

The Final Four is set: Who will win the championship game?

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SOX SAY FAREWELL TO EXHIBITION SEASON: View the gallery at projosports.com/redsox

Opening Day is here

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Country Club

When the N.Y. Mets open their regular season tomorrow, their projected starting rotation will consist of pitchers from four different countries:

PLAYER	COUNTRY
Pedro Martinez	D.R.
Johan Santana	Venezuela
Oliver Perez	Mexico
John Maine	U.S.
Mike Pelfrey	U.S.

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SECTION B



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Sox gird for a tough April schedule

After completing their Oakland series, Boston's next 34 games will feature 21 .500-or-better teams.

BY SEAN McADAM
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

LOS ANGELES — Their two trips across the Pacific Ocean complete and their jet lag under control, the Red Sox might be excused for thinking that the most challenging part of their 2008 schedule is complete.

In fact, it has yet to really begin. The long trips and overnight flights in which days magically disappeared — or reappeared — are over, but the Sox are about to start their most difficult April in a long time.

After the Sox complete what

they started in Tokyo by finishing their series with the Oakland A's on Wednesday, 21 of their next 34 games will come against teams that finished 2007 with .500 records or better.

"We're going to get tested early — that's for sure," said manager Terry Francona as the team prepared to fly out last night.

After the set in Oakland, the Sox begin a stretch of 14 consecutive games against playoff contenders with in Toronto, three at home with Detroit, three at home with New York, two in Cleveland and two in New York.

The Sox then get something of a reprieve with Texas in town for four games before they host the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim.

By April 22, then, the Sox will have met every other American

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

One of the toughest stretches of the Red Sox' season comes at the very start:

APRIL	OPPONENT	THE SKINNY
1-2	at Oakland	The season resumes
4-6	at Toronto	A.L. East contender
8-10	Detroit	A Series favorite
11-13	Yankees	Need we say more?
14-15	at Cleveland	ALCS rematch
16-17	at Yankees	Rivalry resumes
19-22	Texas	At last, a break
22-24	L.A. Angels	ALDS rematch
25-27	at Tampa Bay	Young, improved team

League playoff team from a year ago — the Yankees (twice), the Indians and the Angels. The latter two, of course, were defeated by the Sox en route to their world championship.

Coming hard on the heels of the team's journey to Japan and back,

and their 19-day season-opening road trip, the first month figured to be demanding, anyway. But given the quality of the opposition, the Sox will be doubly challenged.

"But our guys aren't complain-

SEE RED SOX, B6



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH

Red Sox starter Clay Buchholz gathers himself after giving up a bases-loaded two-run single to Andre Ethier in the third inning that gave the Dodgers a 3-0 lead yesterday in Boston's last exhibition game.

MARCH MADNESS



MCT / ERIC SEALS

Davidson's Stephen Curry, who finished with 25 points on 9-for-25 shooting and was picked Most Outstanding Player of the Midwest Regional, and Kansas' Darrell Arthur fight for the ball during first-half action last night in Detroit.

How often has this happened? All four No. 1 seeds — UCLA, North Carolina, Memphis and Kansas — have advanced to the Final Four. The answer is NEVER, going back to when the NCAA started seeding teams in 1979.

Three No. 1s have advanced three times to the final weekend, most recently in 1999.

Three of the Final Four teams reached the semifinals with convincing victories. Only Kansas faced a stiff challenge as the Cinderella Davidson team battled the Jawhawks to the wire. Kansas finally wore down Stephen Curry and his teammates

with its size and strength, holding on for a 59-57 victory yesterday in the Midwest Regional final.

Earlier yesterday, John Calipari's Memphis team defeated the Rick Barnes-coached Texas Longhorns, 85-67, in the South Regional final in Houston.

Now it's on the San Antonio and the semifinals.

