his injuries suggest that's how his body responded.

Matt Spradling was above his brother, 300 to 400 feet from the ground. He was concentrating on his jump, visually scanning the sky when, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a parachutist land violently.

It took a moment for him to comprehend what he saw, immediately followed by sheer disbelief and fear. Spradling recognized the color of his brother's canopy (Seminole garnet and gold).

"At first I was like, 'Wait, was that Stephen?' I saw the canopy colors and was, 'Oh, crap,' and I realized it had to be him," Matt said. "Honestly, I don't remember even landing."

Stephen, crumpled and face down, was being attended by fellow skydivers when Matt reached him. One was a doctor from Canada. Another one was a military paramedic. The scene was calm, professional. An ambulance's sirens could be heard in the distance.

"Stephen was pretty beat up, fully conscious, and in a lot of pain," Matt said. "It was pretty much a car wreck without the car. The big concern was his back."

Life happens

Andrea Spradling was on her way home from church when Matt telephoned. Andrea and husband Mark,

missionaries years ago, rely on their strong faith. And Andrea, now an English teacher, also knew that Stephen has before beaten the odds.

Physicians didn't think Stephen would walk again when he was stricken with meningitis at age 10. As a freshman in high school, Stephen suffered a C2 fracture (neck) of his vertebrae playing football.

And let's not forget the bumps and bruises over the years from skim boarding, surfing, snowboarding, water skiing, BMX racing and skateboarding. A neighbor even remembers Stephen riding up and down the street on a unicycle.

"It was devastating when Matt telephoned, but we also know that someday, somehow, Stephen has always come out above all odds," Andrea said.

"You know, life happens. Stephen has always been very cautious, he doesn't take risks, and he knows his body. Things happen. Winds happen. I always know he's prepared for whatever he does."

FSU assistant coach Mike Martin was in Miami for the Seminoles' Jan. 1 Orange Bowl victory over Northern Illinois. It was following the game when Martin received a telephone call from Stephen Spradling, who was hospitalized at Holmes Regional Medical Center in Melbourne.

"The first thing he said was how disappointed he was and that he felt like he let the team down," said Martin, who loaded his family into a car and drove to Melbourne from Miami.

"I could barely understand him. I was in a panic. When we got to the hospital, it was heart-breaking to see. He had trouble talking and moving at all and was in an awful lot of pain. But all he wanted to talk about was the team. He's a very unselfish player, a guy who is always positive about everything."

Spradling was expected to contribute on a young FSU team this season.

The right-handed batter hit .262 in 42 at-bats last year, including being hit by 12 pitches to rank second on the team. The Broward College transfer played high school baseball at American Heritage School and was known for his versatility.

It shouldn't be a surprise, it's a long way off, but Spradling hopes one day to return to baseball.

"I probably could have put more time in practicing baseball with everything else I did, especially while in high school," Spradling said. "But I also think those other interests only strengthened my love for the game because it didn't consume my life. I miss everything about it."

Road to recovery

The right side of Spradling's body absorbed the brunt of impact.

Surgeons had to cut through Spradling's abdominal muscles to repair him. His front and back pelvis are held in place by screws and metal. The fracture to his lower back avoided damaging nerves associated with paralysis. His ribs have healed but remain tender. Spradling said the worst pain was associated with his injured bladder.

Spradling was hospitalized for three weeks, shorter than anticipated by surgeons. Once home, the family turned its living room into Stephen's living quarters.

It had a bed, table, television and portable toilet. A garden hose on the front porch served as a makeshift shower. Matt and his father built a wooden ramp outside the front door to make the home wheelchair accessible, complete

with a rope that Stephen uses to pull himself up the incline.

Early on, a neighbor who is a nurse stopped by twice a day to inject Spradling with blood thinners to guard against clots since Spradling spent most of the time on his back in bed.

Spradling, a 6 foot, 205-pounder, credits his active, athletic lifestyle and positive outlook for helping in his recovery. And nobody is surprised by his accelerated pace.

A month ago, he started aquatic therapy, standing, walking and exercising in water up to his chest. Last Thursday was his first steps with a walker. Spradling has weaned himself off prescribed pain medication and dealt with the nausea because he wants a "clear mind."

Each day he says he feels better, stronger, confident. Spradling's not one to sit still, even in a wheelchair.

He has a bow and arrow that he shoots (through an open door) at a Styrofoam target on the back porch. Last Friday, he attended a concert with fiance, Brittany Murray. Spradling goes to the movie theater, circles the neighborhood block for exercise and earlier this month threw out the first pitch from his wheelchair at a prep baseball game.

Goes with the flow

Spradling remains upbeat. No pity-parties, thank you. That's just his nature.

"He doesn't let a lot affect him, just goes with the flow, always doing something," said Matt, who has returned to skydiving and is studying to be a pilot.

Stephen repeatedly thanks family members and friends for their support, and altering their lives to help him. His full recovery expects to take months.

Each year in the United States, about 35 people die while making approximately 2 million parachute jumps. Spradling quickly acknowledged he understood the risks each time he jumped.

Spradling looks forward, not behind him. He can't wait to be reunited with his Seminole teammates, and hopes to arrive by first pitch on Friday.

Spradling doesn't dwell on the accident either. And no, he doesn't know the identity of the skydiver he avoided that fateful morning.

Life happens. Winds happen.

"It was tough out there that day," Spradling said.

"It was probably my fault from the angle I was coming in. But things can happen so quickly in the air. I had to make the turn. I know I didn't want to bring somebody else down with me. "

Weekend preview: Sizzling Seminoles

Kendall Rogers [T](#) [E](#)

Published: Thursday, March 21, 2013

MORE: PG College Top 25 | Weekly chat transcript | Mid-major spotlight | College Recruiting Roundup

Subscribe to the College Baseball Ticket!

Florida State head coach Mike Martin and his coaching staff have done some impressive coaching jobs over the years, but what the Seminoles have accomplished so far this season considering the adversity they've gone through might just best them all.

After reaching the College World Series last season, the Seminoles certainly entered this season with high hopes even without outfielder James Ramsey, third baseman Sherman Johnson and other key cogs. However, that was without knowing the two things we know now -- starting pitcher Mike Compton is out for the season and had Tommy John surgery and shortstop Justin Gonzalez, a key offensive cog and tremendous leader, is out the rest of the season because of hip surgery.

Despite those significant setbacks, the Seminoles still have an outstanding 20-1 overall record entering this weekend's home series against hard-hitting Georgia Tech, much credit, of course, going to a much improved pitching staff.

"Well, Mike Bell has done a tremendous job with our pitching staff," Martin said. "He has people in good roles, and they understand what they need to do. He's meticulous with his organization and a lot of credit goes to him for that. I'm just very pleased with our starting pitchers giving us quality starts.



Jameis Winston has been an electric addition for the Seminoles this spring. (FSU photo)

"I like the way this team understands things. Some clubs have success and start getting inward turned eyeballs. This club doesn't. This club knows we're going to be playing a very competitive schedule," he continued. "I'll tell you this much, we ain't going to win the next 19 out of 20. I can almost promise you that. We just have to continue to scrap."

While the pitching staff certainly headlines this team moving through the meat of its rigorous ACC schedule, the offense also has been serviceable. The Seminoles are hitting .286 as a team with Jose

Brizuela and much improved catcher Stephen McGee leading the charge with batting averages of .377 and .333, respectively.

JUCO transfer outfielder Marcus Davis has shown flashes of greatness so far this season, while freshman DJ Stewart has some serious pop, but is still making the transition to Division I Baseball with a .262 average, a home run and 15 RBIs.

"Brizuela is just a much different player this year because he played so much last year, he gained some really valuable experience," Martin said. "As for McGee, I don't know if I should start talking about him. I might just bore you. He's just a coaches player. He comes to the ballpark and does whatever it takes to win. He's literally a rock behind the plate and he brings the winning to himself. I can't say enough about Stephen McGee."

While the offense will undoubtedly improve as the season progresses, the pitching has been a significant surprise, especially considering the loss of Compton for the season. The Seminoles, entering this weekend's series against the Yellow Jackets, have a very impressive staff earned-run average of 1.77.

As Martin alluded to, several pitchers throughout the staff are taking care of business in their respective roles, but it's the confidence and momentum gained by the starting pitchers that's allowing the Seminoles to really settle into a groove.

Sophomore left-handed pitcher Brandon Leibrandt isn't going to blow pitches past opponents on a consistent basis, but he's typically efficient and has a 3.64 ERA in 29 2/3 innings with 24 strikeouts and 10 walks..

Junior right-handed pitcher Peter Miller has taken a step forward so far this season with a 1.88 ERA in 24 innings, along with 26 strikeouts and 12 walks, while husky 5-foot-10, 210-pound, senior right-handed pitcher Scott Sitz has been terrific in the rotation.

Sitz, whom Martin calls a bulldog and someone who "fights for foul balls in the dugout" exudes confidence and toughness on the mound. It shows in his results, as he has a fantastic 0.60 ERA in 30 innings, along with 27 strikeouts and eight walks.

"The thing that has really helped Scott is that he has another year under his belt," pitching coach Mike Bell said. "He has just really settled into that Saturday role. Stuff-wise, he's still the same guy, but he's just more understanding of the game."

There's also power-armed right-handed pitcher Luke Weaver, who put together a great midweek start this week against Stetson to preserve some bullpen arms for this weekend's series against the Jackets.

"Last year, there were a number of times when by the seventh inning we were thinking of what to do the next night because of the relievers we were using," Martin said. "As for the starters, Miller has been much improved. He's never been one of those cerebral pitchers for us, but again, that's something pitching coach Mike Bell has worked hard to develop. It's still a work in progress, but I'm pleased with his progress."

Beyond the starting rotation, the Seminoles continue to get clutch outings from their relievers, specifically newcomers Robby Coles and Jameis Winston, along with others such as Gage Smith, Brandon Johnson and Bryant Holtmann.

Coles, a 6-foot-2, 175-pound, right-handed pitcher, has a 0.77 ERA in 10 appearances and 11 2/3 innings of work, while he has struck out 19 and walked six. As for Winston, the former high school All-American and two-sport star, is a 6-foot-4, 220-pounder, with a 1.86 ERA in 9 2/3 innings of work.

"The key to our bullpen ... we just have some deep Alabama and deep Florida type of guys that just like to fish and hunt," Martin said. "They're not in the least bit intimidated by anything. They just enjoy going out there and competing."

Coles is a sinker, slider type of pitcher who throws from a low arm angle and has a fastball sitting 88-91, while Winston is more of the prospect with a fastball sitting 89-91 with the potential to get up to 93-94 at times. He's also utilizing a two-seam fastball and slider.

"There's a lot of movement involved when it comes to Winston. He's coming at you from a big frame and from a tough angle. He's kind of an old school pitcher with lots of legs and arms coming at you. It's tough to pick up," Bell said. "Coles is just a tough guy who wants to pitch everyday, whether it's 45 or 85 degrees. I'd call him an old school gunslinger."

With gunslingers, hunters and fishermen, among other things, the Seminoles move forward with an intriguing club that should compete for another CWS berth.

It's not a surprise the Seminoles have that potential. But it certainly is one that they're doing it this early in the season.

Strode leads Seminoles past Stetson

Mar 20, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Fifth-ranked Florida State got exactly what it needed on Wednesday.

The Seminoles received an outstanding pitching effort from Billy Strode in his second career start, allowing one unearned run over six innings with a career-high nine strikeouts.

FSU generated runs in bunches, sending 23 hitters to the plate over the fifth and sixth innings and scoring 13 runs. Marcus Davis' two-run homer – his first home run in nearly a month – helped ignite the onslaught.

And let's not forget that the Seminoles' 14-1 victory over Stetson not only swept the two-game midweek series, it provided welcomed momentum heading into this weekend's Atlantic Coast Conference series against No. 11 Georgia Tech (17-3).

The Yellow Jackets weren't so fortunate in their home midweek game to Georgia Southern on Tuesday, losing 5-4.

"Billy certainly gave us what we needed, and that was six innings from our starter," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "Very pleased with the effort, and the way we came out and got after it."

Stetson (10-11) led 1-0 and held its own for the second consecutive game for the early innings behind its starting pitching. However, the Seminoles (20-1) quickly wore down the Hatters' bullpen, which surrendered 12 walks, eight hits all 14 runs over the final four innings.

Josh Delph and Jose Brizuela each had two hits for FSU, and Delph added four RBIs. John Nogowski smacked a three-run triple. Even starting pitcher Scott Sitz got into the act with a RBI in two at-bats.

But it was Davis' swing that changed the game's momentum. And it was big for Davis, too, after his average had fallen below .300 after a quick start to the season.

"I think I've been having better at-bats the last few games," Davis said.

"It felt good just to finally have a positive result from having a positive at-bat. It felt good to finally put a good swing on the ball."

Strode, meanwhile, settled into a comfortable rhythm, relying on a slider and commanding the strike zone with his fastball.

"I've always been a pitcher who likes to work fast," Strode said.

"It keeps the hitters on their toes and it keeps your team up, alive in the game."

Relievers Brandon Johnson, Kenny Burkhead and Dyland Silva combined to throw three scoreless innings.

Thankful to be alive

FSU's Spradling seriously injured in skydiving accident

Mar 20, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Stephen Spradling positioned his wheelchair behind the walker. He raised himself and tightly gripped the walker for support and stability. Slowly and cautiously – right foot first – Spradling took his most important steps in 74 days.

Last Thursday was a remarkable moment considering what Spradling has endured the past three months.

The Florida State baseball player's recovery from a horrific skydiving accident on Dec. 30 is ahead of schedule. The fact the senior outfielder survived his fall from the sky can be considered a miracle. And his decision to attend the Seminoles' home series this weekend against Georgia Tech reflects his willpower.

Spradling's list of injuries from a problematic landing included a broken pelvis (front and back), a broken bone in his lower back, two broken ribs, a shredded bladder and internal bleeding. He underwent two blood transfusions and emergency surgery during his first two days in a Melbourne hospital.

"I am blessed that I am alive and will be able to do things again," said Spradling, an experienced skydiver and extreme sports enthusiasts who made 35 appearances in his first season for the Seminoles last year.

"It has given me a new perspective certainly. It could have been worse. I will always like skydiving, I think it's an amazing thing. There's no other feeling like it, to be honest. It's the closest thing to flying. Will I go back up? Probably not. I always told myself I would skydive until something happened to me. It's my time to put it (parachute) away.

"But I will miss aspects of it."

Windy conditions

Sebastian, located just north of Vero Beach, is considered a premier location for skydiving over Florida's eastern coastline. While the weather was clear the morning of Sunday, Dec. 30, it wasn't the most ideal setting for skydiving due to wind conditions.

Yet, Spradling, 23, and his older brother Matt, 25, were cleared to jump as B licensed skydivers – the pair had completed more than 100 jumps each since earning their certification three years ago. Stephen Spradling was also a member of FSU's Skydiving Club last year.

And the mood was upbeat as skydivers from around the state converged on Sebastian Municipal Airport for a week-long festival of jumps, music and food.

Spradling was home in Boynton Beach on holiday break from FSU. He made the hour drive north to join Matt, who was camping at the skydiving facility. The brothers contemplated not jumping due to the winds, but others were in the air, so they loaded into the plane around 11 a.m.

When the plane reached 13,500 feet, Spradling, his brother and two other skydivers exited. The jump, from start to finish, was expected to last less than four minutes. Spradling estimated there were probably 30 other skydivers (normal amount) in the air, all headed toward an open, grassy landing area (larger than a football field) below.

"The jump went well, and my (parachute) opening went well," said Spradling, who can reach up to 200 mph during a freefall prior to opening his chute. "As I was coming down for a landing, the wind was real strong. I felt it on my canopy. It (wind) is always a concern, but I've handled those conditions."

The real danger suddenly appeared in front and slightly below Spradling. Another skydiver was headed toward him.

"I don't think the person ever saw me," Spradling said. "I immediately knew I had to do something to get out of the way so that we wouldn't collide in mid-air – and most likely both of us be killed."

Spradling estimated he was 100 feet above the ground when he pulled his left riser to make a left turn to avoid the approaching skydiver. All Spradling remembers was quickly glancing toward the ground.

With modern parachutes under ideal conditions, a proper landing can be as easy as stepping off a curb. This was more like stepping off a curb into rush-hour traffic.

