

Will this be Manny Ramirez's last season with the Red Sox?

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Manny in spring

See spring training photos of Ramirez from all of his seasons with Boston, at projosports.com/redsox

Sox appeal

Terry Francona struggled during his four years as Phillies manager, but his four years as Red Sox skipper have been outstanding:

	W	L	PLAY-OFFS	W.S. TITLES
Phillies	285	363	0	0
Red Sox	375	273	3	2

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SECTION C



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Patriots possibly near deal with Moss

New England's failure to designate the star receiver as a franchise player may mean a long-term contract is near.

BY SHALISE MANZA YOUNG
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

INDIANAPOLIS — The New England Patriots did not designate receiver Randy Moss as their franchise player by yesterday's 4 p.m. deadline, but the move may not have been made because it won't be necessary.

The feeling here is that Moss and the Patriots are close to a long-term deal and he won't test the free agent market.

When New England acquired Moss in a draft-day deal last April, he signed a one-year contract with incentives that marked a significant pay cut for the veteran wideout compared to what he was due to make with his previous club, Oakland.

Moss came to the Patriots and returned to his previous impressive form, with 98 catches for 1,493 yards and a league-record 23 touchdowns. He also was praised as a great teammate, and did not cause any ripples save for the restraining order a Florida woman filed against him during the playoffs.

If the Pats have come to a multi-year agreement with Moss, it cannot be announced until Feb. 29, the first day of the new NFL year.

Tom Brady has made no secret of his fondness for Moss as a teammate, and said at the Super Bowl earlier this month that he figures he has at least 10 more seasons left in him and would like to have Moss with him for as many of those as possible. Brady was not happy when the Pats traded Deion Branch to Seattle, and then replaced the former Super Bowl MVP with Reche Caldwell and Doug Gabriel; clearly, it is in New England's best interests to keep the best quarterback in the game happy.

Moss agreed to the trade from the Raiders to the Pats — which netted Oakland just a fourth-round pick — for the chance to play with Brady and play for a Super Bowl championship, the one thing missing from his résumés.

He did get to play in his first Super Bowl, catching the go-ahead touchdown for the Patriots with less than three minutes to play, but after the Giants' upset win he said New York had the better game plan and after such a loss "the only thing you can do is lick your wounds and try to come back at it next year."

Had New England franchised Moss, he would have gotten a one-year contract for a guaranteed \$7.85 million. When teams designate a franchise player, they have until July 15 to work out a long-term

SEE **MOSS, C5**

UMASS 98, URI 91

MASS DESTRUCTION

Rams pay for their mistakes against Minutemen

BY PAUL KENYON
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

SOUTH KINGSTOWN — An old problem cropped up again last night for the URI basketball team, at the worst possible time.

One reason the Rams have been better this year than last is because they have improved their ability to protect the ball. Turnovers were perhaps the biggest problem the team had last year.

The old bugaboo came back to haunt the Rams last night. Rhode Island had 20 turnovers, including two crucial ones in the final two minutes, as it was beaten by Massachusetts, 98-91, at the sold-out Ryan Center.

The two teams raced back and forth all the way in the nationally televised game and made it entertaining. The game was tied 12 times and there were 17 lead changes.

The difference came down to the

fact that URI had six more turnovers. Not only that, but the two late ones were the biggest plays of the game.

"We just turned the ball over too many times at crucial times," said Rhody coach Jim Baron. As he spoke, Baron three times went back to talking about turnovers. It was understandable.

"Everything we did wrong they capitalized on," offered URI co-captain Will Daniels.

URI shot 55 percent for the night and won the rebound battle 35-31. But UMass was equally good scoring the ball. The two big Minutemen defensive plays late in the game made the difference.

Red-shirt freshman Delroy James had just hit a 3-pointer, the first of his career, to put URI up 86-82 with 2:18 left. Ricky Harris responded with a

SEE **URI, C3**



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / RUBEN W. PEREZ

Dejected URI players Marquis Jones, Lamonte Ulmer and Delroy James can't bear to watch as the final seconds tick away during last night's game against rival UMass at the Ryan Center.

Rams suddenly seem defenseless to stop this epic slide

SOUTH KINGSTOWN — January's joy has turned into a deep and depressing February funk at the University of Rhode Island.

Ranked 22nd nationally a little over a month ago, the Rams last night fell into a four-way tie for sixth place in the Atlantic 10 following their second straight home court loss, 98-91, to the University of Massachusetts.

That's a disappointment, with a capital "D." Although, sad to say, the Rams had no "D" last night.

JIM DONALDSON

URI is still a tournament team. The problem is, they're a National Invitation Tournament team, not an NCAA tournament team.

If they can't beat UMass in the raucous Ryan Center, with face-painted students roaring and the jam-packed building rocking, they don't deserve an invitation to the Big Dance.

That's a huge letdown for a team that seemed NCAA-bound when it headed into conference play with a 14-1 mark, including wins over Providence College and at Syracuse.

What happened to that team?

"We started off like gangbusters," URI coach Jim Baron said last night, "but, as we played against different teams, they played us in different ways. We've been playing good teams that are doing a good job defending. Good teams that can shoot the basketball."

The Rams shot the ball well against UMass — 55.4 percent from the floor (31 of 56) and 40 percent from 3-point range (6 of 15) — but they didn't handle the ball very well and their defense was worse.

SEE **DONALDSON, C3**

Easy to see how he manages to get by

FORT MYERS, Fla. — It's a job like few others in sports, this business of managing the Red Sox, but

SEAN MCADAM

wouldn't have it any other way. "I love doing what I'm doing here," said Francona in a rare bit of introspection yesterday on the eve of his team's first full-squad workout. "It's hard to explain this place. This is the best job I've had ... and the hardest."

Few positions come with more pressure. Certainly, fewer still come with this degree of scrutiny. Every move Francona makes — every lineup switch, every batting-order adjustment, every in-game bit of strategy — becomes a referendum



FRANCONA

of job to have if you harbor much self-doubt. The second-guessing and 20-20 hindsight are part of the position, standard-issue, just like the office and the uniform. After managing four seasons in Philadelphia, Francona thought he had seen and heard it all. He was wrong. "I thought I had an understanding coming in (what it was about)," said

Francona. "But until you live it, you don't really know."

He was prepared for the talk-show callers and the profane comments from fans seated behind the home dugout at Fenway. He was not, however, prepared for a particular writing assignment given to his daughter's middle school English class. The topic: Should the Red Sox fire Terry Francona?

Sometimes, the passion of the fans surprises him. In a Baltimore hotel elevator last summer, he had to keep his composure while two Sox fans berated him for removing Daisuke Matsuzaka in a game the Sox' bullpen blew. The elevator

SEE **FRANCONA, C5**

MANNY MAKES HIS ENTRANCE



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH

Manny Ramirez speaks to the media after a short stint in the batting cage at Fort Myers, Fla., yesterday. Ramirez reported to spring training yesterday, skipped the team workout and said it was up to the front office whether he plays in Boston in 2009 and 2010. See Red Sox Journal, C5.