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Sure-handed

The Pats had 15 turnovers this year, the third-lowest total in NFL history:

	INT.	FUM.	TOTAL
1982 Chiefs	8	4	12
1990 Giants	9	5	14
1959 Browns	9	5	14
1943 Giants	9	5	14
2007 Patriots*	9	6	15

* — Four other teams (the 2006 Chargers, 2002 Chiefs, 2002 Jaguars and 1998 Cowboys) also had 15 turnovers in a season.

SECTION **D**

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REAL HOTSHOTS

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / **GRETCHEN ERTL**

Ellis Hobbs, hauling down the Giants' Plaxico Burress during the regular-season finale, says he's no "weak link."

Look below surface and you'll see real Hobbs

The Patriots' Ellis Hobbs is often "picked on" by opponents, but that's only because All-Pro Asante Samuel mans the other cornerback spot.

BY ROBERT LEE
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

FOXBORO — It's hard to make a name for yourself when you play in the same secondary as Pro Bowl defensive back Asante Samuel, the Patriots' "franchise" defensive back who intercepted a league-leading 10 regular-season passes last season.

And it's because of the talented Samuel that opposing quarterbacks have chosen to throw more toward third-year corner Ellis Hobbs' side of the field rather than risk a Samuel interception.

It also may be because of Samuel's talents that Hobbs is the one who many television analysts and fans have "picked on" and labeled as the "weak link" in the Patriots' secondary, which Hobbs says is untrue.

"These fans out here, they'll turn against you in a second," Hobbs said. "The media, they'll turn against you in a second. But these guys [in this locker room] know how hard I work. They see my ups. They see my downs. They know that I'm giving a consistent effort on the field every time."

While it has widely been reported on the NFL Network and ESPN that Hobbs is having a bad year because he is in the picture or making a tackle on a big pass play or a touchdown, Hobbs said commentators are only assuming that the player he is tackling or trying to catch up to is his responsibility. Often he's not, and Hobbs is either covering for someone else who made a mistake or is supposed to get help and none arrives.

He has a valid argument.

According to Stats Inc., an independent sports information and statistical analysis company, opposing teams threw in Hobbs' direction 106 times this season, ranking him 13th, but Hobbs gave up only four touchdowns. There were 44 defensive backs in the league who gave up more touchdowns than Hobbs.

Receivers caught only 58 passes in those 106 pass attempts (54.7 success rate), which is a low ratio compared to other defenders in the league. Among defensive backs thrown against at least 30 times, 156 of them were less successful than Hobbs, so Hobbs said he tries not to let what people outside of the Patriots' locker room say about him negatively bother him.

SEE **PATS, D3**

AP / **SKIP PETERSON**

Dayton's Marcus Johnson, front, struggles to control the ball as Lamonte Ulmer of URI tries to take it away during last night's game in Ohio. At right is the Flyers' Andres Sandoval.

Flyers top Rams in showdown

BY PAUL KENYON
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

DAYTON, OHIO — This is going to be fun.

If Atlantic 10 play all winter is anything like the opening night show Dayton and Rhode Island put on last night, it is going to be a great season. And an entertaining one, too.

DAYTON **92**
URI **83**

NEXT GAME
Sunday
vs. Duquesne
2 p.m.

The two ranked teams looked very much the part of A-10 heavyweights as they went toe to toe for 40 minutes before the Flyers pulled out a 92-83 victory at the UD Arena.

Urged on by a raucous sellout crowd of 13,435, the 17th-ranked Flyers led all the way as they won for the 10th straight time at home and 12th in a row overall.

Dayton played a sensational first half, making 20 of 27 shots — that's 74 percent — to build a 54-41 advantage at the break. It was a performance that would have knocked out most teams. URI somehow managed to fight back.

The Rams, showing the grit they will need to be contenders, rode terrific play by Will Daniels, Jimmy Baron and Parfait Bitee and drew as close as three, at 71-68, with 7:44 left. On this night, though, in front of this crowd, there was no way Dayton was letting the game slip away.

Guards Brian Roberts (23 points) and Marcus Johnson (14

SEE **URI, D7**

Friars' suffocating defense overwhelms Scarlet Knights

Rutgers connects on just two field goals in the second half as its offense fizzles against PC's presses and zone defense.

BY KEVIN McNAMARA
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

PROVIDENCE — The Rutgers Scarlet Knights proved to be the perfect medicine for the Providence College Friars last night.

Rutgers came into the Dunkin' Donuts Center with a reputation for offensive ineptness and after 20 exceptional minutes the Knights eventually delivered. PC outscored RU, 41-16, in the second half and coasted to a 76-50 blowout victory.

PC **76**
RUTGERS **50**

NEXT GAME
Saturday
vs. S. Florida
4 p.m.

After dropping their first two Big East games on the road, the Friars enjoyed a fun homecoming sparked for one of the few times this season by defense. Rutgers made just two field goals in the second half against PC's assortment of presses and zone defense, setting a modern-day record for fewest field goals in a half by a Friar opponent.

Providence improves to 10-5 on the season, 2-1 in the Big East and a perfect 7-0 at

SEE **PC, D7**

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / **GLENN OSMUNDSON**

Rutgers' JR Inman, left, and Jaron Griffin hem in Providence's Weyinmi Efejuku during the first half last night.

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