No recollection

Wind flows over objects closer to the ground, just like water flowing over a rock. Spradling believes he got caught in a downward flow of air the instant he made his turn, accelerating him toward the ground.

Spradling doesn't remember what happened next. It's a blur, he said.

Spradling was told he slammed into the ground feet first, bounced and flipped a few times. When Spradling, who was wearing a protective helmet, opened his eyes and realized he was alive, his first instinct was to try to stand. But the lower half of his body felt disconnected. His entire body was engulfed by a severe burning sensation.

"The pain was unbearable, it's hard to explain," Spradling said.

Spradling said it was a "God thing" that he landed on his feet at impact. He figures his instinct from skydiving training (and early years as a gymnast) was to collapse, bend his knees and roll, and his injuries suggest that's how his body responded.

Matt Spradling was above his brother, 300 to 400 feet from the ground. He was concentrating on his jump, visually scanning the sky when, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a parachutist land violently.

It took a moment for him to comprehend what he saw, immediately followed by sheer disbelief and fear. Spradling recognized the color of his brother's canopy (Seminole garnet and gold).

"At first I was like, 'Wait, was that Stephen?' I saw the canopy colors and was, 'Oh, crap,' and I realized it had to be him," Matt said. "Honestly, I don't remember even landing."

Stephen, crumpled and face down, was being attended by fellow skydivers when Matt reached him. One was a doctor from Canada. Another was a military paramedic. The scene was calm, professional. An ambulance's sirens could be heard in the distance.

"Stephen was pretty beat up, fully conscious, and in a lot of pain," Matt said. "It was pretty much a car wreck without the car. The big concern was his back."

Life happens

Andrea Spradling was on her way home from church when Matt telephoned. Andrea and husband Mark, missionaries years ago, rely on their strong faith. And Andrea, now an English teacher, also knew that Stephen had before beaten the odds.

Physicians didn't think Stephen would walk again when he was stricken with meningitis at age 10. And as a freshman in high school, Stephen suffered a C2 fracture (neck) of his vertebrae playing football. Let's not forget the bumps and bruises over the years from skim boarding, surfing, snowboarding, water skiing, BMX racing and skateboarding. A neighbor even remembers Stephen riding up and down the street on a unicycle.

"It was devastating when Matt telephoned, but we also know that someday, somehow, Stephen has always come out above all odds," Andrea said.

"You know, life happens. Stephen has always been very cautious. He doesn't take risks, and he knows his body. Things happen. Winds happen. I always know he's prepared for whatever he does."

FSU assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. was in Miami for the Seminoles' Jan. 1 Orange Bowl victory over Northern Illinois. It was following the game when Martin received a telephone call from Stephen Spradling, who was hospitalized at Holmes Regional Medical Center in Melbourne.

"The first thing he said was how disappointed he was and that he felt like he let the team down," said Martin, who loaded his family into a car and drove to Melbourne from Miami.

"I could barely understand him. I was in a panic. When we got to the hospital, it was heartbreaking to see. He had trouble talking and moving at all and was in an awful lot of pain. But all he wanted to talk about was the team. He's a very unselfish player, a guy who is always positive about everything."

Spradling was expected to contribute on a young FSU team this season.

The right-handed batter hit .262 in 42 at-bats last year, and he was hit by 12 pitches to rank second on the team. The Broward College transfer played high school baseball at American Heritage School and was known for his versatility.

It shouldn't be a surprise, though a long way off, but Spradling hopes one day to return to baseball.

"I probably could have put more time in practicing baseball with everything else I did, especially while in high school," Spradling said. "But I also think those other interests only strengthened my love for the game because it didn't consume my life. I miss everything about it."

Road to recovery

The right side of Spradling's body absorbed the brunt of impact.

Surgeons had to cut through Spradling's abdominal muscles to repair him. His front and back pelvis are held in place by screws and metal. The fracture to his lower back avoided damaging nerves associated with paralysis. His ribs have healed but remain tender. Spradling said the worst pain was associated with his injured bladder.

Spradling was hospitalized for three weeks, shorter than anticipated by surgeons. Once home, the family turned its living room into Stephen's living quarters.

It had a bed, table, television and portable toilet. A garden hose on the front porch served as a makeshift shower. Matt and his father built a wooden ramp outside the front door to make the home wheelchair accessible, complete with a rope that Stephen uses to pull himself up the incline.

Early on, a neighbor who is a nurse stopped by twice a day to inject Spradling with blood thinners to guard against clots since Spradling spent most of the time on his back in bed.

Spradling, a 6 foot, 205-pounder, credits his active, athletic lifestyle and positive outlook for helping in his recovery. And nobody is surprised by his accelerated pace.

A month ago, he started aquatic therapy, standing, walking and exercising in water up to his chest. Last Thursday was his first steps with a walker. Spradling has weaned himself off prescribed pain medication and dealt with the nausea because he wants a "clear mind."

Each day he says he feels better, stronger, confident. Spradling's not one to sit still, even in a wheelchair.

He has a bow and arrow that he shoots (through an open door) at a Styrofoam target on the back porch. Last Friday, he attended a concert with his fiancée, Brittany Murray. Spradling goes to the movie theater, circles the neighborhood block for exercise and earlier this month threw out the first pitch from his wheelchair at a prep baseball game.

Goes with the flow

Spradling remains upbeat. No pity-parties, thank you. That's just his nature.

"He doesn't let a lot affect him, just goes with the flow, always doing something," said Matt, who has returned to skydiving and is studying to be a pilot.

Stephen repeatedly thanks family members and friends for their support, and altering their lives to help him. His full recovery expects to take months.

Each year in the United States, about 35 people die while making approximately 2 million parachute jumps. Spradling quickly acknowledges he understood the risks each time he jumped.

Spradling looks forward, not behind him. He can't wait to be reunited with his Seminole teammates, and hopes to arrive by first pitch on Friday.

Spradling doesn't dwell on the accident either. And no, he doesn't know the identity of the skydiver he avoided that fateful morning.

Life happens. Winds happen.

"It was tough out there that day," Spradling said.

"It was probably my fault from the angle I was coming in. But things can happen so quickly in the air. I had to make the turn. I know I didn't want to bring somebody else down with me. "

DeLand High product Luke Weaver finds his pitch with Florida State

Former Bulldog will show off new slider against Stetson

By Sean Kernan

STAFF WRITER

Published: Monday, March 18, 2013 at 11:19 a.m.

Last Modified: Thursday, March 21, 2013 at 12:26 a.m.

The Florida State sophomore knew he was on to something that might complete his repertoire and fit in nicely with a low-to-mid-90s fastball, as well as his always reliable changeup.

"I was trying to keep my arm in check, getting ready to come back in the spring, just playing catch with my dad," Weaver said. "I was messing around with some grips and arm angles, and I found a grip that I liked and just kept throwing it. I was like, 'Wow! I might have something here.'"

Weaver's suspicion proved correct. His slider has made him a more complete pitcher. The numbers bare that out: 3-0, 0.44 ERA and 26 strikeouts in 20 1/3 innings as he heads into Tuesday's scheduled start against Stetson at 4 p.m. at Dick Howser Stadium in Tallahassee.

Mark Weaver remembers what it was like being on the receiving end of his son's new-and-improved slider.

"Boy, when it started breaking hard like that, his confidence and his face just lit up," the proud pop recalled. "Man, I knew he had it. I was so excited for him because over the years he's had so many coaches — from travel ball and high school — who worked with him on that, and he's had very little luck."

So, the DeLand High product continued to tinker with his new slider when he returned to Tallahassee after the holidays. He couldn't wait to show pitching coach Mike Bell, who had been working with him to develop the hard breaking pitch. Weaver refined the slider during a few bullpen sessions, and he knew he had added a weapon to his arsenal.

"I was just really ecstatic, because I just loved the way it was breaking and I thought there was a good future with it," the 6-foot-2, 170-pound right-hander said.

Weaver, a 19th-round draft choice by the Toronto Blue Jays in 2011, is a more complete pitcher than he's ever been. Coupled with instruction provided by Bell and midweek starting opportunities given to him by FSU head coach Mike Martin, the former DeLand Bulldog is now a three-pitch hurler who is simply dominating opponents.

Weaver won't ever forget the reaction he had after throwing the new pitch to his father.

"The first time I threw that (slider) to my dad I just kind of stepped back," said Weaver, who has limited opponents to a .114 batting average and issued just three walks. "I was just super pumped about it because that was the pitch that was holding me back. Now, my slider is challenging my changeup as my second-best pitch. That's a good problem."

Yes, a good problem for Weaver that equals a bad problem for his opponents, and last week that meant trouble for the Florida Gators.

Weaver struck out five Gators and scattered three hits while giving up one unearned run in 6 1/3 innings in a 4-1 victory in Gainesville. His parents, Mark and Merry Weaver, and brother, Jake, attended the game, which was the first of three scheduled this year between the Sunshine State rivals.

“That was a big win for us,” Weaver said. “Last year was really disappointing with the three losses we had (against Florida). We felt like we should have won each one, but kind of felt like we didn’t play well for a full nine innings, and they got around to beating us. ... Our coach told us after the game that it had been six years since we beat them in Gainesville. That was a big surprise to me. It was great to beat them at their place.”

The Seminoles remained fifth in the USA Today Coaches poll and National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association rankings after beating Florida and taking two of three at Maryland in Atlantic Coast Conference play last weekend. FSU is 18-1 going into Tuesday’s game against Stetson, which is 10-9 after winning seven of its last 10 games.

Weaver has contributed much already to a Seminoles team that is loaded with starting pitching — three of the four starters boasted ERAs under 1.00 last week.

“He is attacking hitters and is really just trusting his stuff,” said Martin, who has seen the 19-year-old mature before his eyes in the last year and a half.

“There is no doubt that the real cream rises to the top when you’re facing hitters one through nine who are capable of beating you. You don’t have that in high school and can get away with a lot of stuff. But on the college level, Luke now understands that he has got to bear down one through nine.”

Weaver’s development also included a 2012 summer stint in the prestigious Cape Cod League after FSU went to the College World Series.

“I think he applied that knowledge (from Bell) in the Cape, where he had some success,” Martin said. “He came back and continued to work hard in the fall and pitched well. Luke has really established himself as one of the best pitchers on our staff, as evidenced by his good start.

“I can’t say enough about the importance that Luke Weaver has brought to this club, as he has pitched deep into ballgames this year and (has had) success against very good competition. I am very, very excited to see how he progresses as we go through the season.”

Weaver described his freshman season (1-0, 5.93 ERA, one save in 16 games) as “hit-or-miss” and felt his March 21 victory over Stetson — a 9-1 home win in which he didn’t allow an earned run in seven innings — was his turning point in going from thrower to pitcher.

“Throughout high school and travel ball, usually pitchers are just throwers, just try to strike everybody out. But when you get to college baseball, it’s a whole different game,” Weaver said. “You really have to start pitching and not throwing. That was a big lesson I had to learn, and I’m finally settling down.” Weaver admitted he certainly doesn’t know it all about pitching. In fact, his next project is to add a forkball or split-finger fastball.

Guess what pitch he'll be throwing to his dad the next time father and son have a catch?

FSU a challenge for Jackets' clout

By Ken Sugiura

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Georgia Tech's surprise run to last year's ACC baseball championship began with an upset of Florida State. In some ways, the Yellow Jackets haven't stopped yet.

"I think there was a lot of carryover," pitcher and staff ace Buck Farmer said. "I think people saw what we could be, and I think that's what they brought here this year and want to show people."

Fueled by perhaps the top offense in the country to this point, the Yellow Jackets have risen to No. 11 in the USA Today coaches poll. This weekend, they play the same Seminoles, ranked No. 5, in a three-game series that will provide by far the best competition they've faced this season.

"It's going to make you play your best, and you're going to find out a lot about your team," coach Danny Hall said.

The series starts in Tallahassee, Fla., with a Friday doubleheader beginning at 3 p.m. With heavy rains forecast for Saturday, the second game was moved to Friday. The series concludes Sunday with a 1 p.m. game. The games will be carried online on ESPN3.

Tech (17-3 overall, 5-1 ACC) returns all but one starting position player from last year's team and seven of the nine pitchers who took the mound in the ACC tournament. Hall in part attributed his team's offensive output — through last weekend, the Jackets led the country in batting average (.355), runs per game (10.0) and slugging percentage (.526) — to the Jackets' four-game sprint to the ACC title after making the eight-team field in the final game of the regular season.

"I think that the older guys in particular, to go through the ACC tournament and win that tournament against four really good teams, I think that gave them a lot of confidence," he said.

A few of those older guys are putting up startling numbers. Going into this week's games, center fielder Brandon Thomas ranked second in the country in batting average at .479 and fourth in on-base percentage (.557). Catcher Zane Evans ranked second in RBIs (30), fourth in home runs (eight) and 13th in slugging percentage (.789). Right fielder Daniel Palka ranked 10th in batting average (.449), sixth in on-base percentage (.552) and seventh in RBIs (28).

"Everyone's gotten better, top to bottom," Thomas said.

The Seminoles (20-1, 5-1) will be stern, though, with a pitching staff that ranked fifth in the country in ERA (1.85) after last weekend. Farmer will be opposed Friday by Marist grad Brandon Leibrandt, the son of former Braves pitcher Charlie Leibrandt.

To this point, the Jackets have done a lot of damage against fairly weak pitching. Of the eight teams that Tech has faced, six ranked 200th or worse in ERA (out of 296 teams) after last weekend. The Jackets did pummel the best pitching staff they've faced, Virginia Tech, for 27 runs in a three-game series.

The three games hardly will be a final verdict, but will be a far better gauge on the Tech's offensive might.

"I have said there's going to be times when we're going to run into a good pitcher and have to win in other ways, but I do think that we will make teams have to pitch really well to beat us because I just think we have a lot of guys capable of hitting the baseball," Hall said.

Weekend preview: Sizzling Seminoles

Kendall Rogers

Published: Thursday, March 21, 2013

Florida State head coach Mike Martin and his coaching staff have done some impressive coaching jobs over the years, but what the Seminoles have accomplished so far this season considering the adversity they've gone through might just best them all.

After reaching the College World Series last season, the Seminoles certainly entered this season with high hopes even without outfielder James Ramsey, third baseman Sherman Johnson and other key cogs. However, that was without knowing the two things we know now -- starting pitcher Mike Compton is out for the season and had Tommy John surgery and shortstop Justin Gonzalez, a key offensive cog and tremendous leader, is out the rest of the season because of hip surgery.

Despite those significant setbacks, the Seminoles still have an outstanding 20-1 overall record entering this weekend's home series against hard-hitting Georgia Tech, much credit, of course, going to a much improved pitching staff.

"Well, Mike Bell has done a tremendous job with our pitching staff," Martin said. "He has people in good roles, and they understand what they need to do. He's meticulous with his organization and a lot of credit goes to him for that. I'm just very pleased with our starting pitchers giving us quality starts.

Jameis Winston has been an electric addition for the Seminoles this spring. (FSU photo)

"I like the way this team understands things. Some clubs have success and start getting inward turned eyeballs. This club doesn't. This club knows we're going to be playing a very competitive schedule," he continued. "I'll tell you this much, we ain't going to win the next 19 out of 20. I can almost promise you that. We just have to continue to scrap."

While the pitching staff certainly headlines this team moving through the meat of its rigorous ACC schedule, the offense also has been serviceable. The Seminoles are hitting .286 as a team with Jose Brizuela and much improved catcher Stephen McGee leading the charge with batting averages of .377 and .333, respectively.

JUCO transfer outfielder Marcus Davis has shown flashes of greatness so far this season, while freshman DJ Stewart has some serious pop, but is still making the transition to Division I Baseball with a .262 average, a home run and 15 RBIs.

"Brizuela is just a much different player this year because he played so much last year, he gained some really valuable experience," Martin said. "As for McGee, I don't know if I should start talking about him. I might just bore you. He's just a coaches player. He comes to the ballpark and does whatever it takes to win. He's literally a rock behind the plate and he brings the winning to himself. I can't say enough about Stephen McGee."

While the offense will undoubtedly improve as the season progresses, the pitching has been a significant surprise, especially considering the loss of Compton for the season. The Seminoles, entering this weekend's series against the Yellow Jackets, have a very impressive staff earned-run average of 1.77.

