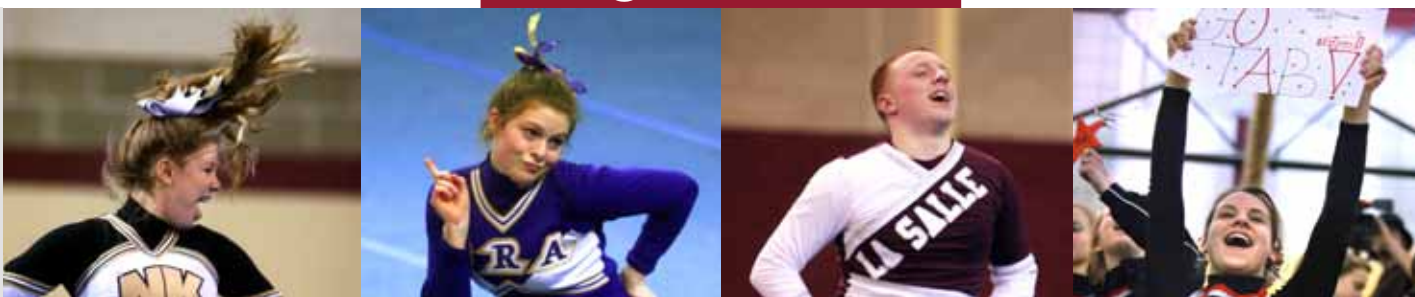


PC or URI: Will either team win a conference tournament game?

Tell us what you think at projosports.com



TOP CHEERLEADERS SELECTED: View the gallery at HSGameTime.com/rhodeisland

Hoops do-or-die
Kevin McNamara blogs PC's game at projosports.com/pc
Paul Kenyon blogs URI's game at projosports.com/uri

Friar futility

The numbers show that Tim Welsh's PC teams have not fared well at all in postseason play:

Tournament	W	L
Big East	1	8
NIT	2	5
NCAA	0	3

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

SECTION C



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2008

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Phone: 401-277-7340 Fax: 401-277-7444 E-mail: pjsports@projo.com

Who will catch on when 'Tek departs?

Jason Varitek doesn't have many years left, and the Sox don't have a great prospect in their system.

BY JOE McDONALD
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Believe it or not, there will come a time when Jason Varitek, who will be 36 next month, is no longer catching for the Boston Red Sox.

Whether that's through retirement or free agency, someone will eventually have to replace The Captain. Varitek's current contract expires at the end of this season, and despite reports that he could re-sign with the club before the end of spring training, the two sides have not had a serious conversation regarding an extension. Either way, the Red Sox need to focus on their future catching plans.

The development state of catching in professional baseball is at a low point, and the Red Sox know that all too well.



MIRABELLI

"We have some promising pitching prospects," said Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein, "but we don't have the catcher of the future in the organization. So, I don't think we are the ones to talk about how to develop catchers just yet."



CASH

"These days, it's hard to find catching talent," said Epstein, "or anyone developing who can make an impact in a competitive big-league situation."



KOTTARAS

Dusty Brown and George Kottaras hold the reins to a future job in Boston. That's not to say either one is a shoo-in.

"They are two promising catching prospects," said Epstein. "They have their own style."

Both, along with veteran Kevin Cash, have impressed management this spring.

Brown has proven to be a solid catcher with fine defensive skills, a strong arm and the ability to call and control a game. His offensive numbers need work, but the Red Sox feel he has a future behind the plate.

If he wants to succeed The Captain, Brown will have to make strides with his bat. The 6-foot, 180-pounder split time between Portland and Pawtucket last season and combined for a .260 average with 9 homers and 46 RBI in 77 games.

Kottaras, who was acquired from San Diego to complete the deal for David Wells in September 2006, struggled for the Pawtucket Red Sox last season and missed an opportunity to play in Boston when a sore knee kept him sidelined when the Red Sox needed a backup. He hit .241 with 9 home runs and 39 RBI in 87 games.

Cash was called up instead and was brought along as a nonroster player for the postseason. Cash re-signed during the offsea-

SEE **RED SOX, C5**



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH

Veteran Jason Varitek possesses all the tools you would want in a major-league catcher, and then some.

LAST STAND



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / GLENN OSMUNDSON

In order for PC head coach Tim Welsh to keep his job, the Friars are probably going to have to pull off a couple of upsets in the Big East Tournament, which begins today at Madison Square Garden in New York.

For Welsh, it's likely win or else

BY KEVIN McNAMARA
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

NEW YORK — Truth be told, Tim Welsh loves the Big Apple.

Providence College's basketball coach enjoys the restaurants, the sports-crazed feel that rises from the city's streets and the dozens of old friends he sees dating back to his days at Iona College.

