

Which of Rhode Island's hoops teams will make the Tourney?

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INTENSE COMPETITION AT BROWN INVITATIONAL: View the gallery at HSGameTime.com/rhodeisland

Rams central

Chat on our bulletin board, see our photo galleries and check live blog reports from tonight's game, at projosports.com/uri

Against the iron

How the six NFC playoff teams fared this year against teams that qualified for the NFL playoffs:

	W	L	P.C.
Seahawks	2	0	1.000
Packers	3	1	.750
Cowboys	4	2	.667
Bucs	2	3	.400
Redskins	2	5	.286
Giants	1	5	.167

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

SECTION C



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STAYING ON GUARD

Reducing turnovers fuels Rams' success

BY PAUL KENYON
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

SOUTH KINGSTOWN — Those who compiled a check list before the season began on areas where the URI basketball needed to improve can cross off the one about protecting the ball better.

Fifteen games into the season, and two weeks into life among the Top 25, it is safe to say the Rams have fortified that part of the game.

The numbers prove it. The ball-handling and passing have improved dramatically because of the play of Parfait Bitee, in particular, and all of the guards, in general. Tonight's game, when the Rams host Fairleigh Dickinson at 7 at the Ryan Center, is a perfect time to look at how URI has turned over the turnover category. That is, it has gone from a weakness into an area of strength.

FDU knows a lot about that aspect of the game. The Knights, a member of the Northeast Conference, come in with a 4-6 record.

TONIGHT

URI VS. FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON

7 p.m. at Ryan Center

They already have lost to two Atlantic 10 teams, Saint Joseph's by 20 and Charlotte by six on Sunday. Coach Tom Green, who has won 396 games, often goes with a three-guard lineup. The team relies on the 3-point shot and uses it well. It is shooting 40.4 percent on the season behind the arc and is averaging nearly nine made threes per game.

The problem for FDU is getting enough shots. It is not strong inside. What's worse, even with the small lineup, it has had trouble protecting the ball. It has committed 162 turnovers in its 10 games, while forcing only 120.

Rhode Island can relate to that situation. On its way to winning 19 games last winter, the Rams had the same trouble. They piled

SEE **URI, C4**

PC must face the music: It's playing second fiddle

Has there been a stranger PC season so far?

Hard to think of one. Because here we are already in January and the Friars are still trying to crawl onto the radar screen.

BILL REYNOLDS Here it is January and the only significant game they've played in the Dunk is against Florida State, and that was three days before Christmas. Here it is already January, in what should be the belly of the college basketball beast, and until yesterday the Friars had played just twice in the past 22 days.

Here it is already January and it's like the season that's never really started, too few good home games, overshadowed by URI's great start, overshadowed, period.

So what exactly is going on

here?