As Martin alluded to, several pitchers throughout the staff are taking care of business in their respective roles, but it's the confidence and momentum gained by the starting pitchers that's allowing the Seminoles to really settle into a groove.

Sophomore left-handed pitcher Brandon Leibrandt isn't going to blow pitches past opponents on a consistent basis, but he's typically efficient and has a 3.64 ERA in 29 2/3 innings with 24 strikeouts and 10 walks..

Junior right-handed pitcher Peter Miller has taken a step forward so far this season with a 1.88 ERA in 24 innings, along with 26 strikeouts and 12 walks, while husky 5-foot-10, 210-pound, senior right-handed pitcher Scott Sitz has been terrific in the rotation.

Sitz, whom Martin calls a bulldog and someone who "fights for foul balls in the dugout" exudes confidence and toughness on the mound. It shows in his results, as he has a fantastic 0.60 ERA in 30 innings, along with 27 strikeouts and eight walks.

"The thing that has really helped Scott is that he has another year under his belt," pitching coach Mike Bell said. "He has just really settled into that Saturday role. Stuff-wise, he's still the same guy, but he's just more understanding of the game."

There's also power-armed right-handed pitcher Luke Weaver, who put together a great midweek start this week against Stetson to preserve some bullpen arms for this weekend's series against the Jackets.

"Last year, there were a number of times when by the seventh inning we were thinking of what to do the next night because of the relievers we were using," Martin said. "As for the starters, Miller has been much improved. He's never been one of those cerebral pitchers for us, but again, that's something pitching coach Mike Bell has worked hard to develop. It's still a work in progress, but I'm pleased with his progress."

Beyond the starting rotation, the Seminoles continue to get clutch outings from their relievers, specifically newcomers Robby Coles and Jameis Winston, along with others such as Gage Smith, Brandon Johnson and Bryant Holtmann.

Coles, a 6-foot-2, 175-pound, right-handed pitcher, has a 0.77 ERA in 10 appearances and 11 2/3 innings of work, while he has struck out 19 and walked six. As for Winston, the former high school All-American and two-sport star, is a 6-foot-4, 220-pounder, with a 1.86 ERA in 9 2/3 innings of work.

"The key to our bullpen ... we just have some deep Alabama and deep Florida type of guys that just like to fish and hunt," Martin said. "They're not in the least bit intimidated by anything. They just enjoy going out there and competing."

Coles is a sinker, slider type of pitcher who throws from a low arm angle and has a fastball sitting 88-91, while Winston is more of the prospect with a fastball sitting 89-91 with the potential to get up to 93-94 at times. He's also utilizing a two-seam fastball and slider.

"There's a lot of movement involved when it comes to Winston. He's coming at you from a big frame and from a tough angle. He's kind of an old school pitcher with lots of legs and arms coming at you. It's

tough to pick up," Bell said. "Coles is just a tough guy who wants to pitch everyday, whether it's 45 or 85 degrees. I'd call him an old school gunslinger."

With gunslingers, hunters and fishermen, among other things, the Seminoles move forward with an intriguing club that should compete for another CWS berth.

It's not a surprise the Seminoles have that potential. But it certainly is one that they're doing it this early in the season.

Stewart looks for win in visit home

FSU freshman excited to play rival Florida in Jacksonville

Mar 25, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

This already has been quite a week for Florida State freshman DJ Stewart, and the best could be yet to come.

Last Friday night, Stewart hit a grand slam and registered a career-high 6 RBIs in the Seminoles' 11-3 victory against Georgia Tech. On Sunday, he delivered a game-winning two-run single in an 8-6 win against the Yellow Jackets.

Then on Monday, Stewart was rewarded for his efforts by being named the ACC's co-player of the week.

But truth be told, the highlight of Stewart's week could come Tuesday night, when FSU takes on rival Florida in his hometown of Jacksonville.

"I'm very excited," said Stewart, a former baseball and football star at The Bolles School. "I can't wait to see all my friends at the game. I've actually been talking about this game since last year in high school."

Stewart, who was drafted by the New York Yankees in the 28th round of last summer's MLB draft, has adjusted well to the college game. He is hitting .278 on the season and is tied for the team high with 23 RBIs.

A nagging shoulder injury has kept Stewart out of the defensive lineup on some days -- he moved from left field to designated hitter on Sunday, for example -- but it hasn't done much to limit his production.

And FSU assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. said he isn't surprised the freshman has come through in big situations.

"The coaches at Bolles told us all the time about him coming up with clutch hits," Martin Jr. said. "I really think there's something to the football part of it. That determination and mental and physical toughness those guys have -- and having played in front of however many thousand people -- coming up in pressure situations is nothing for them."

Stewart also is no stranger to the Baseball Grounds in Jacksonville, where tonight's game will be played. He played there several times in high school, and he has attended several of the FSU-Florida games there in recent years.

"It's a great experience," Stewart said of the rivalry games, which typically draw crowds of more than 10,000. "There's a lot of fans there -- both sides. So it will be fun."

The Seminoles defeated the Gators in their first meeting this season (4-1 in Gainesville), but FSU coach Mike Martin said UF has been playing better as of late. The Gators split their first two games with No. 2 Vanderbilt this past weekend before dropping the rubber game, 5-4, on Sunday.

“I know they’re starting to get some of their guys back that have been hurt,” Martin said. “We’ll look forward to going over there. That’s always a good venue for both clubs and the entire state of Florida.”

College Baseball: Florida vs. Florida State

Posted: March 25, 2013 - 9:45pm

By Justin Barney

When: 6 p.m. Tuesday.

Where: Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville.

TV/Radio: FSN/930 AM.

Records: Florida is 11-14; Florida State is 22-2.

Rankings: Florida State, fourth (USA Today); fifth (NCBWA) sixth (Baseball America); seventh (Perfect Game); Florida is unranked.

Notes: It's the second of three meetings this season between the Gators and Seminoles (FSU beat Florida 4-1 in Gainesville on March 12) and the seventh time these two will have met at the Baseball Grounds. The series here has been dominated by FSU. Florida's 4-1 win last year snapped a four-game Seminoles winning streak. FSU is 4-2 against Florida in Jacksonville since 2007. ... Freshman RHP Tucker Simpson (1-1, 4.91) will make the start for the Gators. He'll oppose righty Luke Weaver (3-0, 1.00). ... The Seminoles have a heavy First Coast presence. LHP Kyle Bird (Clay), C Lee Howard (Fleming Island), C Ladson Montgomery (Creekside), RHP Scott Sitz (Fletcher) and OF D.J. Stewart (Bolles) are all on FSU's roster. Stewart, the Times-Union's All-First Coast player of the year in 2012, is hitting .278 with a team-leading 23 RBI. He was named the ACC's co-player of the week of Monday. For the Gators, OF Christian Dicks (Providence) is the lone player with local ties. ... The teams will play for the final time in Tallahassee on April 9.

FSU-FLORIDA HISTORY AT THE BASEBALL GROUNDS

2012: Florida 4, FSU 1

2011: FSU 5, Florida 2

2010: FSU 7, Florida 2

2009: FSU 3, Florida 2

(5 innings)

2008: FSU 10, Florida 2

2007: Florida 16, FSU 7

Seminoles closer Coles slams door on Gators

Former Wakulla, Chipola College pitcher notches second save against Gators

Mar. 27, 2013 4:01 AM, |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

JACKSONVILLE — Robby Coles didn't need any extra adrenaline here Tuesday night at the Baseball Grounds.

He took the mound just moments after fifth-ranked Florida State grabbed a 2-1 lead against arch rival Florida, and as the Seminoles' recently anointed closer, it was his job to preserve the victory.

The fact that several thousand Florida State fans – among a mixed crowd of 9,269 – were screaming wildly after every pitch only pushed his emotions even higher. So once he struck out Gators third baseman Zack Powers for the final out in the top of the ninth inning, Coles turned toward his teammates in the third-base dugout, pumped his fist and shouted in celebration.

"I was pumped," Coles said. "The crowd, once they got real loud like that, they got me going. I normally don't get that pumped up. But in that situation, with all (those) fans getting that loud, I had to."

Coles, a former Wakulla High star, has been giving the Seminoles (23-2) plenty to cheer about since he transferred in from Chipola College.

This past Sunday, he earned his first career victory when he came on in relief during the Seminoles' comeback victory against Georgia Tech. Then on Tuesday, he earned his fifth save of the season after retiring the Gators' 4, 5 and 6 hitters in order.

"We didn't want to go get him if the score was tied," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "But as soon as we scored that run, he was ready."

Coles now has recorded saves in both of Florida State's victories against the Gators (11-15). With a 2-0 record and one game in Tallahassee remaining, the Seminoles are guaranteed of winning the series after getting swept by the UF in 2012.

"That's huge," Coles said. "I'm pretty sure they beat us three times last year. To go ahead and win the series, and if we get the next one, that would just be huge."

Coles anchored what was another brilliant performance by FSU's bullpen. After starter Luke Weaver left following the sixth inning, relievers Bryant Holtmann, Gage Smith and Coles retired nine of the 10 batters they faced.

"The bullpen's been great," shortstop Giovanni Alfonzo said. "It's comforting to know that when the starting pitching comes out, we have guys in the bullpen that can come in and shove it."

Seminoles win pitching duel with Gators at Baseball Grounds

Posted: March 26, 2013 - 11:48pm | Updated: March 26, 2013 - 11:51pm

By Adam Pincus

The blend of Gators and Seminoles fans didn't have much to cheer for until the eighth inning. Neither team could solve the opposing pitchers until Florida State's Giovanni Alfonzo drove in Jose Brizuela on an infield single up the middle. Shortstop Casey Turgeon couldn't make an accurate throw to first after diving for the hard-hit ball.

Alfonzo pumped his right hand in the air in celebration as he crossed first. Runs were hard to come by Tuesday night at The Baseball Grounds in the Seminoles' (23-2) 2-1 victory against the Gators (11-15).

An announced attendance of 9,269 at The Baseball Grounds saw a pitcher's duel heading into the bottom of the eighth.

Brizuela hit a leadoff double off Florida left-hander Danny Young. The freshman entered the inning with four straight scoreless frames. Brizuela advanced to third after Young balked.

With the corner infielders in, Florida coach Kevin O'Sullivan went to right-hander Ryan Harris who prevented Brizuela from scoring by inducing a groundball to Vickash Ramjit at first. Left-hander Daniel Gibson followed Harris with a strikeout of Seth Miller before facing Alfonzo.

Florida played the eighth inning by the book, but it wasn't enough — something Florida State coach Mike Martin recognized after the game.

"We got a man on third, nobody out and they go groundball one pitch and then a punch out. With two outs we get the groundball barely out of the shortstop's reach," Martin said. "We were fortunate, but we are very proud we were able to get it done."

Reliever Gage Smith earned the win. Closer Robbie Coles picked up his fifth save this season.

The Gators didn't get a hit after the second inning when Connor Mitchell drove in their only run on a single into right-center.

Florida State plated its first run when Florida starter Tucker Simpson walked John Nogowski with the bases loaded. The Seminoles finished with seven hits.

Right-hander Luke Weaver tied a career-high with nine strikeouts in six innings. The sophomore has pitched at least six innings in all five starts this year.

Even injured, Gonzalez fills captain role for FSU baseball

Rehab going well for senior SS Gonzalez

Mar 29, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Justin Gonzalez takes his role as captain of Florida State's baseball team seriously. He might be lost for the season following surgery on his right hip earlier this month, but he doesn't view it as a lost season.

Gonzalez is in the dugout for games and traveled to Virginia Tech for this weekend's Atlantic Coast Conference series. The senior doesn't hesitate to offer advice to teammates, and FSU's coaches and players won't allow Gonzalez to feel sorry for himself — not that that's in his personality.

"It's unfortunate that I can't be out there with the team, but I had two choices — I can either pout or do what I can do and enjoy the moment and be there for my teammates and hopefully win," Gonzalez said Thursday, before the Seminoles left for Virginia.

"That's the goal every time I step on the field, and that's the goal every time I step in the dugout. To win."

Gonzalez said he actually was relieved when surgeons explained his injury, one that he might have had for years due to abnormal (extra) bone growth near the hip socket.

Gonzalez admitted he has experienced the described symptoms for "the longest time" and couldn't recall when they first appeared.

Gonzalez underwent surgery on March 11 to repair a torn labrum and bone impingement. The shortstop said his surgery is similar to what New York Yankees third baseman Alex Rodriguez underwent in January. Recovery time can be four to six months.

"I had felt these nagging pains for so long, and it was like, 'Why won't this go away?'" Gonzalez said.

"I had been forcing it, practicing and working so hard and not seeing the results on the field, and to hear them explain the injury, it was kind of like, 'Wow, it's all making sense now.' It was almost like a stress reliever, a weight off my shoulders."

It could have easily left him bitter.

He was drafted in the 27th round by the Los Angeles Dodgers last June. Yet, Gonzalez opted to return for his senior season even after fellow infielders Sherman Johnson at third base, Devon Travis at second base and Jayce Boyd at first base turned professional. Johnson was a senior, but the other two left school a year early.

FSU coach Mike Martin named Gonzalez this year's team captain, and Gonzalez couldn't contain his excitement about the upcoming season despite the team's youth and question marks.

The Miami native's season abruptly ended on Feb. 23 — just five games in — during a home game against South Florida. Gonzalez legged out a bunt to the pitcher in the third inning.

However, he was picked off first base without even attempting to get back to the bag.

"My hips literally locked on me," Gonzalez said. "I couldn't turn. I couldn't dive back. I just didn't feel right. I was like, 'Man, something is definitely wrong.' This is more serious than I thought."

Gonzalez had hoped to avoid surgery, but it proved to be the best option for a full recovery. He continues to wear a brace that limits his movement and uses crutches, but his rehabilitation is going well.

So well that he took his first steps on an underwater treadmill during therapy Thursday morning. Gonzalez attends therapy at FSU twice a day for 3 1/2 hours per day. Sessions include riding a stationary bicycle 20 minutes, range-of-motion exercises, isometrics and core strengthening.

"They stretch me out and that feels good, but when I get a deep tissue massage, that doesn't feel too great," Gonzalez said and smiled.

"It's grueling, but I know I am headed in the right direction. I am in the early stages of this, but once I get more active I will start getting the itch to get back on the field."

Catcher and roommate Stephen McGee said Gonzalez remains an important part of the team. In fact, FSU coach Mike Martin couldn't recall ever including an injured player, who had no chance of playing, on the travel roster.

That's "how much he means to this team," Martin said.

"Justin has that presence about him and still has a big influence on players," McGee said.

"He's in the dugout, he's in the circle before games. When something like this happens, you are obviously not happy. But he got through it very quickly, and he's really focused on working and coming back stronger and better than ever."

Gonzalez, upbeat and strong in his faith, is not ignoring the future. He has looked into summer courses and says he'd love to return to FSU next season. He also says turning professional is an option if the opportunity presents itself.

"But right now, all I am focused on is getting healthy," Gonzalez said.

"You can be (upset), and it will be the longest recovery time, or you can think positive. Big setbacks set up for big comebacks, that's how I am looking at it. I believe something good will come out of this."
No change to rotation

Despite some inconsistency from two of his starters, FSU coach Mike Martin said he does not plan to change his pitching rotation for this weekend's series at Virginia Tech. He will go again with Brandon Leibrandt today, Scott Sitz on Saturday and Peter Miller on Sunday.

FSU's Weaver to move into weekend rotation

FSU plays five games in six days this week

Mar 31, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Luke Weaver has earned a promotion.

Florida State's sophomore right hander will move into the rotation against Miami this weekend, according to FSU coach Mike Martin.

While Martin said he's not sure on what day Weaver (3-0, 1.09 ERA) will pitch when the Seminoles open their three-game series on Friday in Coral Gables, Weaver will replace junior Peter Miller in the weekend rotation.

Miller (3-1, 3.77 ERA) entered the season as the Seminoles' Sunday starter.

"We are not absolutely certain what day Luke will pitch –we are still discussing that – but we are going to make the move," Martin said Sunday.

Martin also said sophomore Billy Strobe (1-0, 0.63 ERA) will start Tuesday's home game against Florida Gulf Coast, which travels to Tallahassee for a two-game series.

Martin has not decided on Wednesday's starter.