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BOSTON 88, MIAMI 62

CELTICS HOSE HEAT



AP / MICHAEL DWYER

Miami's Kasib Powell, left, fouls Boston's Leon Powe in the second quarter of last night's blowout victory at the TD Banknorth Garden.

With its third straight victory, Boston moves another game closer to clinching the home-court advantage throughout the playoffs.

BY ROBERT LEE
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

BOSTON — Boston sent a message to the rest of the teams on its schedule last night.

The Celtics are not going to take it easy on them just because they have a losing record or because Boston is poised to lock up home-court advantage throughout the playoffs in the near future.

Facing lowly Miami last night at the TD Banknorth Garden in front of a crowd of 18,624, the Celtics crushed the Heat (13-60) — the worst team in the NBA — 88-62 in a game that Boston dominated from start to finish.

"We are supposed to do that [to Miami]," Boston captain Paul Pierce said of the blowout. "They have D-Leaguers out there, so I think we just handled our business. They put about four or five guys from the D-League in and we did our business. We are supposed to do that. We knew this was a game that we were supposed to win and we just focused from the jump and went out and did it."

The win moved Boston (58-15) one game closer to securing home-court advantage throughout the playoffs. New Orleans (50-22) has the second-best record in the NBA, but the Celtics hold a firm lead over the Hornets for the top overall seed.

Last night's win was Boston's third straight victory by 20 points or more and it gave the Celtics their first season sweep of Miami in nine years.

Boston held Miami to an NBA-record for fewest field goals allowed in a game in the shot-clock era — 17. The previous record was held by Chicago, which made only 18 field goals against Miami on April 10, 1999.

SEE CELTICS, B4

Ex-Friar guard Larranaga talking with PC about coaching job

BY KEVIN McNAMARA
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Jim Larranaga, a star guard at Providence College in the early 1970s, is in contact with Friar officials about the school's vacant head-coaching position.

Larranaga did not return phone calls yesterday seeking comment on his interest in the job, but the current George Mason coach is free to speak with his alma mater.

"He was indeed contacted and we did give permission to talk to (Providence)," said Richard Coco, George Mason's athletic department spokesman.

Coco also added that Larranaga was contacted two years ago, when an opening developed for the Seton Hall coaching position. "Jim said he wasn't interested and didn't speak with them," Coco said.

PC athletic director Bob Driscoll has not made any statements about his search for a new coach and refused to discuss any specific candidates yesterday, but he has talked with Larranaga. It is unclear, however, whether Larranaga has been offered the PC job.

"It's a bit premature for me to comment on any candidates other than to say that it's going extremely well," said Driscoll



LARRANAGA

last night from the NCAA hockey tournament in Madison, Wis. Larranaga just completed his 11th season at George Mason, where he is the school's all-time leader in wins and in the history of the Colonial Athletic Conference. He's led the Patriots to four NCAA Tournaments, including this year, when the team finished 23-11 and was knocked out in the first round by Notre Dame, 68-50.

His coming-out party came two years

ago (2006), when the Patriots received a surprising at-large bid into the NCAA Tournament and proceeded to become one of the all-time great Cinderella stories in the history of the event. The Patriots finished the year with a 27-8 record and ranked eighth in the final coaches poll after NCAA wins over Michigan State, North Carolina, Wichita State and Connecticut. Mason's historic run was ended in the Final Four by eventual national champion Florida.

That run elevated Larranaga's stature at Mason, where some fans hope the school names its home court in his honor. He began his career as an assistant at

Davidson College and then became a head coach at American International, in Springfield, Mass. He returned to Division I as an assistant at Virginia, where he helped coach All-American center Ralph Sampson and played in the Final Four in 1981 and '84. In 1986, he became the head coach at Bowling Green, where he spent 11 seasons before jumping to George Mason in 1997.

Larranaga expressed interest in the vacant Providence position several times earlier in his career but was never a factor when the Friars chose to hire Rick Barnes (1988), Pete Gillen (1994) and Tim Welsh (1998).