

Rickards' Givens earns scholarship

Shortstop to play softball for St. Johns River CC next season

By David Sáez
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Some years back Rickards High softball coach Mindi Buckles told current senior shortstop Nikki Givens that she had the talent to go to college for free.

On Friday morning, Givens made it real by signing a national letter of intent to attend college at St. Johns River Community College in Palatka on a softball scholarship.

Givens became the first player in Buckles' three years as the head coach to earn a softball scholarship.

"I'm really proud of her," said Buckles, who played at St. Johns River for one year. "She's worked really hard for it. She eats, breathes, and lives softball."

"She's a spark plug for her team. She's a huge part of our team."

Givens, 18, is a .500-average batter who came into the current

season with a total of 82 bases in the previous two seasons. Her speed and .500 on-base percentage make her a catalyst for the Raiders. She'll likely play outfield in college.

"(St. Johns River) is lucky," Buckles said. "We're losing something that I don't know we'll ever replace. It's going to be tough."

The left-handed batting Givens said she chose St. John's River because of the bond the players on the team have.

"They kind of have a sisterhood that no one can ruin," Givens said. "The team's close, and that's a big reason I decided to go there."

Her familiarity with the St. Johns River program also attracted her to the school. The Vikings' assistant coach Robert Atwood coached Givens for two years on the Gainesville Warriors 18-and-under travel team.

"Even though it's a com-



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Rickards High senior Nikki Givens signed a national letter of intent to play softball at St. Johns River Community College next year.

munity college, they can teach me a lot," Givens said. "After they invest in me for two years, they will help me showcase what I can become so I can go to a four-year school."

Givens was selected to the Tallahassee Democrat 2008 All-Big Bend softball team during her junior season. She said it wasn't until last year that she became serious about softball.

"At first softball wasn't a big deal to me," Givens said. "I was into basketball and played softball to stay in shape."

That changed with her success the previous two seasons.

"I'm excited about it because I love softball," Givens said. "Softball's my get-a-way. I get to leave here and have a new experience. It's a new start."