FSU (24-4 overall, 8-4 ACC) dropped its first conference series at Virginia Tech this weekend.

The Seminoles have leaned heavily on pitching this season with a staff ERA of 2.44.

However, Saturday starter Scott Sitz is the lone pitcher in the weekend rotation with more than one league victory (3-0).

Miller has lasted 4 2/3 innings in his last two starts, allowing seven earned runs on 13 hits. He suffered the loss in Saturday's 8-1 defeat at Virginia Tech, and is 1-1 with a 6.00 ERA in four conference starts.

Brandon Leibrandt, the Seminoles' Friday starter the past two years, is 1-2 with a 4.82 ERA in conference games. The sophomore left hander is 4-2 with a 4.89 ERA overall.

Reliever Bryant Holtmann (2-0) earned FSU's lone win at Virginia Tech, throwing 2 1/3 innings of relief in Saturday's first game (11-10 victory).

FSU assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. was disappointed with the Seminoles' defense against the Hokies. FSU committed six errors in Saturday's doubleheader.

The Seminoles boast a .963 fielding percentage, ranking ninth in the ACC.

“It always seems to happen right around the midway point of the season, and we need to get back to practice and get after the fundamentals,” Martin said.

“You can attribute it to a lack of focus, being lackadaisical, or whatever, but we have to shore up things defensively.”

FSU also spent Easter Sunday in Blacksburg, Va. The team could not reschedule its charter flight after it played a doubleheader on Saturday.

The Seminoles attended Sunday service and had lunch at a local mall. Their flight was scheduled to leave at 4 p.m.

Katrina Witt, Kristi Yamaguchi and Scott Hamilton headlined ice skating shows. Tom Wolfe, Henry Kissinger, Walter Cronkite, Jane Goodall and Spike Lee gave talks. Comedians Bill Cosby, Stephen Colbert, Dave Chappelle, Craig Ferguson and Larry The Cable Guy performed there.

It's the home of football luncheons, boat shows and Rotary meetings. It's the home of hospital galas, Junior League fundraisers, technology fairs and Broadway shows. It's the home of monster truck rallies, rodeos and circuses. It's the home of high-school and college graduations, community banquets and, yes, basketball and hockey games.

FSU baseball team splits two with Hokies

Mar 31, 2013 |

Written by

| Democrat staff report

The Florida State baseball team hung on for a wild win in a high-scoring affair in the first game before dropping the series finale to Virginia Tech in a doubleheader Saturday in Blacksburg, Va.

FSU came out swinging and grabbed an 8-0 lead in the first game but quickly saw that erased when the Hokies scored seven in the fourth to tie the score. The Seminoles grabbed an 11-8 lead in the seventh.

Virginia Tech had the tying run on third with one out in the ninth, but closer Robby Coles shut the door to pick up his sixth save. Giovanni Alfonzo went 3 for 5 with a pair of RBIs and Stephen McGee, Jose Brizuela and Casey Smit each added two hits for FSU.

Bryant Holtmann picked up the win in relief of starter Scott Sitz.

In game two, Joe Mantiplay pitched into the seventh and the Hokies ripped six extra base hits in an 8-1 win.

Peter Miller (3-1) allowed six hits and three earned runs in 3.1 innings. The Hokies scored four in the fourth, then four more in the seventh off reliever Kyle Bird.

The loss meant FSU (24-4, 8-4) dropped its first ACC weekend series of the season.
FSU swimming and diving

Junior Tom Neubacher earned honorable mention All-American honors after placing 13th in platform diving Saturday at the men's NCAA championship meet.

He is the first FSU diver to place among the nation's top 16 in the event since his older brother Mike did it in 2011.

"He was very consistent," FSU diving coach Patrick Jeffrey said. "... He only missed one dive in three events. I couldn't have asked for more."

The Seminoles' 400-yard freestyle relay was disqualified for an early start. It was the second time this meet the group of Paul Murray, Trice Bailey, David Sanders and Mark Weber were DQ'd. They qualified 15th for the 'B' final.

Other FSU competitors Saturday were Pavel Sankovich, who placed 23rd in the 200-yard backstroke, and Josh Friedel, who was 35th. Weber placed 45th in the 100-free and John Jessell was 34th in the 1650-free.

FSU placed 23rd overall. Michigan won the team title. Florida placed sixth.
FSU softball

FSU's Weaver to move into weekend rotation

FSU plays five games in six days this week

Mar 31, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Luke Weaver has earned a promotion.

Florida State's sophomore right hander will move into the rotation against Miami this weekend, according to FSU coach Mike Martin.

While Martin said he's not sure on what day Weaver (3-0, 1.09 ERA) will pitch when the Seminoles open their three-game series on Friday in Coral Gables, Weaver will replace junior Peter Miller in the weekend rotation.

Miller (3-1, 3.77 ERA) entered the season as the Seminoles' Sunday starter.

"We are not absolutely certain what day Luke will pitch –we are still discussing that – but we are going to make the move," Martin said Sunday.

Martin also said sophomore Billy Strobe (1-0, 0.63 ERA) will start Tuesday's home game against Florida Gulf Coast, which travels to Tallahassee for a two-game series.

Martin has not decided on Wednesday's starter.

FSU (24-4 overall, 8-4 ACC) dropped its first conference series at Virginia Tech this weekend.

The Seminoles have leaned heavily on pitching this season with a staff ERA of 2.44.

However, Saturday starter Scott Sitz is the lone pitcher in the weekend rotation with more than one league victory (3-0).

Miller has lasted 4 2/3 innings in his last two starts, allowing seven earned runs on 13 hits. He suffered the loss in Saturday's 8-1 defeat at Virginia Tech, and is 1-1 with a 6.00 ERA in four conference starts.

Brandon Leibrandt, the Seminoles' Friday starter the past two years, is 1-2 with a 4.82 ERA in conference games. The sophomore left hander is 4-2 with a 4.89 ERA overall.

Reliever Bryant Holtmann (2-0) earned FSU's lone win at Virginia Tech, throwing 2 1/3 innings of relief in Saturday's first game (11-10 victory).

FSU assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. was disappointed with the Seminoles' defense against the Hokies. FSU committed six errors in Saturday's doubleheader.

The Seminoles boast a .963 fielding percentage, ranking ninth in the ACC.

“It always seems to happen right around the midway point of the season, and we need to get back to practice and get after the fundamentals,” Martin said.

“You can attribute it to a lack of focus, being lackadaisical, or whatever, but we have to shore up things defensively.”

FSU also spent Easter Sunday in Blacksburg, Va. The team could not reschedule its charter flight after it played a doubleheader on Saturday.

The Seminoles attended Sunday service and had lunch at a local mall. Their flight was scheduled to leave at 4 p.m.

McGee grand slam helps power FSU past FGCU, 12-9

Apr 3, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Stephen McGee was looking fastball.

Instead, Florida State's catcher adjusted to a hanging slider and, with one swing, helped the Seminoles recapture the lead and the baseball game's momentum against visiting Florida Gulf Coast University on Tuesday.

McGee's first career grand slam in the sixth inning powered FSU past gutty FGCU, 12-9, at Howser Stadium. McGee's towering blast over the left-field wall on a 2-2 count snapped a 6-6 tie in an entertaining game that featured plenty of highlights — and mistakes.

Each team used six pitchers, and they combined for 23 hits.

"I would have been pretty upset if it didn't go out," McGee said of his grand slam, his fourth home run of the season. "I was looking fastball. When you hang a ball like that, it's pretty easy to put the barrel on the ball.

"I needed to come through right there, and I am glad I did."

An announced crowd 4,766 that enjoyed sunny, 83-degree weather for the game's first pitch at 6 p.m. was glad, too.

The Seminoles (25-4) were hot early, building an early lead and taking a 5-1 advantage into the fifth inning behind starter Billy Strode.

But Strode and reliever Jameis Winston, plagued by wildness and making his first appearance since March 24 as he juggles football and baseball, wouldn't make it out of the inning.

The Eagles (18-7) rallied for five runs on four hits and claimed a 6-5 lead.

Gage Smith recorded the inning's final out and earned the win in relief to move to 4-0. He allowed one unearned run in 21/3 innings. Robby Coles tossed a scoreless ninth inning to register his seventh save.

FGCU didn't go quietly, however. The Eagles scored three additional runs over the final three innings to give FSU another test after it dropped last weekend's ACC series at Virginia Tech.

"From an offensive side, we know we can hit, we know we can put runs up," said Eagles assistant coach Rusty McKee, who directed the team in place of head coach Dave Tollett. Tollett missed the game due to illness.

“We need to get better performances out of our pitchers and throw some zeroes up there,” McKee said. “Obviously, Florida State has a great team, but we feel like we have a really good team, too. It was a game we kind of let go.”

FSU freshman second baseman John Sansone, who entered hitting .208, helped pace the Seminoles offensively. He hit his first career home run, added a single and reached base four times.

Josh Delph, Jose Brizuela and Casey Smit each had two hits. McGee tied a career-high with 4 RBIs, while DJ Stewart added 3 RBIs and scored two runs. The home run by McGee extended his streak of reaching base to 22 straight games.

“It was just a well-fought game,” FSU coach Mike Martin said. “FGCU is a very good baseball team. We had some very good at-bats tonight, and I am just very pleased with that.”

Smit started the Seminoles’ rally in the sixth with a single. Sansone followed with a walk, and both runners advanced on a sacrifice bunt by Josh Delph. Marcus Davis loaded the bases as he was hit by a pitch, followed by an RBI walk by Stewart to tie the game at 6-6.

McGee followed with his grand slam off reliever Harrison Cooney.

“I was just really trying to see the pitches and to drive a ball in the gap,” McGee said.

“I felt like he was a little wild with the previous at-bat. I was looking away, just trying to drive the ball and get in some runs. Then I got down to two strikes and at that point, if anything is close you are just hacking. He happened to hang one for me.”

Peter Miller (3-1, 3.77 ERA) is slated to start for FSU in tonight’s rematch.

FSU's Stephen Spradling thankful to be alive

Bob Ferrante- FSSouth
April 3, 2013, 10:04am

Each step is slow. And often painful. But Stephen Spradling is thankful for every step that he takes, for every step in his journey.

Just more than three months ago, the Florida State baseball player was enjoying one of his other favorite pursuits — skydiving. Spradling always has had a passion for sports, and beyond baseball he pursued BMX racing, surfing, scuba diving and snowboarding.

On this day, Dec. 30, Spradling was skydiving in Sebastian, Fla., (about an hour and a half north of West Palm Beach) with his brother Matt and others. The winds were stronger than usual, but Stephen had jumped dozens of times and was certified to skydive in the conditions.

As he got closer to the ground, parachuting to the Earth, another skydiver came right into his path. Spradling had few options, as a mid-air collision possibly would have killed both of them. One choice: He could change direction.

He did. Spradling avoided the other skydiver. And an instant later, he hit the ground.

Spradling never lost consciousness. One skydiver in the group was a doctor and another was a paramedic. They gave him immediate attention.

“As soon as I hit, (my) first thought was, ‘I’m alive,’ ” Spradling said. “Second thought was, ‘My lower body is in excruciating pain.’ ”

What followed were surgeries that Spradling doesn’t remember the details of to this day. There were broken bones all over, including his back, ribs and pelvis. He’s just thankful that he was able to leave the hospital three weeks after the accident.

“As soon as I was put back together, it was just wanting to get out of there,” Spradling said. “I just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible.”

Sometimes, doctors and physical therapists have to push patients harder as they rehabilitate. With Spradling, the athlete kicked in. He was the complete opposite.

“It’s a hard balance to know when I am pushing myself too hard,” Spradling said.

The rehabilitation

Spradling has had a number of surgeries. The first was emergency surgery to stop the internal bleeding. He had another surgery to re-attach his groin muscle to his pelvis, a surgery that he didn’t even remember until days later. He had knee surgery, too.

He spent a lot of time initially in a wheelchair, but Spradling also was able to do a variety of physical therapy. He was able to walk in a pool, doing calf raises and marching in place. And he did some leg exercises and upper-body work in the gym.

Spradling was able to walk with the aid of crutches in March. And, over Easter weekend, he walked for the first time without the crutches.

“Each step right now is painful,” Spradling said. “But they are the happiest steps of my life.”

A week before the accident, Spradling had proposed to his girlfriend, Brittany Murray. The holidays were special, but this year more than others. There was so much to look ahead to.

The accident changed everything, but it clearly brought the family together. Spradling’s parents, brother and Murray don’t want to talk about what happened back in December. The emotions are still too strong.

But Spradling is thankful for everything that they have done. And the past three months have brought he and Murray even closer.

“We were both coming off being so happy and talking about plans,” Spradling said. “It just changed. This is not good. She’s stuck with me the whole time. She’s been my biggest supporter every day. I think it made our relationship even stronger.”

The return

Spradling returned to Dick Howser Stadium for the first time on March 22 to watch Florida State play Georgia Tech (Murray drove him there from his home in Boynton Beach). He sat in the stands just a few rows behind the Seminoles’ dugout and cheered on his teammates as they took two of three games from the Yellow Jackets.

And Florida State fans returned the favor by giving Spradling a standing ovation.

“That meant so much to me,” Spradling said. “Since I’ve been back here (rehabilitating), I’ve been wanting to get back up there. When I was finally able to get back up there, I was cleared to walk in crutches, it was just an amazing experience.”

He was reunited with teammates for the first time, going into the locker room to shake hands and receive hugs. Spradling said they’ve all kept up with him through his rehabilitation, and it was an emotional reunion.

Spradling is trying to arrange another trip to Tallahassee, but he also will be in the stands this weekend in Coral Gables when Florida State plays Miami.

There are aspects of the game that Spradling misses. He missed playing the game he loves and the camaraderie that he shares with teammates. Spradling hit .262 with 11 runs and four RBI in 2012, starting 11 games as an outfielder in his junior season in Tallahassee (he transferred from Broward College after two years).

Spradling had helped Florida State reach the College World Series a year ago. Florida State coach Mike Martin wanted to keep Spradling on the roster, but NCAA rules don't allow it.

"I'd love to put him on the roster but we can't because he's not an enrolled student," Martin said.

Spradling knows that his chances of ever playing baseball again are a long shot.

"I'm not really sure what my future is in baseball," Spradling said. "It's been an amazing ride. I'm just trying to get healthy."

The future

Spradling has gone from nearly dying in a field to emergency surgery to a shorter-than-expected three-week stay in the hospital to walking with crutches to now walking on his own. As far as his rehabilitation has gone so far, he has done far better — and recovered quicker — than anyone expected.

He has plenty of goals ahead of him. Spradling is 11 credits shy of a bachelor's degree, and he hopes to wrap that up this summer. It's possible that he could attend class in Tallahassee to complete his degree (major in geography and a minor in psychology), but he also may take the classes online and graduate.

Spradling said he will not skydive again. But he would still like to pursue other sports. He would love to get back into surfing. He has planned to take part in a 1-mile run (walking, of course) in the next few weeks.

After he graduates, Spradling would like to work for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as a law officer, helping protect native wildlife and fish. He loves fishing and feels like it's a perfect career choice. And he and Brittany plan to get married either in December or next spring.

The simple fact that he is able to look forward to so much in life, even if the steps are slow, is a miracle to Spradling.

"From where I was to now is incredible," Spradling said. "God was looking out for me. ... I believe God saved me when the accident happened."

Bullpen key to FSU's success

Holtmann bounces back from elbow surgery, helps lead crew of relievers

Apr 4, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

When Luke Weaver makes his first career Friday start for the Florida State baseball team tonight at Miami, he will look to set the pitching tone for the important weekend series against the rival Hurricanes.

Just as importantly, the sophomore right-hander also will try to reverse a recent downward trend for the Seminoles' starting pitchers.

While FSU starters have gone at least five innings in 19 of 29 games, they have accomplished that feat just twice in the past eight games. And senior righty Scott Sitz is the only starter to register a win during that stretch, beating Georgia Tech on March 23.

The starters' struggles not only led FSU coach Mike Martin to juggle his starting rotation, they also have increased the bullpen's workload as well.

The good news for the Seminoles is the bullpen has responded.

"The bullpen has been great," said middle reliever Gage Smith, a former North Florida Christian standout who has allowed just one earned run in his last 14.1 innings over 13 appearances. "That's something we haven't had in years past, is we can literally trust almost everybody out of the bullpen, which is unbelievable. The starters have been throwing good, but lately we haven't been getting as many innings from them.

