

Do you have any concerns about Ellsbury as regular leadoff man?

Tell us what you think at projosports.com/redsox



DIVISION II CAGERS WRAP UP SEMIFINALS: View the gallery at HSGameTime.com/rhodeisland

HotBytes audio

Tom Meade asked three experts about the best lures for the coming season. Hear what they said at projosports.com/hotbytes

Tale of two halves

The Patriots defense in the second half of the 2007 season allowed almost a FG more per game than it did in the first half:

GAMES	PA	PAA
First 10	157	15.7
Last 9	166	18.4

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

SECTION C



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PLAYOFF TIME



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / KRIS CRAIG

North Smithfield forward (5) Vanessa D'Andrea prepares to slip the puck past La Salle goalie Chelsea Balasco for a goal during last night's Game Three at Schneider Arena.

HIGHLIGHTS

What looked like an easy victory for the favored North Smithfield girls hockey team in last night's Division II title game turned into a grueling battle that took overtime to declare a champion. The Northmen had themselves a 3-0 lead after two periods, but La Salle came back with three unanswered goals in the third to force overtime. That's when North Smithfield's Perri Bennett scored the game-winner to give the Northmen their first postseason crown.

In the Division II girls basketball semifinals, Mount St. Charles got off to a slow start but found its rhythm midway through the first half and carried it through to defeat Woonsocket in overtime, 49-47.

In the other DII semi, Barrington's defense subdued Scituate's top scorers in Katie Birrell and Katherine Corsi and defeated the Spartans, 46-32. That makes for a five-seed (Barrington) versus a seven-seed (Mount St. Charles) in a winner-take-all game Saturday when the Eagles defend their crown.

In the Division II boys basketball semifinals, Classical's Ashton Watkins brought his A-game, scoring 27 points and grabbing 15 rebounds to lead the top-seeded Purple to a 61-54 victory over Rogers. In the other DII semi, two days after knocking off defending champion Feinstein in the quarterfinals, West Warwick defeated the second-seed Coventry, 64-44.

BOYS DIVISION III BASKETBALL SEMIFINALS

Games Tonight

Juanita Sanchez vs. Moses Brown, 6:30 p.m.
Central Falls vs. Mount St. Charles, 8 p.m.
Both games at CCRI-Warwick

FAST LEARNER

Sox' Ellsbury seems ready to blaze a trail to stardom



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH

Star prospect Jacoby Ellsbury, racing around the bases during last year's ALCS, is not only lightning quick on the basepaths, but he's also quick to pick up on any helpful hints or instructions that are presented to him.

BY SEAN MCADAM
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

By its very nature, baseball is a game defined by failure.

The best hitters make outs 70 percent of the time. The best teams lose 40 percent of their games. The grinding, day-after-day nature demands commitment while virtually guaranteeing disappointment.

But try telling that to Jacoby Ellsbury, who has a knack for making a difficult game look easy. What may be challenging to others looks natural for Ellsbury, who's competing with Coco Crisp for the Red Sox' starting center fielder's spot.

An All-American at Oregon State, Ellsbury was the Red Sox' No. 1 pick in

the 2005 draft. He hit .317 in his first year of pro ball, then combined to hit .303, splitting time between Single A and Double A ball in his first full season.

He began last year by hitting a torrid .452 at Portland before quickly being promoted to Pawtucket where he .298 and successfully stole 33 bases in 39 tries.

From there, Ellsbury hit .353 in two short stints with the Red Sox, then capped his first major league season by hitting .438 in the World Series.

It's a long-held belief among player development people that players can't

"I know how tough it is. It's a very difficult game. You're going to go through some tough times. The game definitely humbles you."

JACOBY ELLSBURY

"I know how tough it is," Ellsbury said on a recent morning. "It's a very difficult game. You're going to go through some tough times. The game definitely humbles you."

He says the words earnestly, with

truly be evaluated until they experience failure. So, where does that leave Jacoby Ellsbury?

"Maybe," said manager Terry Francona with a smile, "he already has and we just didn't notice it."

Regardless of the evidence, Ellsbury swears the game isn't easy.

Ellsbury swears the game isn't easy. Ellsbury said on a recent morning. "It's a very difficult game. You're going to go through some tough times. The game definitely humbles you."

SEE RED SOX, C5

JACOBY ELLSBURY

- **Age:** 24 (turns 25 on Sept. 11)
- **Bats and throws:** Left
- **Height:** 6-foot-1
- **Weight:** 185

■ **Scouting report:** Ellsbury is one of the fastest players in baseball, and that speed enables him to outrun the misreads he makes in center field. He will also be good for 20 to 30 infield hits a year. Along with a lefty stroke designed for Fenway, that makes him a threat to win a batting title right out of the gate. He doesn't have much power, and his rawness in center will lead to some embarrassing moments, but he's still the Rookie of the Year favorite. (Baseball Prospectus 2008).

After their sluggish start, Huskies pulled together

Thirteenth-ranked UConn is 12-1 since losing to PC in January and 23-6 overall, including 12-4 in the Big East.

BY KEVIN McNAMARA
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

PROVIDENCE — When Jim Calhoun pulled his car out of the Hartford Civic Center on a snowy night back in mid-January, he could barely see straight.

It wasn't the frosty weather that had the University of Connecticut's basketball coach seething. It was his team, a group that was playing without enough discipline and clearly underachieving for the better part of a season and a half. With no seniors and only two juniors on the team, youth was clearly an issue but not the main crux of the Huskies' problems in a 77-65 loss to Providence College that night. With a 2-3 Big East record, the Huskies had reached an early-season crossroads.

AT PROJOSPORTS.COM/PC

At projosports.com/pc: See and hear Kevin McNamara's multimedia preview of tonight's PC-UConn game, posted by midday, and check tonight for a live scoreboard and in-game blog reports from The Dunk.

"I was more surprised that we could play that bad. That really shocked me," Calhoun said yesterday.

The next day, Calhoun "chatted" with his team and then put them through a light workout. "I told them that we were a year in now as a group and not making any progress. I just started looking for things that I knew were

SEE PC, C3

CELTICS 90, PISTONS 78



AP / ELISE AMENDOLA

Celtics' Kendrick Perkins grimaces before going up for a shot against Pistons' Tayshaun Prince, left, during the first quarter of last night's game in Boston. Story, Page C4.

Pats' offense should soar, but defense has its holes

So, you're happy that the Patriots have signed Randy Moss to a three-year contract. You're delighted, thrilled — ecstatic, even.

JIM DONALDSON Well, you should be.

The guy set an NFL record last year with 23 touchdown receptions, providing a deep threat that opened up New England's offense to the point where the Patriots set an NFL record by racking up 589 points.

With Moss slashing through and past overmatched defensive backs, the Pats averaged 36.8 points per game while winning the AFC championship for the fourth time in seven years, and scored 31 or more points in 12 of their 16 regular-season games.

All of which is well and good.

Or well and very, very good, we certainly could say.

But the return of Moss, along with the signing Tuesday of Jabar Gaffney, does not guarantee that all is well for the Patriots, even though they were a mere 2:42 away from a perfect season when their championship dreams died in the desert.

While New England's high-powered offense scored a disappointing 14 points against the Giants in Super Bowl XLII, that should have been enough to win, since the final seven came on a six-yard pass from Tom Brady to Moss that gave New England a 14-10 lead with 2:42

SEE DONALDSON, C2

The Patriots have reportedly signed safety Tank Williams. Story, Page C2.