

Sloppy Seminoles slip past Mercer 6-5

By RICK ROBB

Democrat executive sports editor

Florida State tried to give away a baseball game Tuesday, but Mercer-Macon handed it right back.

The Seminoles rallied for three eighth-inning runs on only one one hit — a weak bouncer that went for a bad-hop single — to edge Mercer 6-5 at Seminole Field.

The victory snapped a four-game losing streak for the Seminoles, 8-6, but not until they had done everything in their power to extend the skid.

Three errors on routine plays led to four unearned runs by the Bears, but FSU coach

Mike Martin was willing to overlook them. He simply was too relieved about winning for the first time in a week.

"This is one of the biggest wins we've had in my seven years at FSU," Martin said. "We needed this game very badly."

FSU won in less-than-dramatic fashion. Trailing 5-3 with one out in the eighth, Craig Ramsey and pinch-hitter Ken Huff drew walks off starter Scott Barnhouse. Lionel Martinez followed with a bunt and Barnhouse attempted to get the force at third. Ramsey beat the throw and all runners were safe.

Don DeLoach's sacrifice fly accounted for the first run. Then Mike Fuentes hit a slow

bouncer that scooted over the head of shortstop Jeff Thompson to drive in the tying run.

After Jeff Ledbetter was intentionally walked, Barnhouse hit Joe Licata to force in the winning run.

"It was an unbelievable game," Martin said. "We got three runs behind when the other team hadn't even hit the ball hard, then things finally went our way in the eighth inning."

"We've been struggling for four games now, but the kids wouldn't fold. They wouldn't give up and say, 'Well, it's just not our day today.'"

For a while, it didn't look like the Seminoles' day.

After taking a 2-0 lead in the third inning on

Ledbetter's two-run single, FSU's defense fell apart.

In the fourth, the Bears had runners on first and second with two out when Dave Jedneski hit a grounder to DeLoach at shortstop. DeLoach appeared to have an easy force at second but threw the ball into right field, allowing Wayne Ryle to score.

The fifth inning was worse. After Mercer's Lawrence Walters singled, Jeff Thompson hit an easy grounder to second that Martinez booted. Ryle followed with a bunt, and Ramsey, the catcher, threw wildly to first, allowing Walters

and Thompson to score and Ryle to reach third base.

FSU got a run back in the seventh when Martinez doubled and scored on a single by Fuentes.

The Seminoles' eighth-inning rally saved starter Jeff Gray from a hard-to-swallow loss. Gray, making his first start of the season, gave up only one earned run before needing last-out relief help from Jamie Shouppe.

Gray scattered nine hits, walked two and struck out four. The performance was a welcome relief for Martin, whose staff had been rocked for 43 runs in the four-game losing streak.

"Gray is a tremendous competitor," Martin said. "He has a lot of poise for a freshman. As far as I'm concerned, he deserves to be in the

starting rotation."

Gray, 2-0, was delighted to hear Martin's remarks.

"I feel great; that really fires me up," Gray said. "I thought my job on the mound was better than the scoreboard indicated."

So far, FSU has been a team of streaks: two losses, seven victories, four losses. Ledbetter, for one, believes Tuesday's victory will start another one.

"I think we've been going in the right direction the whole time," he said. "Jacksonville was a tough loss (10-9), and we should have taken the first two at Miami. There's no way you're going to convince me we're not as good a team as Miami."

Florida State and Mercer play again today in Macon. The Seminoles then will travel to Gainesville for a two-game series against Florida Friday and Saturday.

FLORIDA STATE

Mercer 000 131 000-5
Florida State 002 000 13x-6
E—Martinez, DeLoach, Ramsey,
Shouse. DP—Florida State 2. LOB—Mercer
7, Florida State 12. 2B—Martinez, Ledbetter.
3B—Millerd. S—Ryle, Martinez. SF—De-
Loach.

	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Mercer						
Barnhouse (L, 2-1)	8	8	6	6	8	1
Florida State						
Gray (W, 2-0)	8½	9	5	1	2	4
Shouppe (S)	½	0	0	0	0	1

HBP—by Barnhouse (Licata). PB—Walters. T—2:35. A—590.