"For the bullpen to come in and be able to give as many innings as it has, and shut people down like it has, you have to credit everybody there."

Sophomore left-hander Bryant Holtmann (2-0, 1.93 ERA) is one of those relievers who has made the most of his opportunities.

Holtmann has made 13 appearances, third on the team behind Smith, whose 17 leads the Atlantic Coast Conference, and closer Robby Coles (15). Coles' seven saves also ranks first in the ACC.

Holtmann, a native of Illinois who missed his senior prep season due to elbow surgery, posted a career high in innings pitched (31/3) and strikeouts (5) against Georgia Tech on March 24.

He recorded his second win of the season at Virginia Tech last Saturday, pitching 21/3 innings without allowing a run. Holtmann also threw 2/3 of an inning in Tuesday's win over Florida Gulf Coast.

"I love my role," Holtmann said.

"I am first out of the pen most of the time, and every time I go out there I get more and more confident. I just need to keep doing what I am doing."

The same could be said of Weaver, who has pitched at least six innings in all five of his midweek starts this season, including a pair of victories over rival Florida. He made two weekend starts last season, but did not factor in the decisions with a 5.14 ERA

Sophomore Brandon Leibrandt, who had made 21 consecutive Friday night starts, is scheduled to start Saturday, followed by Sitz on Sunday.

Meet Jameis Winston, Florida State's newest two-sport star

Game On!

Paul Myerberg, USA TODAY Sports 12:50p.m. EDT April 7, 2013

Jameis Winston is a redshirt freshman at Florida State. It gets complicated from there.

Is he the future of FSU football? Maybe, depending on who's talking. Is he a future baseball star? Some have made the suggestion. The confusion stems from days like Saturday, when Winston pulled double duty on the gridiron (in the morning) and the baseball diamond (in the evening) over a 12-hour span.

It wasn't your typical Saturday – for folks like you and I, obviously. It's par for the course for Winston, a former five-star quarterback prospect who went in the 15th round of the 2012 MLB draft; he slid out of the first few rounds only because teams knew he was choosing FSU over a professional contract.

Morning: Winston continued to make a push to become the Seminoles' new starting quarterback during a team scrimmage. During FSU's previous scrimmage, on Apr. 3, Winston completed 11-of-18 attempts for 239 yards and a touchdown.

Evening: Winston entered in the sixth inning of FSU's 6-0 loss to rival Miami (Fla.) and retired all nine batters he faced, striking out one and throwing only 34 pitches.

"Winston also drew 'oohs' and 'ahhs' from some in the crowd when the scoreboard at Mark Light Stadium showed his velocity to be 97 (miles per hour) at one point," Ira Schoffel of the Tallahassee Democrat wrote. (Schoffel added that some pro scouts had Winston more in the 93-94 range, though that remains very impressive.)

"It was a long day but I didn't feel any wear and tear on my body at all," Winston told Schoffel. Oh, to be 19 or 20 (and to have Winston's athletic ability).

FSU sophomore Brizuela enjoys Miami trip

Sophomore shines defensively, also sparks Seminole offense

Apr. 8, 2013 8:40 AM |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

CORAL GABLES — Jose Brizuela picked a good time to turn in one of the most complete games of his young career.

Not only was he one of Florida State's top hitters Sunday — the sophomore went 2 for 4 with an RBI — but he also made several beautiful plays at third base.

Brizuela recorded four assists during the Seminoles' 5-1 victory against rival Miami, and three of those plays featured diving stops on sharply hit grounders.

"I just told him, 'I thought those balls were base hits,'" FSU starter Scott Sitz said after the game. "He just came out of nowhere diving and making the play and gunning them at first. It was great."

Brizuela had some help from first baseman John Nogowski on a couple of the throws, but none of them pulled Nogowski off the bag. And that was important to Brizuela, who has been working to overcome some accuracy issues.

After committing several throwing errors earlier this season, Brizuela said he received some help on his footwork from injured shortstop Justin Gonzalez, and he said that has made all the difference.

"It's been really helping me out," Brizuela said. "I'm glad he's there to teach me those things so I can get better."

Brizuela was happy to play a key role in the Seminoles' series-clinching victory, and it was an added bonus that it happened in front of so many of his close friends and family. The Weston native played high school ball at nearby Archbishop McCarthy, and he competed with and against several of the Hurricanes as a youth.

"I had family members, I had best friends from high school, I had coaches from high school," Brizuela said. "It's just great to play against them and that crowd that I used to play with in high school. It was an awesome experience, and it was great to get the win."

Tough crowd

As well as Scott Sitz pitched Sunday against Miami, he still heard from a handful of critics in the Seminoles' dugout.

Because Sitz failed to catch a throw from first baseman John Nogowski while covering the bag in the first inning, the Hurricanes were able to score their lone run of the game. And while it didn't impact the outcome of the game, that one play was the difference between FSU's pitchers being able to take batting practice this week at Dick Howser Stadium.

“All the pitchers were kind of mad at me about that because I blew pitchers’ BP because we didn’t get the shutout,” Sitz said with a smile. “So I’m gonna have to wear that one for the next week at least.”

FSU hasn’t recorded a shutout victory since March 8 against Boston College.
Winston solid once again

One day after practicing in football and then taking a flight to Miami, where he pitched three perfect innings that night, freshman Jameis Winston was impressive again Sunday.

Starting at designated hitter, Winston reached base safely three times (one hit, two walks), stole a base and scored a run.

Noteworthy

- Outfielder Josh Delph, who spent two days in a Miami hospital with a viral infection, was released and returned to Tallahassee with the team. His status is not known for Tuesday’s game against Florida.
- The attendance for Sunday’s game was 2,567.

Florida State downs rival Miami

Seminoles defeat Hurricanes in two out of three games in Coral Gables

11:06 PM, Apr. 7, 2013 |

It was a tale of three different games this weekend, as the No. 5 Florida State baseball team won two of three games against Miami in Coral Gables. After it was all said and done, the Seminoles' record now stands at 27-5 (10-5 ACC).

The first game played on Friday night was one in which the Seminoles were blanked for the first seven innings. The Hurricanes were the first to get on the board, scoring two runs in the fifth and took the 2-0 lead all the way into the eighth. Florida State was able to hit three straight singles to open the eighth inning and tie the game at 2-2.

In the ninth with the score still tied 2-2, shortstop Giovanni Alfonzo hit the game winning double down the right field line to score Casey Smit from second to give the Seminoles their first lead of the night.

"It was a fastball away," said Alfonzo on the pitch. "Actually I saw the outfield shift over when the pitcher was stepping on the rubber, so I got up on the plate and figured he was going to pitch me away. I just tried to see it deep and hit it."

John Sansone tacked on another run by singling in Alfonzo to make the final score a 4-2 FSU victory.

"This was a great win," said head coach Mike Martin after the game. "You're behind by two in the eighth inning and you see guys' battle. I think Smity's at-bat was certainly big. It was just a very good win for our ball club. It was a well-played game. We got a break, no question about it, but I am very happy for our young men."

Martin wouldn't be able to say the same about the second game, though.

The second game played on Saturday saw the Hurricanes score six runs over the span of five innings and the Seminoles score zero over the span of nine. No rally came in the second game for the Seminoles and Florida State gave all the credit to Miami's pitching for the 6-0 loss.

"Well there is just no question, if you saw it you know the story of the game," said Martin after the second game. "[Miami starting pitcher Bryan] Radziewski just did a great job tonight. It's as good a job as I have seen done on us all here. You really got to tip your hat to him, he shut us out."

Radziewski had seven scoreless innings only walking three and allowing four hits while striking out eight. In contrast, Florida State starting pitcher Brandon Leibrandt only went four innings and allowed five earned runs over the span.

The final game was won by the Seminoles though to take the series thanks to a spectacular outing by their starter. Right hander Scott Sitz went eight innings with only one unearned run and struck out five. He's now 6-0 on the season.

"It's a credit to Scott Sitz today," said Martin Sunday. "He just took the bull by the horns and really dominated a very good Miami team. I just can't say enough about his composure, the way he

approached the game. He was very much in control. He never panicked if things didn't go his way. It was a very good win for our baseball team."

Left fielder Marcus Davis went 2-for-4 at the plate Sunday and scored two of the five Seminoles runs to help Sitz secure the win.

The rivalry games continue for Florida State as their next opponent is none other than the Gators who they take on Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. in Tallahassee.

Sitz puts UM bats on ice

Senior pitcher dominates, helps FSU earn series victory

Apr 7, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

CORAL GABLES — He committed a fielding error in the first inning to give Miami a one-run lead, and then needed just five pitches to retire the next two batters and end the threat.

He gave up three singles in the second inning but didn't surrender a run.

And then in the seventh inning, after giving up a leadoff single to end a streak of 14 consecutive outs, he promptly induced a double-play ball and recorded a strikeout to keep the Hurricanes off the scoreboard again.

But it was Florida State senior Scott Sitz's composure after Sunday's game that might have been most impressive. While doing a national television interview following the Seminoles' 5-1 victory, Sitz's teammates doused him with an ice bath in celebration of his performance.

"That was freezing," Sitz said. "I almost said something (bad) ... but I held it in."

Sitz was in complete command all afternoon. The senior right-hander scattered six hits, struck out five and allowed just one unearned run. He issued no walks and faced the minimum number of batters between the time he recorded his second out in the second inning through the second out of the eighth inning.

"It's a credit to Scott Sitz. He just took the bull by the horns and really dominated a very good Miami team," said FSU coach Mike Martin, whose team won its fourth consecutive season series against the Hurricanes. "I just can't say enough about his composure, the way he approached the game — very much in control. Never panicked if things didn't go his way. It was a very good win for our baseball team."

Sunday's game followed a completely different script from the first two games of the series. On Friday, FSU rallied from a late two-run deficit to pull off a 4-2 victory. On Saturday, the Seminoles trailed early and lost, 6-0, without ever really threatening.

But with the series on the line, Florida State dominated in all phases.

The Seminoles recorded 10 hits and drew five walks, while UM had just six hits and no walks. FSU was led offensively by left fielder Marcus Davis (2 for 4, two runs scored) and third baseman Jose Brizuela (2 for 4, 1 RBI).

And FSU also played flawless defense, with the exception of Sitz's miscue in the first inning.

The Hurricanes, meanwhile, committed three errors.

“It was a very well-played game by us, no doubt about it,” Martin said. “We made some plays. We did what we talk about all the time – we didn’t give them a chance to feel good because we kept making big plays. From the double play we turned in the seventh to the outstanding plays that Brizuela made.”

“They played great,” Sitz said of FSU’s defense. “I give the credit to them.”

Although he tied a career high by pitching eight innings, Sitz said he was far from perfect. Pointing to the hard-hit balls that Brizuela stopped at third, the Jacksonville native said his change-up was “good,” but that his slider was just “OK.” He said he relied primarily on locating his fastball.

“I threw a few bad pitches, and I just got lucky and they didn’t hit them,” said Sitz, who improved to 6-0 on the season and saw his team-leading ERA drop from 0.69 to 0.57.

With the victory, Florida State is now 27-5 on the season (10-5 in the Atlantic Coast Conference), while Miami fell to 21-14 (6-9).

After taking today off, the Seminoles will finish their three-games-in-three-cities series with rival Florida. FSU won earlier in Gainesville and Jacksonville and will go for the sweep on Tuesday at Dick Howser Stadium.

“We get to enjoy it a day,” Martin said with a laugh.

FSU has not yet announced its starting pitcher for that game.

Seminoles blanked by 'Canes, 6-0

Reliever Winston throws three scoreless innings

Apr 7, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

CORAL GABLES — After watching Miami left-hander Bryan Radziewski carve up his lineup for seven innings Saturday night, Florida State coach Mike Martin said it was the best performance he had seen from an opposing pitcher this season.

It might have been the best the Seminoles have seen from a UM starter in nearly a decade.

Radziewski came into Saturday's game with a 0.98 ERA, and he actually improved on that — it's now 0.78 — by pitching seven shutout innings and leading the Hurricanes to a 6-0 victory.

It marked UM's first shutout of a Florida State team since April 2004.

"If you saw it, you know the story of the game — Radziewski just did a great job," Martin said. "It's as good a job as I've seen done on us all year. You've got to really tip your hat to him. Shut us out. ... He just dominated us."

Radziewski, who relied heavily upon a nasty curveball, allowed just four hits and never seemed to be pressured by the Seminoles' offense. He did walk three batters and hit another with a pitch, but he recorded eight strikeouts and picked two runners off at first base.

Those two pickoffs — in the first and second innings — set the tone for what would be a long night for the Florida State offense.

"He was throwing all of his pitches for strikes," said FSU left fielder DJ Stewart, who went 2 for 3 to lead the Seminoles.

"He's mainly a curveball pitcher, but you can't really do anything because we don't want to swing at (breaking balls) early in the count. So you take it, and he did a great job of throwing it for a strike."

"I was able to locate everything," said Radziewski, who improved to 4-1. "I was throwing my fastball for strikes, my slider, my curveball. Luckily this year I have a change-up, and that helps a ton."

FSU sophomore Brandon Leibrandt, who made his first Saturday start after moving out of the Friday role, again failed to last through the fifth inning. After surrendering one run in three of the first four innings, he was pulled after getting in more trouble in the fifth.

Iready trailing 3-0, Leibrandt allowed UM's first two batters to reach on a walk and a single before being pulled for reliever Brandon Johnson. Then things really spiraled downward for the Seminoles, who fell to 26-5 and 9-5 in the ACC.

Johnson issued an intentional walk to UM cleanup hitter Alex San Juan to set up a possible double play, but then he hit left fielder Michael Broad with a pitch to force in a run. UM designated hitter David Thompson then drove in two more runs with a single to center field.

Leibrandt, who entered this season as a preseason All-America candidate, fell to 4-3 after allowing five runs (all earned) on seven hits in four innings. He walked three and struck out three.

“He’s a control pitcher that cannot walk three guys in four innings,” Martin said.

“That’s giving them a baserunner 75 percent of the time. He’s still gonna be fine. And we’re gonna give him the ball. We’re not ready to move him out of the rotation.”

Other than Stewart, perhaps the only highlight for FSU was the extremely impressive relief performance from freshman pitcher Jameis Winston.

After participating in FSU’s football practice Saturday morning, the quarterback flew to Miami and threw three shutout innings of relief that night. Winston retired all nine batters he faced.

“Jameis really was impressive,” Martin said. “I don’t think they had a base runner on him for three innings. He did a good job.”

“It was a long day, but I didn’t feel any wear and tear on my body at all,” Winston said. “I felt good.”

The Seminoles and Hurricanes (21-13, 6-8) will play a rubber game to decide the series today at noon.

Senior right-hander Scott Sitz (5-0, 0.69 ERA) will go against UM sophomore left-hander Andrew Suarez (2-1, 2.92).

Seminoles rally past 'Canes, 4-2

Alfonzo's double in ninth inning ignites comeback

Apr 6, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

CORAL GABLES — Just when Florida State fans had gotten used to calling sophomore shortstop Giovanny Alfonzo a “Gator killer” they might need to change it up.

Make it “rival killer.”

With the fifth-ranked Seminole and host Miami Hurricane tied in the top of the ninth inning Friday night, Alfonzo laced a double down the right-field line to drive in pinch-hitter Casey Smit for the go-ahead run. He later scored in the inning to cap off FSU's 4-2 comeback victory.

"It was obviously a great win," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "You're behind by two (runs) in the eighth inning. It was a very good win. ... I'm very happy for our young men."

Alfonzo's ninth-inning heroics were reminiscent of a pair of games earlier this season, when he delivered game-winning hits to beat rival Florida. But the South Florida native said the key to his success has been not trying to do too much.

"It's the same thing every time," Alfonzo said. "You have to have the same approach in that situation. ... I went up there, my heart was beating. I said, 'OK, hold on. Calm down. Just see the ball, hit the ball.' And you find holes."

With the victory, Florida State improves to 26-4, 9-4 in the ACC. Miami falls to 20-13 and 5-8.

FSU closer Robby Coles, who entered the game with one out in the eighth inning, recorded the victory to improve to 2-0.