Welsh loves the feel of a packed Madison Square Garden, the world's most famous arena. He registered one of his biggest wins ever as the Friars' coach at MSG when PC blew out nationally ranked Illinois in the Jimmy V Classic in 2003. He's been known to sneak into the Garden during Big East Tournament week to view intriguing matchups, especially ones involving his mentor, Syracuse's Jim Boeheim.

But when it's the Friars' turn to toss it up under the Big East Tournament spotlight, things haven't gone well for Welsh. In fact, they haven't gone well at all. Providence is 1-8 under Welsh in the tournament. The only win came in 2003 as the Friars made their way into the NIT.

PC is back at MSG and in the Big East Tournament this afternoon, but it just may be Welsh's last roundup as the Friars' coach when the 12th-seeded

SEE **PC, C2**

PC VS. WEST VIRGINIA

- **TIME:** 2 p.m.
- **SITE:** Madison Square Garden.
- **TV:** ESPN.
- **LIVE PLAY-BY-PLAY AT:** projosports.com/pc
- **TEAM RECORDS:** PC 15-15 overall, 6-12 in Big East; West Virginia 22-9 overall, 11-7 in Big East.
- **LINE:** West Virginia by 9.
- **ON PROJOSPORTS.COM:** Kevin McNamara discussed the PC coaching situation, plus the Friars' and the Rams' chances in the coming conference tournaments, in a live chat yesterday. Find the full transcript at projosports.com/hoopsblog

URI must get on the ball to reach postseason

The Rams have staggered down the stretch while Atlantic 10 tourney foe Charlotte is playing its best basketball right now.

BY PAUL KENYON
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — It is hard to imagine two teams entering any conference basketball tournament from more dramatically different directions than URI and Charlotte will tonight.

The Rams and 49ers will play for the second time in five days when they meet about 9 p.m. at Boardwalk Hall in the opening round of the Atlantic 10 Championship. The players on each

team do a good job of summing up the different attitudes going in.

"I think we're playing our best basketball of the season right now," said Leemire Goldwire, Charlotte's leading scorer. "It doesn't matter who we play next. They're going to get the best we have."

"No one is expecting anything from us except the people in this locker room," said Kahiem Seawright, the Rams' leading rebounder. "We're going to have to continue to work and hopefully get a little luck on our side. We need a little luck right now. And we've got to keep working."

The very different attitudes are understandable.

Charlotte (18-12 overall, 9-7 in the

URI VS. CHARLOTTE

- **TIME:** 9 p.m. (approximate; game will start 23 minutes after the end of the La Salle-Duquesne game).
- **SITE:** Boardwalk Hall, Atlantic City.
- **TV:** None.
- **LIVE PLAY-BY-PLAY AT:** projosports.com/uri
- **TEAM RECORDS:** URI 21-10 overall, 7-9 in Atlantic 10; Charlotte 18-12 overall, 9-7 in Atlantic 10.
- **LINE:** URI by 1.

A-10 and the sixth seed in the tournament) enters with a three-game winning streak, equaling its longest of the

season. URI (21-10, 7-9 and the 11th seed) comes in after losing seven of its last nine in the regular season.

Obviously, Charlotte has all of the momentum. Seawright, though, pointed out that his team has been able to bounce back before. Last year, the Rams lost their last three regular-season games. But they managed to gather themselves and advance to the title game of the A-10 Tournament before falling to George Washington.

Seawright, who often is the vocal leader of the team, promised that he and his teammates would gather themselves and be ready to give it their all.

"I think we're capable of doing what

SEE **URI, C2**

Unfair conference tourneys are a reach — for dough

JIM DONALDSON



should a team that lost twice as many games as it won in conference play (the 6-12, 12th-place Friars), or a team that lost seven of its last nine league

games, including its final four home games, and finished under .500 (that would be the 7-9, ninth-place Rams) have a shot — as remote as it may be — at playing for the national championship?

Shouldn't the regular season mean something?

Why should what happens in one weekend wipe out two months of conference play?

I love March Madness. But these ridiculous conference tournaments drive me crazy.

It is a never-ending source of irrita-

tion and frustration to me that the automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament does not go to the regular-season conference champion.

It doesn't make any sense that Georgetown, which finished atop the Big East with a 15-3 mark during a grueling conference campaign, or the Xavier Musketeers, whose 14-2 record was three games better than any other team in the A-10, shouldn't be rewarded for their season-long excellence with automatic bids.

Ah-hah, you say, those teams are sure to be invited to the Big Dance,

no matter what happens in the conference tournament.

Ah-hah, I say, that's exactly the problem.

Admittedly, it's not anywhere as big a problem in conferences like the Big East and the A-10, although it's possible that a team that finished in the lower half of the league standings could get hot and land an NCAA berth.

The real problem is in the smaller conferences, which aren't likely to

SEE **DONALDSON, C2**