

## NBA lockout pales by comparison to faculty talks

The Union-News has had fairly regular coverage of the National Basketball Association lockout, and has even sponsored a poll to see what readers think about this issue. ("Do You Miss the NBA?" Union-News, Dec. 17).

Like the NBA players, faculty members at the Massachusetts state colleges have been without a contract since July 1. Negotiations between the Massachusetts State College Association and the state Board of Higher Education are as stalled and divided as the sides in the NBA lockout.

Considering the media coverage afforded to educational testing recently, I find it ironic and offensive that the Union-News' coverage of this devastation of the state college system has been dwarfed by its coverage of the NBA lockout.

I can imagine it takes years of dedication, hard work and sacrifice to become a professional athlete. For this, professional athletes make salaries that begin at league minimums in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. I can imagine owners spend lifetimes in business to afford to own teams worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

To be a faculty member at the state colleges, I know firsthand, takes years of dedication, hard work and sacrifice - to earn a Ph.D., become an effective teacher and achieve regional recognition as a scholar.

For this, junior faculty at Westfield State College earn about \$35,000 a year. The average salary of our senior faculty, which includes many nationally-known teachers, scholars and researchers with long careers of service to Westfield State, is \$55,444.

Despite this financial inequity and an admission by Jim Carlin, chairman of the Board of Higher Education, that "a vast majority of our faculty members do an outstanding job," six months of "negotiating" have yielded only a single, take-it-or-leave-it proposal from the Board of Higher Education.

This three-year proposal includes "pay increases" of 0 percent, 0 percent, 0 percent, and no cost of living increase. It includes the abolition of academic freedom for faculty. It strips the faculty of any role in campus governance and all decision-making processes, including those of an academic nature.

It also punishes the few ineffective faculty by making them teach more courses to incoming students! These proposals and Carlin's lack of good faith bargaining are degrading and deeply destructive.

I'm a really big sports fan. But I'm an even bigger fan of public education.

A public interest poll on the NBA is curious. But what we really need is a referendum on public education.

For we can all drive to see the Patriots play in Hartford. We can't send our daughters and sons to Connecticut for their educations.

If you care about public education more than pro sports, call your elected and appointed officials and tell them that we could afford losing the Patriots, but we cannot afford to lose our state colleges.

JULIAN F. FLEURON  
Assistant Professor  
Westfield State College

Westfield