Florida State sophomore Luke Weaver, making his first weekend start of the season, looked dominant at times but couldn't keep the Hurricanes at bay all night.

The sophomore right-hander pitched five innings and allowed two runs (both earned) on eight hits. All eight of those hits came with two outs, including the pair of singles that gave the Hurricanes a 2-0 lead in the bottom of the fifth inning.

With two runners on base and two outs, Weaver gave up an RBI single to Miami designated hitter Alex San Juan, and then another RBI single to left fielder Michael Broad.

Junior right-hander Gage Smith then came on in the sixth inning and kept the Hurricanes in check long enough for FSU's bats to come around.

UM starter Chris Diaz, who entered the game with a 2.38 ERA, was every bit as good as advertised. He cruised through the first seven innings and had retired eight consecutive batters when UM coach Jim Morris decided to leave him in the game for the eighth inning.

Diaz entered that frame having thrown 115 pitches, and he quickly got into trouble.

Freshman second baseman John Sansone, who had three hits, led off with an infield single and advanced to second on a throwing error by UM third baseman Brad Fieger.

Center fielder Seth Miller drove Sansone in with a single to center to make it 2-1. Then Miller scored when Brett Knief singled to right, and UM right fielder Chantz Mack misplayed the ball.

Knief ended up going to third on the play, but the Seminoles couldn't drive him in for the go-ahead run. Freshman DJ Stewart and junior Stephen McGee both struck out, and Marcus Davis flew out to the end the threat.

But in the ninth, Smit was sent in to hit for starting first baseman John Nogowski, and he got things going with a leadoff single. He then stole second base to set up Alfonzo's winning hit.

"Coming to Miami, this is a big, big series for us," Smit said. "Getting a win, especially opening night, is huge."

UM's Eric Nedeljkovic (2-1) took the loss in relief.
Winston a late arrival

Freshman pitcher Jameis Winston, who has been one of the Seminoles' top right-handed relievers, is expected to fly down to Miami after Florida State's football practice this morning.

Winston missed Friday's baseball game, but FSU football coach Jimbo Fisher confirmed that his backup quarterback will fly down this afternoon for the remainder of the Seminoles' series against the Hurricanes.

Schoffel column: FSU two-sport star Winston already has wow factor

Apr 9, 2013 |

We're trying, Jameis.

We're trying our hardest not to get ahead of ourselves. We don't want to overhype you. We know you're just a few months removed from high school. We don't mean to build you up to an impossible standard.

But you're not making this very easy on us.

First, before we get into all that, let's clear one thing up: You don't mind if we call you Jameis, do you? It just seems to roll off the tongue.

Jameis rhymes with famous, of course, which is why some have taken to calling you, "Famous Jameis." And who doesn't like the sound of that?

Yes, we understand that your family and friends call you "Jaboo" (pronounced J-boo), and maybe we'll get to that point someday. But we just don't know each other that well yet. And Mr. Winston seems far too formal. So we're gonna stick with Jameis.

After all, many of the great ones didn't have nicknames. Chris Weinke didn't. Warrick Dunn didn't. Charlie Ward didn't ... unless you count "Chollie," which was more of a mispronunciation than anything else.

And oh, here we go again.

One minute we're discussing your name, and the next we're listing you in a paragraph with three of the greatest athletes in school history.

OK, so this one wasn't your fault. We'll take the heat for this.

But that stuff over the weekend? The deal where you woke up at 6:30 a.m. for football practice in Tallahassee, had team meetings and practiced, then flew down to Miami for a baseball game and retired all nine batters you faced in order? While your fastball was lighting up radar guns? Including the Mark Light Stadium scoreboard, which clocked you at 97 mph?

That was all on you, friend.

Can't blame us for that.

Same with the time you let some dudes videotape you throwing a football over a fraternity house and then post it on YouTube. It looked like you were throwing the ball to the moon, dude.

So again, that's on you. Not us.

To be fair, we have made the mistake of doing some background checks on you, and that's only made things tougher.

Your baseball teammates say you're already a tremendous leader. They point to the final game from the Georgia Tech series a few weeks ago when they were down 5-0 in the early innings and you – a true freshman – gathered them together in the dugout and urged them to not get down.

"He brings the quarterback (mentality) from football over here," sophomore shortstop Giovanny Alfonzo said. "Georgia Tech jumped on us, and he said, 'It's not going to happen again, guys.' He got the whole team together and said it's not going to happen again. ... He's definitely one of those guys we look up to regardless of his age."

The fact that you were part of a brilliant bullpen effort that day, and helped the team rally for an 8-6 win and a series victory, only strengthens their belief.

"He's incredible," sophomore third baseman Jose Brizuela said. "I want to call him Superman. I don't know how he does football and baseball, and still comes out here throwing 'ched.'"

Then we talked to some of your coaches in both sports, and they can't say enough about your work ethic and your thirst for knowledge. Everyone knows about your talent – that many considered you the No. 1 quarterback in the country coming out of high school and that you also were drafted in the 15th round of the MLB draft – but that's not what they bring up first.

They talk about your dedication. About your intelligence. And about your ability to apply what they have taught you almost immediately.

It's why assistant baseball coach Mike Martin Jr. was convinced you could bolster the Seminoles' batting lineup, and why pitching coach Mike Bell was sure you could help in the bullpen. And why football coach Jimbo Fisher believed your splitting time between the two sports wouldn't inhibit your ability to win the starting quarterback job ... this year.

With the spring game just a few days away, it's hard to tell if you're going to accomplish that just yet. Coach Fisher doesn't let us watch much of practice, and we know you had a lot of ground to make up on junior Clint Trickett and sophomore Jacob Coker. But we're hearing a lot of good things, man.

We've heard whispers about some of your beautiful passes. And a little birdie told us the other day that Fisher made you "live" during one portion of practice – meaning you were allowed to have full-contact – just to see what you could do.

And the word is that you ran over a defender or two near the goal line.

Now that's not fair, Jameis. That's not fair at all.

We know that you still have a lot of room for improvement in both sports. And we understand there are bound to be tough times and difficult moments during this journey.

While your teammates may feel the urge to compare you to a super hero, we're mature enough to at least try to keep things in perspective.

We are trying, Jameis.

But you are making this tougher than we expected. And you're doing it far sooner than any of us imagined.

Jones credited the offense for a solid showing. It was said the defense held the upperhand in the team's first scrimmage last week.

"It was real competitive out there," Jones said.

"I felt like when we made a big play, the offense would come back and make a big play. It seemed pretty even, especially physical-wise. Both sides of the ball looked good today."

No. 5 FSU looks for season sweep of Gators

Apr 9, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

The No. 5 Florida State baseball team has already won the season series over its rival from the east.

The Seminoles knocked off the Florida Gators 4-1 in Gainesville four weeks ago and then slipped away from the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville with a 2-1 win two weeks ago.

But just because they have already clinched the series heading into tonight's finale at Dick Howser Stadium doesn't mean the Seminoles are content with what they've accomplished.

"Absolutely not," said sophomore shortstop Giovanni Alfonzo, who had the game-winning RBI single in Jacksonville. "(FSU head coach Mike Martin) always tells us we're not done until we sweep. And that goes for this series also, regardless of if we play three games in a row or it's spread out across the season like it is.

"We always want to make sure that we take every game that we can. So we're going to come out here (Tuesday) with the same intensity, same fire, and hopefully walk away with the 'W.'"

After starting Luke Weaver (now in the weekend rotation) on the mound in the first two games against the Gators the Seminoles will turn to Peter Miller (3-1, 3.77 ERA) tonight. The junior right-hander will try to lead FSU to its first season sweep of the Gators since the 2002 season, when the Seminoles won both games over their in-state rivals.

The last time the Seminoles beat Florida in a series of three or more games? The year 2000. When every player on the current FSU team was in elementary school. Or kindergarten.

So it would be a big feather in the cap of the 2013 Seminoles (27-5) to finish off the Gators (16-18) tonight, especially considering how last season played out with Florida pulling off the sweep.

"Last year really wasn't a fun feeling," sophomore third baseman Jose Brizuela said. "Obviously they had a great squad, but it's good to be on the winning side this year.

“But like (FSU assistant Mike Martin, Jr.) always says, you don’t play the opponent. You play the game. So that’s our focus. Just to go out there and play our game.”

In front of a capacity crowd.

“You feel the difference,” Brizuela said of playing the Gators. “But it’s the same game. It’s good to have the last game here. You’re in front of your fans. These fans are unbelievable. They’re great. It’s always great to play in front of your home crowd.

“I can’t wait.”

FSU falters late against Florida

Seminoles commit four errors over final three innings, drop series finale to Gators, 4-3

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

The Florida State Seminoles were seven outs from a three-game series sweep of the Florida Gators.

Instead they committed four errors over the final three innings, allowing the visitors to score the game-tying and winning runs without the benefit of a hit in a 4-3 loss on Tuesday night in front of 6,719 at Dick Howser Stadium.

"I'm obviously very disappointed," FSU head coach Mike Martin said. "We did not deserve to win. They played better. They didn't walk as many as we did. They didn't make four errors. ... And when you do that you're going to get beat by a good baseball team."

The Seminoles had a chance to sweep their in-state rivals (in a series consisting of at least three games) for the first time since 2000, when FSU beat Florida all four times they met.

And after freshman Jameis Winston stroked a two-out RBI double off the screen in right center in the bottom of the sixth they had a 3-2 lead.

But catcher Stephen McGee compounded his throwing error on a stolen base attempt (allowing the UF base runner to reach third with two outs) with a passed ball two pitches later and the Gators (16-18) tied the game at 3-3 in the top of the seventh.

Florida State (27-6) had a chance to reclaim the lead in the bottom of the eighth when they put runners on the corners with one out. But sophomore Jose Brizuela grounded into an inning-ending double play and then slammed his helmet in frustration after diving for the first-base bag.

"He wanted very much to beat the play and that's the way he thought he could beat the play," Martin said. "We always tell our guys we've never seen a sprinter dive for the tape, but there are a lot of guys in the big leagues that dive for first base because they're competitors and they're trying everything they can to beat the play."

Brizuela then committed his 13th error of the season to star the ninth inning. His throw two-hopped past first baseman Casey Smit and allowed Harrison Bader to reach second and eventually score the game-winning run --- after an errant pick-off attempt by reliever Robby Coles moved him to third --- on Josh Tobias' sac fly to right field.

Coles inherited a bases-loaded, one-out jam from Winston in the bottom of the eighth (after a Winston error fielding a bunt) and got out of it without any runs scoring. Only to pick up the loss in the ninth after Brizuela's miscue.

"It's baseball," Winston said. "It's the game of baseball. Things like that are going to happen. ... We're going to put this behind us. We don't like losing, period. And we're a winning team. We still have a winning record. We're going to keep our heads up and put this in the past."

The late-inning sloppiness overshadowed a terrific night at the plate for freshman D.J. Stewart, who was 3 for 4 with a double and a game-tying home run in the bottom of the fifth inning.

Winston also had two hits and junior left fielder Marcus Davis had an RBI double in the bottom of the first in support of starting pitcher Peter Miller, who allowed two earned runs in five innings pitched.

And while the Seminoles wound up winning the series over the Gators, there wasn't much solace to be had on Tuesday night after all but handing the game to the team in orange and blue.

"Right now it doesn't really feel like we won the series," Stewart said. "But we'll look at it tomorrow and the next day and know we still won it. But right now it hurts a little bit."

"I really, really like this baseball team," Martin said. "And this too shall pass. The sun will come up tomorrow. And we'll play Friday God willing. But I am disappointed."

Martin said after the game he wasn't sure what the Seminoles will do with their weekend rotation yet.

Luke Weaver will definitely start on Friday night against the Duke Blue Devils and Scott Sitz will start on either Saturday or Sunday. The head coach said he wasn't sure if sophomore Brandon Leibrandt will stay in the rotation or if Miller will come back in and take his spot, pushing Sitz up to Saturday.

The FSU head coach also said he expects lead-off hitter Josh Delph (viral infection) to rejoin the team on Friday.

'Noles to host surging Devils

Duke has series wins over Ga. Tech, Miami

Apr 12, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

History will not be on Duke's side when the Blue Devils take on No. 7 Florida State this weekend at Dick Howser Stadium. FSU has won 26 of the last 29 games in the series, and the Seminoles are 36-7 against Duke at home.

Then again, these Blue Devils don't appear to be playing anything like their predecessors.

At the midway point of the 2013 season, Duke's baseball team is 21-14 overall and 8-7 in Atlantic Coast Conference play. That's a dramatic improvement from the past three seasons, when the Devils went a combined 24-66 in the conference.

"They're a good team," FSU catcher Stephen McGee said. "Every team in the ACC is a good team. But especially with what they've been accomplishing and how they've been accomplishing it, they're a real good team coming in here."

Not only are the Blue Devils above .500, but they have knocked off several perennial national powers already this season. They took two out of three games last weekend against Georgia Tech; they earlier took two out of three at Miami; and they won one of three in a very competitive series at Florida.

FSU coach Mike Martin said you can tell from watching the Blue Devils that they have embraced first-year head coach Chris Pollard.

Pollard came to Duke from Appalachian State, where he led the Mountaineers last season to a school-record 41 victories (with 18 losses) and a Southern Conference championship.

"Duke has been very impressive," Martin said. "Obviously, they have a new beginning with the new coach. This guy was very impressive when he was at Appalachian State, and it will be a real challenge to us to have success against them."

The Blue Devils have won nine of their last 10 games, and their pitching staff has been a major reason for that success. Last weekend, Georgia Tech scored just two runs in three games.

In back-to-back series wins against the Yellow Jackets and Boston College, the Blue Devils have posted shutouts in four of six games.

"They've pitched extremely well," Martin said. "They shut out Georgia Tech twice. So they've got some people that know how to pitch."

Hot-hitting Seminoles sweep Duke

FSU pounds out 26 hits in doubleheader

Apr 14, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Talk about a swing-happy, productive two days.

Florida State never stopped hitting against visiting Duke, starting with Friday's double-digit victory and ending with Saturday's doubleheader sweep over the Blue Devils in Atlantic Coast Conference baseball.

FSU beat Duke 8-5 and 8-3 at Howser Stadium to clinch its fifth conference series this season.

Yet, it was the manner in which the Seminoles (30-6 overall, 13-5 ACC) swept the Blue Devils (21-17, 8-10) that was so impressive.

Especially considering Duke last week was the first team since 1955 to blank Georgia Tech, currently ranked in the top 10 nationally in batting average and runs per game, twice in the same series.

The Blue Devils arrived in Tallahassee with a team ERA of 2.96 in league games, second behind top-ranked North Carolina. They left battered, bruised and buried by 42 hits and 32 runs, much to the delight of Saturday's announced crowd of 6,561 – ninth largest in school history.

Third baseman Jose Brizuela led Saturday's onslaught with six hits, including home runs and doubles in each game, and four RBIs.

Brizuela at one point strung together nine straight hits over the three games and reached base in 11 consecutive at-bats, two shy of the school record. He flew out to left field in the eighth inning of Saturday's finale.

"I kept hearing how they shut out Georgia Tech and I was surprised because Georgia Tech is a hitting squad; they hit really well," said Brizuela, who finished 9 of 11 with six runs and five RBIs.

"I know we can do this, but I am kind of shocked we got so many hits off of them."

Duke deserved credit, too.

While FSU had 10 hits, including two home runs, after three innings in Saturday's second game, the Blue Devils refused to buckle. They were actually within striking distance in both games.

The teams played a doubleheader due to the threat of rain today.

Seth Miller had five hits, highlighted by a triple in the first game, while DJ Stewart had four hits and three RBIs and extended his hitting streak to a team-high 11 games.

Freshman Jameis Winston double-dipped, too.

Winston started the second game at designated hitter after quarterbacking in the Seminoles' spring football game at Doak Campbell Stadium earlier in the afternoon.

The switch-hitting Winston walked, was hit by a pitch, struck out and singled.

FSU's pitching also was solid, marking the first time since the Boston College series in early March that all three starters earned weekend victories.

It also was timely for sophomore Brandon Leibrandt.

Leibrandt (5-3), who had surrendered 15 earned runs in his last four starts, allowed one run in seven innings in the opener. He tied a career high with 10 strikeouts, and three of the eight hits he scattered were infield singles.

