

Did the officiating make yesterday's win harder than it should have been?

Send in your answer at projosports.com/patriots



IT'S A DAY AT THE RACES: View the gallery at HSGameTime.com/rhodeisland

Pats wrap

A gallery of game photos, postgame reaction and breaking news today on the PatsBlog, at projosports.com/patriots

How close was it?

Very close, as evidenced by the final stats in yesterday's Pats-Colts game:

	PATS	COLTS
Avg. yds. per rush	3.8	3.8
Avg. yds. per pass	7.0	7.0
Total plays	62	61

For up-to-the-second stats and scores: projosports.com/patriots



SECTION B
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**Pats 24
Colts 20**

THE HYPE

Super Bowl 41½. The most anticipated regular-season game in National Football League. The Hyperbole Level was off the charts for yesterday's Patriots-Colts game

THE REALITY

If it didn't live up to all that — and what could? — it was still plenty good, especially from the Patriots' point of view.

REVENGE . . .

It was the Pats' first trip to Indianapolis since their bitter loss to the Colts in last year's AFC Championship Game, when they blew a 21-3 second-quarter lead and lost, 38-34, on a last-minute touchdown by **Joseph Addai**.

. . . IS SWEET

New England turned the tables on Indianapolis almost completely. Unlike last year, when the Colts marched up and down the field at will against the Patriots defense over the final 2½ quarters, New England stopped **Peyton Manning** in the second half yesterday. And this time it was the Pats who were the comeback kids, rallying from a 20-10 deficit in the final 9½ minutes.

A NEW YEAR

The Pats lost last January's game in no small part because they were unable to convert a third-down pass. In the last 2½ minutes that would have enabled them to keep the ball and run out the clock. But yesterday, **Tom Brady** completed a third-and-6 pass to **Wes Welker** with 2:13 left that gave the Patriots the first down they needed to clinch the game.

THE RESULT

The Patriots remain unbeaten. They now lead the Colts — and have the tie-breaker edge — in the battle for top seed in the AFC playoffs. And they snapped a three-game, two-and-a-half season losing streak against their biggest rival.

WHAT HE SAID

"You have to give a lot of credit to New England. We were up 10 points in the fourth quarter and they found a way to come back and win. They played with championship effort, championship big plays down the stretch, and they made them and we did not." — **Tony Dungy**, Colts coach.



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH

The Colts' Peyton Manning watches his fumble bounce away after a fourth-quarter sack by the Patriots' Ty Warren and Junior Seau yesterday in Indianapolis.

GREAT ESCAPE

New England displays perfect (9-0) finishing touch

BY SHALISE MANZA YOUNG
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

INDIANAPOLIS —The New England Patriots' previous eight wins this season were things of beauty, created with paintbrushes on a FieldTurf canvas.

But for yesterday's 24-20 come-from-behind win over the Indianapolis Colts, the Patriots had to trade their painters' caps for hard hats.

It wasn't as much a work of art as it was

hard work.

New England staked its claim as the best team in the NFL, and needed every one of the game's 60 minutes to overcome the challenges set forth by the Colts on both sides of the ball, the problems they brought upon themselves with nearly 150 yards in penalties, and the 10-point hole they found themselves in with 9:42 left on the clock.

Tom Brady, used to producing masterworks this season, yesterday reverted to the

familiar role of foreman, getting all his guys to work — to great success.

"It took us 60 minutes," Brady said. "This is the first time we were really in a [close] ball game late. I was real proud of the way the guys responded down the stretch. There was never any loss of confidence."

Certainly not from Brady, who has made comebacks his trademark.

Yesterday's first half was similar to the second half of January's AFC Champion-

ship Game — Peyton Manning seemed to find all the right receivers, and running back Joseph Addai all the right holes. New England was flagged for five penalties totaling 102 yards in the opening 30 minutes, including two pass-interference calls that the New England defense was able to overcome, holding the Colts to Adam Vinatieri chip-shot field goals on both.

SEE PATRIOTS, B4



Randy Moss is tackled as he catches a touchdown pass in the second quarter of yesterday's game, putting the Pats ahead, 7-3.

Real test for red-hot Patriots comes when weather gets cold

INDIANAPOLIS — The still-undefeated Patriots are, unquestionably and indisputably, the best team in football.

Not that that matters.

Not now, anyway.

Not in early November. Not, at least, to Tom Brady. Or to his New England teammates, who came from 10 points behind in the fourth quarter yesterday against the previously unbeaten Colts and posted a 24-20 victory in a highly hyped game that more than lived up to its billing.

"The thing is," Brady said, "we're 9-0, and it really doesn't matter. What matters is January. That's when it matters."

"Our goal wasn't to win nine games this season. Our goal is to win the AFC East and get in the best position pos-

sible for the playoffs."

The Patriots are now positioned to have home-field advantage throughout the playoffs. A year ago, they came into the RCA Dome for the AFC championship game and blew a 21-3 lead on their way to a 38-34 loss. Yesterday, the Pats were the team who came from behind to win.

"That was a hell of a game," Brady said. "They're a darn good team. To win on the road, against a team that was undefeated, that had won 12 in a row, that had won 13 straight at home — we're all excited."

It was an exciting game. Not as high-scoring as previous Patriots games have been, but more exciting.

SEE DONALDSON, B4

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