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No team has increased its regular-season win total the season after a World Series win since Arizona went from 92 wins in 2001 to 98 in 2002.

	Next	Winning year	season
2006 Cardinals	83-78	78-84	
2005 White Sox	99-63	90-72	
2004 Red Sox	98-64	95-67	
2003 Marlins	98-64	83-79	
2002 Angels	99-63	77-85	

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SECTION C



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# projo SPORTS

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PITT 82, PC 63

## PC worn down by a powerful Pitt squad

Trailing by only three early in the second half, the Friars' defense fails to contain the 22nd-ranked Panthers.

BY KEVIN McNAMARA  
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

PITTSBURGH — From the very first practice this season, coach Tim Welsh and his staff have preached defense. With just a few weeks left to play, it's clear the sermons aren't sinking in.

The Friars' defense was carved up by the Pittsburgh Panthers last night as the home team shot 58 percent, scored 46 points in the paint and ran away in the second half for a 82-63 victory. The shooting percentage is a season-high for the 22nd-ranked Panthers in Big East games.

Providence hung tough in an impressive first half and trailed by only 42-37. But when Pitt's defense stiffened, the Friars' couldn't match up and fell behind by as many as 23 points in the second half. Pitt improves to 19-5 overall and 7-4 in the Big East. The Panthers are now an amazing 94-9 in the six-year history of the Petersen Events Center. PC falls for the sixth time in the last seven games and is now 13-11 and 4-8 in the conference.

Welsh said that he thought his defense "fought hard" but conceded that a Pitt team that's using four first-year players "has got a lot of answers. They're a tough out. You've got to hope to catch them on a flat night in this building. That's few and far between. Someone said 'you haven't had much success here.' I said, 'I don't feel lonely.' Not many people have had success here. It's hard."

Reaching this group of players and inspiring consistent defense has been extremely hard for Welsh and his staff. The Friars have enjoyed some stingy defensive efforts, but there are too many nights like this one where teams carve out space in the lane for easy scores, run their passing games and get wide-open chances and hit the offensive glass for buckets. It's clearly a point of frustration not only for the coaches but the players.

"I felt like we were playing hard. We just weren't getting stops," said Brian McKenzie, who turned his ankle in the first half and struggled to a 2-of-9

SEE PC, C4

# SAME TEAM, NEW SEASON

Red Sox' starting lineup from World Series likely intact

BY SEAN McADAM  
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

FORT MYERS, Fla. — In the political arena, "change" is the operative buzzword for the 2008 presidential campaign, with one candidate after another promising a fresh approach to problems facing the country.

But as the 2008 Red Sox seek a reelection, of sorts, hoping to become the first team to repeat as world champion since the 1999-2000 Yankees, they are quite content to offer more of the same.

The club's roster won't be set for another month or so, but already there are indications that turnover will be negligible. In fact, it's quite likely that the entire starting lineup from last October's World Series will return intact.

Moreover, the starting rotation will feature four holdovers — Josh Beckett, Daisuke Matsuzaka, Jon Lester and Tim Lincecum. Only Curt Schilling, beset by shoulder and biceps injuries, is at risk of losing his spot, one that would be filled by rookie Clay Buchholz, who made three starts last season for the major-league club.

Reserves Alex Cora, Bobby Kielty and Doug Mirabelli — all postseason participants — will return and the makeup of the bullpen — closer Jonathan Papelbon, set-up relievers Hideki Okajima and Manny Delcarmen and middle relievers Mike Timlin, Kyle Snyder, Julian Tavarez and lefty specialist Javier Lopez — is also unchanged.

It's entirely conceivable, then, that the Sox could start the season with 22 players from 2007 returning for another season. Only Eric Hinske (a free agent who signed with Tampa Bay), Coco Crisp (likely to be traded) and Schilling are likely to be missing from the Opening Day roster.

Contrast that to 2005, when, after winning their last World Series, the Sox underwent a significant overhaul. Forty percent of the team's rotation (Derek Lowe and Pedro Martinez) departed for free agency, as did the team's double-play combination of Mark Bellhorn and Orlando Cabrera.



PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH

There was a lot of activity at the Red Sox' training facility in Fort Myers, Fla., yesterday. Pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka loosened up, left; the team's equipment truck, above, arrived, and manager Terry Francona appeared happy to get back to work.

SEE RED SOX, C2



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / RUBEN W. PEREZ

Playing for Smithfield High last year, Mike Marra was an excellent shooter. Now he's honing his skills at a Massachusetts prep school.

## Doing his best to make hoop dreams come true

A year ago I got an e-mail telling me I should go up to Smithfield and check out a high school kid named Mike Marra.

I never got there, but one night last March at a state basketball tournament there he was, a skinny kid with a Mohawk haircut.

This is the kid somebody wanted me to check out?

A skinny kid with a Mohawk? Then the game started. Smithfield was playing Hope and you didn't need to be James Naismith to tell you that Smith-

field was overmatched by Hope's athleticism — a classic basketball confrontation between a suburban school and a city one.

Except for Marra, whose potential seemed to jump out of the gym.

Not that he was a finished player then. Not in the least. But he was 6-foot-4, and he could shoot.

Let me say that again: he could shoot.

This can't be stressed enough, for we now live in a basketball world where the ability to shoot the ball — truly shoot the ball — is an increasingly rare skill. At first glance this doesn't make a lot

of sense, given the 3-point shot. But, more and more, basketball is about athleticism, more and more about power and speed, a game where athleticism trumps skill.

More and more we see kids who couldn't make three jumpers in a row if their futures depended on it.

So Marra was a little bit of a throwback a year ago. He reminded me of Jimmy Baron that night. Not the Jimmy Baron of now, the kid who has proven himself to be one of the best deep shooters in all of college basketball, but the Jimmy Baron of his junior year at Hendricken, a kid who could

shoot. With one exception. Marra was both bigger and better athletically than Baron had been then.

Now it's a year later and Marra is no longer the kid from Smithfield with a Mohawk haircut that no one heard of outside the insularity of Rhode Island high school basketball. Now he's a junior at Northfield-Mount Hermon, a Massachusetts prep school, and has become one of the top recruits in recent schoolboy history around here, someone

SEE REYNOLDS, C5