"I think overall I was just a little more relaxed, I slowed things down and I was able to get into a rhythm early and keep it going throughout the game," Leibrandt said.

"It definitely helps (confidence). I haven't had my best stuff these past couple of weeks. Coming out here today and throwing up zeroes on the scoreboard and getting a 'W' for the team, it's great."

FSU broke the first game open in the third with five runs. Stephen McGee hit a two-run home run and Brizuela followed with a solo homer on back-to-back pitches.

The Blue Devils scored all of their runs in the final two innings, tagging FSU reliever Bryant Holtmann for four runs in the ninth.

The Seminoles jumped to a 6-0 lead in the second game behind home runs from Brizuela and Marcus Davis. Davis went 2 for 3 with two RBIs.

Duke pulled within 6-3 in the fourth, but FSU added a pair of runs two innings later on John Nogowski's infield single and a Duke fielding error. Nogowski finished 3 for 4.

FSU starter Scott Sitz (7-0) remained undefeated, surrendering three earned runs in five innings. Reliever Billy Strode tossed three scoreless innings, and Robby Coles closed out a scoreless ninth.

FSU also did not commit an error in the series.

FSU's Brizuela reflects on hit streak

Sophomore 3B raises batting average 44 points

Apr 15, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

His first at-bat of the series was a ground ball to shortstop. His last at-bat was a pop fly to left field.

And the in-between was about as hot a stretch as a college baseball player can have.

Florida State's Jose Brizuela reached base 11 straight times in the Seminoles' sweep over Duke and had nine straight hits in the process.

He entered Friday night with a .316 average. By the time Saturday's doubleheader was over he was hitting a team-high .360.

"I don't think I've ever felt that way before to be honest with you," said Brizuela, who will look to continue his torrid stretch tonight when the No. 6 Seminoles (30-6) host South Alabama (27-10).

"You feel like no one can get you out. But you've got to get down from Cloud Nine and accept the fact that you're going to get out sometimes. It's baseball. It's a sport of failure. You've just got to accept it."

There wasn't a whole lot of failing for Brizuela against the Blue Devils. In fact, of the two outs he made over the weekend one actually came on a disputed call. In his first at-bat on Friday night replays showed the sophomore beat the throw from shortstop and should have been awarded an infield single. He was called out instead.

Meaning Brizuela really should have been credited with 10 straight hits and 12 straight times reaching base (the FSU record is 13).

"I just kept my mouth shut," Brizuela said. "I'm not going to show that it affected me. ... No biggie. I had more chances to do it."

And he took full advantage. Brizuela finished the series with five singles, two doubles, two home runs and two walks. He scored six runs and drove in five. Not only did he raise his batting average by 44 points, but he raised his slugging percentage by a whopping 96 points. And his on-base percentage went from .440 to .474.

"It was impressive," said FSU hitting coach Mike Martin, Jr. "He's put in an awful lot of work."

The Seminole assistant said Brizuela still had "some work to do," but that he expects him to be this type of impact bat in the Florida State lineup.

"He's a guy that can be a .350 hitter and hit you 10 (home runs) his junior year," Martin, Jr. said. "He's strong. The speed is there. The guy is learning and he's learning quickly."

And in one 30-hour stretch, from the start of Game 1 to the conclusion of Game 3, Brizuela had an almost out-of-body hot streak, launching homeruns over the screen and right and lining doubles down the left-field line.

"I was seeing the ball real well," he said. "I tell myself that I want to get more. I want to be greedy. You don't want to be like, 'Oh. I've got two hits. I'm satisfied.' I tried stay locked in and fortunately kept getting some hits."

FSU's Delph diagnosed with meningoencephalitis

Outfielder expects to be released from hospital later this week

Apr 15, 2013 |

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State assistant coach Mike Martin Jr. and his two young sons visited Seminole outfielder Josh Delph at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital on Sunday.

Delph, known for his positive personality and smile, was in good spirits.

“He was sitting up, sounded great and anxious to get out of there,” Martin Jr. said Monday.

Doctors have diagnosed Delph with meningoencephalitis, which was caused through a viral infection, according to FSU officials.

Delph is progressing and hopes to be released from the hospital later this week. FSU, fresh off last weekend’s home sweep of Duke, meets South Alabama Tuesday at 6 p.m. at Dick Howser Stadium.

FSU players have held up two fingers (Delph’s jersey number) in a peace sign gesture each time they have reached base in honor of Delph.

Meningoencephalitis is a medical condition that simultaneously resembles both meningitis and encephalitis.

Meningitis is an infection or inflammation of the membranes that envelope the central nervous system, while encephalitis is an infection or inflammation of the brain.

It is believed Delph’s viral infection was caused by either a mosquito or tick bite, according to Martin Jr.

Delph, the Seminoles’ lead-off hitter, has missed the team’s last eight games.

He was initially hospitalized in Coral Gables following the Seminoles’ arrival for their three-game series against the Miami Hurricanes April 5-7. He was released following the series, but was admitted into Tallahassee Memorial Hospital last week.

Delph last played against Florida Gulf Coast on April 2. He is batting .287 with a team-high on-base percentage of .484.

Brett Knief and Seth Miller have been used in the lead-off role in Delph’s absence.

FSU has had to overcome a number of injuries this season.

The list started in the offseason with outfielder Stephen Spradling (skydiving injury/out for season), infielder John Holland (back/out for season), and pitcher Mike Compton (elbow/out for season).

Senior shortstop Justin Gonzalez played in the season's first five games before he was lost for the season following surgery on his right hip.

FSU wins pitching duel, 2-0

Miller combines with three relievers on 3-hit shutout

Apr 16, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

The Florida State offense managed just five hits on Tuesday night. All singles.

And yet the No. 6 Seminoles still managed to leave Dick Howser Stadium with a win. Starting pitcher Peter Miller combined with three relievers on a three-hit shutout as FSU defeated visiting South Alabama 2-0.

With the victory the Seminoles improve to 31-6 overall.

“It was a good win and I told the guys that,” FSU head coach Mike Martin said. “When you have a young club and sometimes when they go through what they were going through they start getting frustrated. They start just getting out of themselves. They did not do any of that.

“They stayed mentally involved in the game and got it done. That’s a credit to them.”

Miller and South Alabama starter Payton Gardner duelled for six innings on Tuesday night, with both pitchers making quick work of the opposing lineup.

Miller wound up going 6 2/3 innings, allowing two hits, walking one and striking out four. Gardner went six innings, allowed two runs (one earned) while striking out seven and walking one.

“If he’s had a better outing I don’t know who it was against,” Martin said of Miller. “Great outing for him.”

“I’ve had some rough outings the past few weeks,” said Miller, who is now 4-1 on the season with a 3.12 ERA. “The ball kind of bounced my way this time. I still felt like I had good stuff in all the other outings, but it just kind of went my way this time. And that’s just baseball.”

The right-hander got all the offensive support he would need in the bottom of the fifth. With one out John Nogowski laced a single to left-center field and when the left fielder bobbled it momentarily he raced into second base.

“The guy was pitching great out there,” said Nogowski, who also made a terrific diving stab to end the sixth. “And I knew I hit the ball pretty well and you’ve just got to push the issue a little bit. I saw the guy bobbled it and I just kind of put my head down and went.

“Luckily I got there.”

The hustle paid off when freshman John Sansone served a slider into right field for an RBI single. Giovanni Alfonzo followed with another single to right and Sansone then scored on an RBI groundout from Seth Miller.

It was the lone inning where FSU had multiple hits as Gardner, who came into Tuesday night with a 7.71 ERA in just 4 2/3 innings pitched, confounded the Seminoles with changeup after changeup after changeup.

“We were dominated by that guy,” Martin said. “He struck out seven but I think we’ll all agree it felt like 14.”

“You just wanted to think singles with him,” Sansone said. “I just tried to put the bat on the ball and luckily it fell in there somewhere.”

Not many did for FSU on Tuesday night.

Yet the two-run fifth was enough as the Seminoles got more solid relief work from Billy Strode, Gage Smith and closer Robby Coles to wrap up their 31st victory of the season.

In a game that lasted exactly two hours.

“That was one of the quickest games on record,” Martin said.

Which was nice for the starting pitcher.

“It definitely helped,” Miller said. “You stay in a groove. You don’t have to sit down. Your arm doesn’t get cold and everything. You don’t have to go outside (the dugout) and warm up. It definitely affects the game.”

Florida State plays again on Friday when it travels to Charlottesville to take on No. 8 Virginia Cavaliers.

Delph released from hospital

Florida State sophomore Josh Delph was released from the hospital on Tuesday after being treated for meningoenephalitis. Martin said he thought it would be at least two weeks before Delph could play again for the Seminoles. He will not be making the trip to Virginia.

DeLand native Luke Weaver continues to shine in FSU's ace role

Entering tough series at Virginia, Weaver tries to continue to pace 'Noles
April 18, 2013 | By Coley Harvey, Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — As he strutted his long, lean frame toward the pitcher's mound at Miami's Mark Light Field, Luke Weaver was talking to himself, offering simple reminders that he was just pitching in another ballgame.

Focus on getting ahead of each hitter. Throw strikes. Get quick outs. Use your slider effectively.

Remain calm.

The statements are the same ones the Florida State right-hander ponders whenever he prepares for a hopeful seven-, eight- or nine-inning start, but on April 5, when the Seminoles traveled to face their rival Hurricanes, they took on even greater significance.

"I knew Miami was a really good team and it's a big rivalry, but I knew I had to stay within myself and stay relaxed and not get too over-amped and out of my normal game routine," Weaver said.

Aside from starting against the Hurricanes for the first time, there was another reason the sophomore from DeLand was trying to center his thoughts that much more. He was accomplishing another important individual first. At long last, his watching and waiting had ended. His prayers had been answered. He was entering FSU's weekend rotation as a potential full-time starter.

"You always want to be in the weekend rotation. That's your main goal," Weaver said.

With left-handed ace Brandon Leibrandt struggling to find consistency, the Seminoles decided to shake up their pitching rotation before embarking to South Florida. Their steady, mid-week go-to guy, Weaver, was moved to the top of the staff, taking over Leibrandt's Friday night duties. The sophomore lefty moved into the Saturday night role, with senior Scott Sitz moving from pitching on Saturdays to pitching on Sundays.

Three weeks later, ahead of another important road series, the changes appear to have paid off.

"We have other guys who have been pitching well," Weaver said. "I knew that it's definitely something that I've had to earn. I'd have to pitch well."

As No. 6 FSU (31-6, 13-5 ACC) travels to No. 8 Virginia (32-6, 13-5) on Friday evening for the first game of a three-game conference series, Weaver will look to build upon his perfect 4-0 record. In nine appearances this season, including seven starts, he has not recorded a loss. He also boasts a 1.40 ERA and a team-high 51 strikeouts.

"He's done a great job of attacking the [strike] zone this year, and then once he's been in the zone, he's being able to put guys away or get the easy out with two or three pitches," FSU pitching coach Mike Bell said.

Since taking over as the Friday starter, Weaver has a win and has allowed just three earned runs in 12 innings. After beating rival Florida twice in earlier mid-week starts, he earned a five-inning no-decision against Miami before silencing Duke's bats in a 16-2 thumping in Tallahassee last weekend.

Weaver's start at Miami marked the first time since 2011 that any pitcher other than Leibrandt had started for FSU on a Friday night.

"I've been really happy about the whole transition," Weaver said. "I tried not to change anything when I came into this new role. It's been a little different. There may be more pressure pitching the first game of the series because they're important, but I try not to look at it like that. I just try to stay calm, collected about the whole thing and try to do the best that I can."

Weekend Preview: April 19-21

April 18, 2013 by [Aaron Fitt](#)

12

The Week 10 schedule is loaded with key showdowns across the country, from the Pac-12 to the Southeastern Conference to the Big West to Conference USA. We'll touch on some of those key matchups below, but let's focus on some ACC matchups with major postseason ramifications.

Virginia Hosts Florida State In Clash Of ACC Titans

For decades, Florida State has been a model of consistency, racking up 40- and 50-win seasons year after year, regardless of roster turnover. Whenever the Seminoles enter a season with modest national expectations because of inexperience, they consistently out-perform those expectations.

During Brian O'Connor's regime, Virginia has reached that same level. The Cavaliers entered each of the last two seasons unranked because of inexperience in the lineup (heading into 2012) and on the mound (heading into this season). Last year, the Cavaliers won 39 games and hosted a regional. This year, they are 32-6 overall, 13-5 in the ACC, and jockeying for a national seed.

"I'll just tell you, if Virginia's not one of the top five teams in the country, I don't know who is," Florida State coach Mike Martin said. "What they've accomplished over the years, they're very, very good. It's a credit to Brian O'Connor and Mac (assistant coach Kevin McMullan), (pitching coach) Karl Kuhn and the great job that they do at Virginia. Their weather is not the greatest but yet it does not deter them at all from being at the level they're at, year after year after year. That's a credit to them."

Naturally, Florida State—which entered the season ranked No. 20 for the second straight year after losing its entire infield, its best player (James Ramsey), its closer (Robert Benincasa) and its No. 2 starter (Mike Compton) from last year—is also putting together a strong national seed resume, with a 31-6 overall record, a matching 13-5 conference mark, and a Ratings Percentage Index ranking in the top eight, just like Virginia's. Maybe the Atlantic Coast Conference can produce three national seeds, with the Cavs and Seminoles joining top-ranked North Carolina, but whichever team wins the series this weekend in Charlottesville will be in the driver's seat.

TOP 25 SCHEDULE

- Duke at (1) North Carolina
- (2) Vanderbilt at Georgia
- (3) Louisiana State at Alabama
- (4) Cal State Fullerton at (23) Cal Poly
- (5) Oregon State at Washington
- (6) Florida State at (7) Virginia
- (8) Louisville at St. John's
- Valparaiso at (9) Arizona State
- (13) UCLA at (10) Oregon
- New Orleans at (11) Oklahoma
- Texas A&M at (12) Arkansas
- (15) North Carolina State at (14) Georgia Tech
- Auburn at (16) Mississippi State
- (17) Kentucky at (18) South Carolina
- (19) Indiana vs./vs./at Butler
- (20) Clemson at Miami
- (21) Mississippi at Tennessee
- (22) Rice at Houston
- (24) Gonzaga at Pepperdine
- (25) UNC Wilmington at George Mason

Both the Seminoles (2.60 staff ERA) and Cavaliers (2.76) have gotten outstanding work from their pitchers, especially in the bullpen. In Kyle Crockett, Austin Young, Whit Mayberry, David Rosenberger and Josh Sborz, Virginia has five relievers who have logged at least 10 appearances and have ERAs below 2.00. Crockett, a junior lefthander, has been a sensation at the back of the bullpen, going 3-0, 0.62 with seven saves and an incredible 37-1 strikeout-walk mark in 29 innings. He was slowed by a back injury entering the season, and the Cavs eased him into action in the bullpen while considering whether or not to eventually move him into the rotation. His lights-out work in relief wound up making that decision easy.

"I knew with having a relatively inexperienced team, I wanted somebody at the end of the game who had experience, as well as good stuff," O'Connor said. "He had the most experience on our pitching staff. He seems to have grabbed hold of the role and is excelling. His stuff is a lot better than you will have seen the last two years. He's pretty much 90-92, will touch 93. He has a really good slider, a good changeup, and his command is so good. The guy's got one walk on the year and it's an intentional walk. So you've got to beat him. He's not going to beat himself."

Likewise, Florida State has gotten rock-solid work from a deep bullpen group, with six pitchers—Robby Coles, Gage Smith, Billy Strode, Brandon Johnson, Jameis Winston and Bryant Holtmann—logging ERAs of 3.08 or lower in double-digit appearances. Coles (2-1, 0.79, eight saves, 27-9 strikeout-walk mark in 23 innings) has been the anchor, but Martin made a point to highlight the strong work of lefthander Strode (1-0, 1.93), who has made three midweek starts and seven relief appearances.

"I really like the way Billy Strode is pitching out of the bullpen," Martin said. "He's a very good fielding pitcher, a good athlete, former football player. He pitched at Indian River (Fla., JC) last year, decided to transfer after his first year. (Pitching coach) Mike Bell took him in the fall program, he wasn't very impressive. Then as the season started, he got better and better and better. He's not an overpowering guy, but he's about a three-quarter guy and he's been very effective for us. Good slider, developing change."