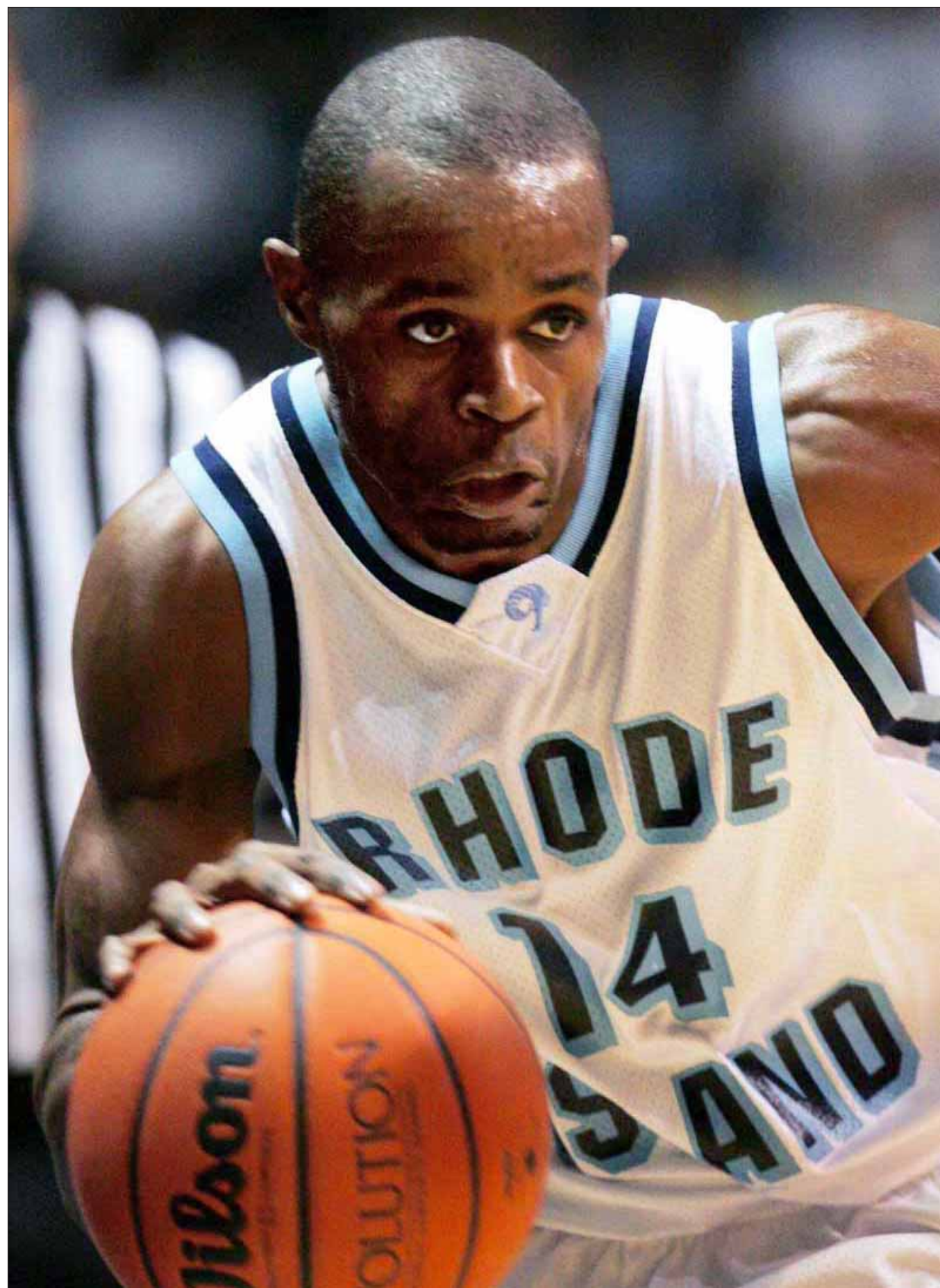
There's no question that the overwhelming success of the Patriots the past few years has negatively impacted college basketball in this state.

How could it not? All those peripheral sports fans? All those people who jump on bandwagons? All those casual fans that used to latch onto PC basketball in the winter?

They now follow the Pats as if it's some civic crusade, and each weekend is another gathering of the flock. Or maybe it's this simple: When you are a college basketball team in shadow of an NFL team for the ages, there's no way you aren't going to be affected by it.

Once upon a time, college basketball ruled the winter around here. But that was once

SEE **REYNOLDS, C4**



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / GLENN OSMUNDSON

Marquis Jones, University of Rhode Island freshman guard, had six assists and only one turnover in the Rams' victory over Eastern Michigan last week.

Pats' trip to perfection: The first eight victories

Individual performances and the final scores gave fans little doubt that this would be a special season.

BY SHALISE MANZA YOUNG
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

One of the pluses for the New England Patriots in their bye week is the chance to rest.

And with no opponent on the immediate horizon, the players and coaches responsible for completing the first 16-0 regular season in NFL history were also allowed the chance to savor their accomplishment for just a couple of days.

Really, everyone gets a chance to savor it before the playoffs begin for the Patriots, and they face the real challenge of following up their undefeated regular season with an undefeated postseason.

Over the next two days, we'll take a look at the games that led to

this point, with some notes and quotes from those weeks.

PATRIOTS at JETS, SEPT. 9

News of the week: Rodney Harrison receives a four-game suspension from the NFL for violation of the league's substance-abuse policy, after admitting to league officials that he purchased and used human growth hormone. Harrison cops to the suspension before it is announced, saying in a conference call he used the substance to accelerate the healing process for his injuries and apologizes to young players for sending the wrong message.

The game: The Pats rout the Jets, 38-14, and Randy Moss makes good on his pledge that "the Moss of old" was back, pulling in nine catches for 183 yards and one slick, split-three-defenders, 51-yard touchdown. Ellis

SEE **PATRIOTS, C3**

NEW YEAR'S DAY BOWLS



OUTBACK BOWL

Tennessee 21, Wisconsin 17

COTTON BOWL

Missouri 38, Arkansas 7

CAPITAL ONE BOWL

Michigan 41, Florida 35

GATOR BOWL

Texas Tech 31, Virginia 28

ROSE BOWL

USC 49, Illinois 17

SUGAR BOWL

Georgia xx, Hawaii xx

Tennessee wide receiver Josh Briscoe (81) dives in a vain attempt to make a first-quarter catch in the Outback Bowl against Wisconsin yesterday. The Badgers defender is Ben Strickland. Bowl stories on **Pages C4, C5.**

AP / CHRIS O'MEARA