Each team has had a weekend starter take a major step forward. For Virginia, fifth-year senior lefthander Scott Silverstein (6-0, 3.42 with 42 strikeouts and 13 walks in 50 innings) has become a rock on Saturdays, pitching much deeper into games than he did last year, when he was still working his way back to full strength after multiple shoulder surgeries.

"His velocity is better consistently," O'Connor said. "He's pretty much 88-92, might flash you a 93, and he's doing a much better job of throwing downhill. Last year was really his first full season pitching in our uniform, and I think he ran out of gas in the back half of the year, because he's never been in that situation before. Overall, I just think his stuff is better, and he's more consistent, because he's 100 percent healthy. His secondary stuff is good—he's got a slider and a changeup. The slider's a good pitch, occasional change. He's a guy that's going to come after you."

For Florida State, sophomore righthander Luke Weaver (4-0, 1.40 with 51 strikeouts and six walks in 45 innings) has learned to harness his electric stuff, and he has found a home in the Friday starter role after beginning the season as the midweek starter. Martin said Weaver pitches at 92 mph with good life on his fastball, which can reach 96. He's developed a very good slider, and his changeup is

still a work in progress. Now Florida State's rotation presents opposing hitters with three very distinct looks, as the power-armed Weaver is followed by a finesse lefty (Brandon Leibrandt) on Saturdays and a bulldog righty slider specialist (Scott Sitz) on Sundays.

The Florida State pitching staff will face a formidable challenge this weekend. Through nine weeks, Virginia's offense ranked seventh in the nation in scoring and walks, second in triples and 12th in slugging. The Cavaliers have a deep, athletic, explosive lineup with a patient, dynamic catalyst in sophomore shortstop Branden Cogswell (.364/.486/.462 with four triples and a 32-15 walk-strikeout mark), a wily senior with good bat-handling skills in the No. 2 hole (Jared King) followed by a powerful heart of the order.



Scott Silverstein (Photo by Carl Kline)

Freshman Joe McCarthy (.309/.467/.441 with three homers and 30 RBIs) is an on-base machine with a disciplined approach and a pretty swing, and he has been a revelation as the No. 3 hitter. Three dangerous sophomores hit behind him: Brandon Downes (.309/.402/.544, 5 HR, and 36 RBI), Mike Papi (.393/.535/.702, 5 HR, 30 RBI) and Derek Fisher (.321/.434/.554, 4 HR, 32 RBI). It is natural to compare this Virginia lineup to the standout offenses of the 2009-11 Cavaliers, and O'Connor doesn't shy away from that comparison.

"They were really good athletes that could run, and hit the ball out of the ballpark too," he said, referring to those past UVa. teams. "I think this is a very similar offensive club. I think we've got the ability to score runs from anywhere in the lineup. You look at our guys 3-7, with McCarthy, Downes, Papi, Fisher, (Nick)Howard—those are big, physical guys that are also really athletic. We have a guy at the top in Cogswell who can handle the bat and run, get on base a lot. King's a battler, (senior second baseman Reed) Gragnani's having a nice year. So you feel like your run production doesn't have to just come from one group of guys in the middle of the lineup."

The Cavs have a more potent offense than the Seminoles, and they also have a defensive edge. UVa.'s infield is more experienced and features a slick double-play tandem in Cogswell and Gragnani, plus an outstanding defensive catcher in Nate Irving. FSU also has a fine catcher in Stephen McGee, but the infield defense has been up and down. Jose Brizuela is fielding .875 at third base, and middle infielders Giovanni Alfonzo and John Sansone are improving but are not at the same level as last year's double-play tandem, Justin Gonzalez and Devon Travis.

“Let’s just say it this way: Of late we have played better,” Martin said. “We have played very good defense of late, and we know that we have to play solid defense every night to be successful. For a guy like me, it’s been very, very challenging from a mental standpoint. Because you expect things to be done because of what you’ve seen, but yet you’ve got four new guys out there. Not three, but four. I’m very pleased, though, with the way they’re playing.”

The bullpens match up well against each other, but give Florida State the edge in the rotation, because freshman lefthander Brandon Waddell and sophomore righty Howard have not pitched as well in the last month as they did in the first half of the season—although Waddell was solid in defeat last week at Georgia Tech, allowing just two runs over 5 2/3 innings.

“The big thing is our starting pitching needs to go deeper in ballgames like we were in the first half of the season,” O’Connor said. “We’ve just got to get it more consistent. But you know what? A lot of people have the same problem. How many people out there, all three of their starters on the weekend are going out there and giving you seven innings? So I don’t want to be too critical of it. But our team has unbelievable fight. We’ve fallen behind in games and crawled back in every ballgame and had a chance to win. So from an offensive standpoint, you feel like your’e never out of a ballgame.

“Overall, I think it’s a team that is still growing even though we’re 32-6 or whatever. I still think that we can get better. Any coach would say that about any team, but there are certainly areas that we can improve on. But overall, I think we’ve got a pretty darn good club.”

So does Florida State. But in both cases, what else is new?

Miami Seeks Signature Series Win Against Clemson

It hasn’t been a typical year for Miami, one of the most successful and consistent programs in college baseball history. Sure, the Hurricanes are in good shape for an at-large bid (unlike fellow traditional power Texas, which finds itself in precarious footing again), but the Hurricanes have lost five of their last seven weekend series, and they have struggled to generate offense all season long. Through nine weeks, they ranked next to last in the ACC in scoring (4.4 runs per game, 226th in the nation), batting (.254, 231st in the nation) and slugging (.327, 239th).

“We play a lot of low-scoring games and don’t score a lot of runs every single game,” Miami coach Jim Morris said. “It’s an interesting scenario coming from where Miami used to be, scoring a bunch of runs.

“We’re starting four rookie infielders. Dale Carey has struggled—we expected him to hit closer to .390, not .190. And we haven’t had a solid starter every day in left field. So our lineup has changed a lot. I think the young guys are starting to make adjustments, but we’re starting a lot of young guys. We’ve done it before, and I keep going to bed thinking, ‘In ’06 we started four or five freshman too.’ ”

That 2006 Miami team went on to win a regional and a super regional on the road to reach Omaha. Of course, that team was loaded with future big leaguers—Jemile Weeks, Yonder Alonso, Jon Jay, Danny Valencia and Blake Tekotte. A number of those players were freshmen who came on strong down the stretch, and Miami hopes its talented young players can make a similar second-half run

Cavs finish off sweep of 'Noles

Sitz takes first loss as FSU falls again, 5-2

Apr 21, 2013 |

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA. — Before this past weekend, the Florida State baseball hadn't lost two consecutive games all year.

Now they've lost three straight, as eighth-ranked Virginia completed a three-game sweep Sunday afternoon with a 5-2 victory before a capacity crowd of 4,980.

FSU, which entered the week ranked No. 6 in the country, fell to 31-9, 13-8 in the ACC. The Cavaliers improved to 35-6 and 16-5.

"It was obviously a very good baseball game," FSU coach Mike Martin said. "I thought the University of Virginia just took it to us for three ball games, and they deserve all the credit."

Senior right-hander Scott Sitz fell to 7-1 after suffering his first loss of the season. Sitz cruised through the first two innings, retiring the first six Cavalier batters on just 19 pitches, before Virginia tagged him for four runs in the bottom of the third.

Sitz would leave the game after 41/3innings of work, allowing five hits and two walks while striking out three. Relievers Billy Strode and Gage Smith kept the Seminoles in striking distance as they combined to work 22/3 scoreless innings in relief.

Strode has not given up a run in 13.0 innings of relief this year – a span covering eight appearances.

But Virginia got another outstanding performance from a starting pitcher as Nick Howard (5-3) gave the Cavaliers 62/3 solid innings Sunday. The sophomore right-hander held the Seminoles to just one run on five hits as he walked three and struck out four.

Kyle Crockett worked the final two innings to earn his ninth save of the season. The junior southpaw allowed just one hit while striking out four.

"They just did a very good job of pitching," Martin said. "They are a solid baseball team; there are no weaknesses on their ball club."

Florida State had its chances to put runs on the board early but could not come up with the key hit, leaving five runners stranded through the first two innings. The Seminoles left the bases loaded in the first after Seth Miller led off the game with a single to right center followed by walks to DJ Stewart and Jose Brizuela. Howard got out of the jam by getting Jameis Winston to fly out to center.

In the second inning, the Seminoles put together back-to-back one-out singles by John Sansone and Giovanni Alfonzo, but Howard once again answered the call and kept FSU off the scoreboard by getting Miller to fly out and Stewart swinging on strikes to retire the side. For the game, Florida State stranded nine base-runners.

Virginia surged to the lead scoring four times in the bottom of the third to take a 4-0 lead. The Seminoles cut the Virginia lead to 4-1 as Winston led off the inning with a triple off the wall in right-center and scored one pitch later on Casey Smit's sac-fly to right.

Florida State then added a run in the seventh, taking advantage of a Cavalier error to make the score 4-2. But Virginia added another run in the eighth to provide the final margin.

"Three ball games doesn't make a season," Martin said. "We got beat; we lost three ball games. We are going to go back, we are going to try and get better, correct some mistakes and work to improve."

FSU returns to action Tuesday at Jacksonville University.

FSU baseball looks to bounce back at JU

Apr 22, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

Over the last three decades, the Florida State baseball team hasn't experienced a whole lot of weekends like this past one in Charlottesville, Va.

Not only did the Seminoles get swept by Virginia, but they never once led in any of the three games.

"It was just one of those weekends that we never got a big hit," said FSU head coach Mike Martin. "We had a team that was really hitting on all cylinders. They were a real good-looking club. You just have to tip your hat to them. They played beautiful baseball."

The Seminoles, of course, did not. They scored just four runs in three games and collected 14 hits total.

Following the sweep, FSU dropped from No. 6 in the USA Today coaches' poll to No. 9. Virginia rose from No. 8 to No. 5.

Now, the Seminoles (31-9) will try to get back on track with a midweek game at Jacksonville (14-25). In the grand scheme of postseason hopes, tonight's showdown with the Dolphins isn't overly important. But with a young team like the Seminoles, Martin knows a win — any win — can be big for confidence moving forward.

"It's always important to play well in the next game you play after experiencing a weekend like we did," Martin said. "You get those thoughts out of your mind, you move forward. Playing well (tonight) is a key issue on our minds, and we're just hoping we go out and play like we're capable of and get it done."

The FSU coach said junior Peter Miller (4-1, 3.12 ERA) will get the start for the Seminoles. He also said that sophomore Josh Delph, who has been battling an illness, is feeling better but will not make the trip to Jacksonville. There is still no timetable for Delph's return.

Fellow outfielder Brett Knief (hamstring) is likely out as well, as Martin wants him to be fully healed before putting him in the lineup again.

FSU baseball slams host Jacksonville, 9-0

Seminoles' arms, bats come through in shutout victory

Apr. 24, 2013 |

Written by

Natalie Pierre

NoleSports.com reporter

JACKSONVILLE — Florida State's players had a bad taste in their mouths as they took the field at Jacksonville's John Sessions Stadium Tuesday night.

But after a tremendous outing from starter Peter Miller and impressive hitting by FSU in the second and seventh innings, that feeling started to go away as the Seminoles rolled to a 9-0 victory over the Dolphins to end their three-game losing streak.

The game was No. 9 Florida State's (32-9) fifth shutout of the season and gave them the 2-0 sweep over Jacksonville.

"It was important because we had a nasty taste in our mouth from Virginia, so it was good to bounce back," said freshman Jamies Winson, who recorded a pair of doubles. "We talked about it. We just wanted to go out there and have a good day as a team and just have good momentum going into the game against Wake Forest."

Winston was one of five Seminoles to record multiple hits in the victory.

The 'Noles jumped out to an early lead with five runs in the top of the second before extending their lead with a four-run seventh inning.

In front of a crowd of just over a thousand — mostly Florida State fans — freshman DJ Stewart had a two-hit night, driving in a game-high five runs in front of his hometown crowd.

But Miller remained consistent throughout the night, extending his scoreless inning streak to 14, which dates back to last week. The junior right-hander pitched a career-high seven innings Tuesday to improve to 5-1 on the year.

"What was so impressive tonight was his ability to throw the change-up literally any time he wanted to throw it," Florida State coach Mike Martin said. "Peter Miller is slowly but surely getting better and better with each outing."

With outfielder Josh Delph still sick and unable to play, Winston started in right field before working a scoreless inning of his own on the mound in the ninth.

Winston, who also has a chance to be Florida State's starting quarterback, was clocked at 97 mph on a radar gun that Jacksonville officials maintain is very close to accurate.

“Jameis is a special player,” Martin said. “This is one of the few times in his career — I know at Florida State — that he’s been able to spend this much time with baseball. Let’s just hope that he continues to get better as we go through this.”

Winston’s two hits tied a career high.

Tuesday’s matchup also marked the first time Jose Brizuela missed a start for the ‘Noles this season. Martin said it had more to do with Brizuela needing to focus on academics more than anything game-related.

Casey Smit got his first career start at third in his place, but Martin expects Brizuela to be available this weekend as Florida State returns to ACC play, hosting Wake Forest in a three-game series beginning Friday.

'Dedicated Captain' FSU Baseball

Dave Griffiths | Posted: Wednesday, April 24, 2013 9:33 pm

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – It's a busy day in the training room at Dick Howser Stadium. Florida State baseball will play Duke later in the evening, and players are coming in and out for treatment, making sure they're at their best when it's time for first pitch in a few hours.

“What if someone's chasing you?”

The question was directed at Justin Gonzalez. The Noles' captain is out for the season after undergoing surgery on his right hip. Gonzalez has freshly ditched his crutches and hip brace, but is still a month away from being allowed to run. He leans up on his elbow from the training table.

“They catch me,” he grins. “I won't be playing hide and go seek or manhunt anytime soon.”

The captain. Too weak to even run, much less go nine innings three to five days a week and provide a strong example of production on the field for his teammates. Still, even before this season began, Gonzalez knew his role as captain would involve much more than on-field performance.

“I had to be the guy who had to focus when everyone else wanted to have fun,” he explains. “I had to be the guy that, even though things weren't going well for him, I had to stay even keel. I was preparing myself all summer for that.”

As it turns out, that preparation to persevere was very much needed.

Gonzalez began the season with tightness in his right hip. In the Noles' very first game, Gonzalez, from his position at shortstop, chased a ball hit up the middle, and knew right then he had something more than just a little tightness.

After five games, Gonzalez had to sit out because he could no longer play through the pain in his hip. After two weeks of hopelessly trying to work out the tightness, he traveled to Colorado for season ending surgery.

The captain. Done for the year, and it wasn't even March.

“When [that surgery] happened,” remembers FSU head coach Mike Martin, “I got to thinking how it would affect him.” What coach wouldn't think the same? The one person you hoped would lead your team, be a model of consistency on field and off, couldn't face another pitch, take another grounder, or turn another double play.

But Martin's thoughts wound up elsewhere.

“Of all the guys I've coached,” he adds, “Gonzo would probably handle this better than anybody.”

So just how has Justin Gonzalez handled this situation? At the very least, he has a sense of humor about it now and can laugh about his inability to escape a pursuer in the training room, but there is no disappointment in his day-to-day role as captain either, a role he eagerly embraces.

“When you're away from the game,” Gonzalez says, “you realize you can't feel sorry for yourself, and I think that's the biggest lesson that I've learned. When you're in the game, there's a lot of emotion going on, but trying to stay even keel is what I try [to do]. You know, help out these guys who may not be doing as well as they want.”

That help Gonzalez offers certainly doesn't fall on deaf ears. His impact on the team is undeniable, and it's ironic his so-called off-the-field leadership is most clear when he's physically on the field, among his teammates.

Gonzalez is at the center of every huddle, leading the Noles in prayer before lineups are announced pregame. He's the first out of the dugout to congratulate a teammate after a home run, or to welcome the pitcher back to the dugout after an inning is complete.

Ask Mike Martin about Gonzalez' impact on the team. After 34 years as head coach, Martin changed his attitude regarding bringing injured players on road trips because of that impact.

“I've never taken a guy on the road who I knew couldn't play,” Martin unwaveringly states, “but I don't want to go anywhere without Gonzo being there to encourage his teammates and do the little things that he can do to make us a better team.”

The little things. The most important things a captain can do.