

NBA agreement scuttled by owners by a 27-2 vote

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league's revenue growth has been strong, player salaries are climbing much faster than revenues. As a result, the league is becoming unprofitable."

The NBA is the only major U.S. pro league that has never lost a game to a work stoppage.

National Basketball Players Association director Billy Hunter, hired by players shortly after they signed the last labor deal, was critical of the decision.

"It's unfortunate the owners

have chosen to forfeit three years of guaranteed labor peace at a time when the industry is so obviously healthy," he said. "Nonetheless, we are prepared to negotiate with the understanding that every facet of the collective bargaining agreement is open for discussion. We are hopeful an agreement can be reached and the process concluded by June 30."

Granik claimed 15 teams — more than half the league — are expected to lose money this season, a large increase from a few years ago when as few as two teams lost money.

"Obviously, that's not a healthy situation," Granik said. "Our goal is to try and reach a fair deal. We're hopeful that the players will come to the table with the same mindset."

Many of the owners, and especially Stern, have come to dislike the agreement because it has failed to slow salaries.

In fact, according to Stern, salaries are growing at such a

rate that they threaten to eat up all the extra money teams will receive when the new, \$2.64 billion television contract goes into effect next season.

"If you just keep increasing (revenue) numbers, but you also increase salaries with it, you never get out of the quicksand," Granik said.

Some players have been critical of a system in which the youngest players have the most leverage and are able to bargain for huge chunks of each team's salary cap.

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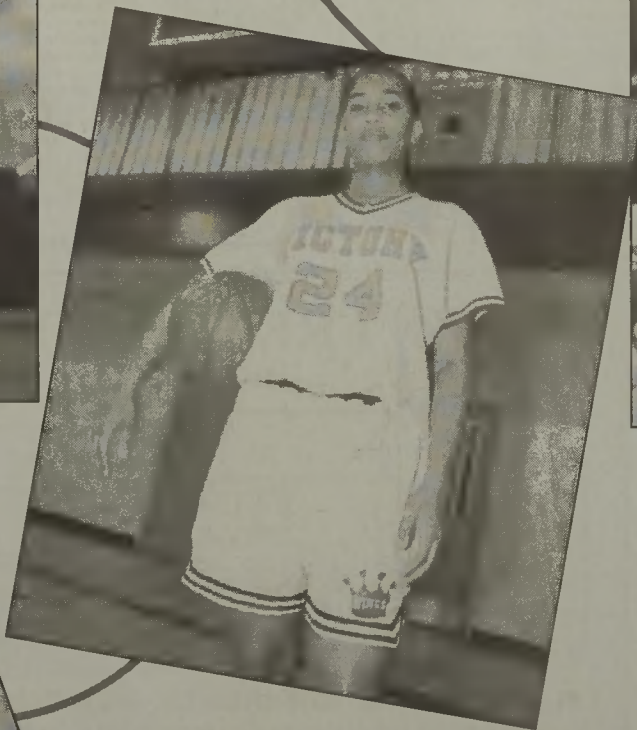
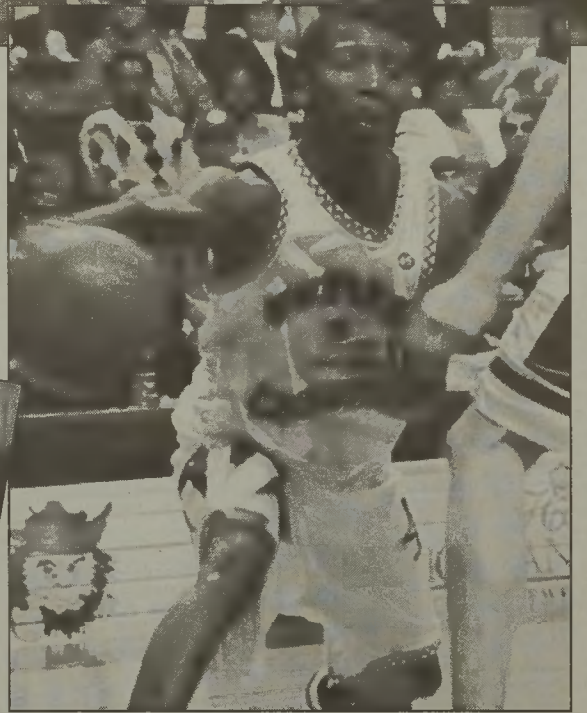
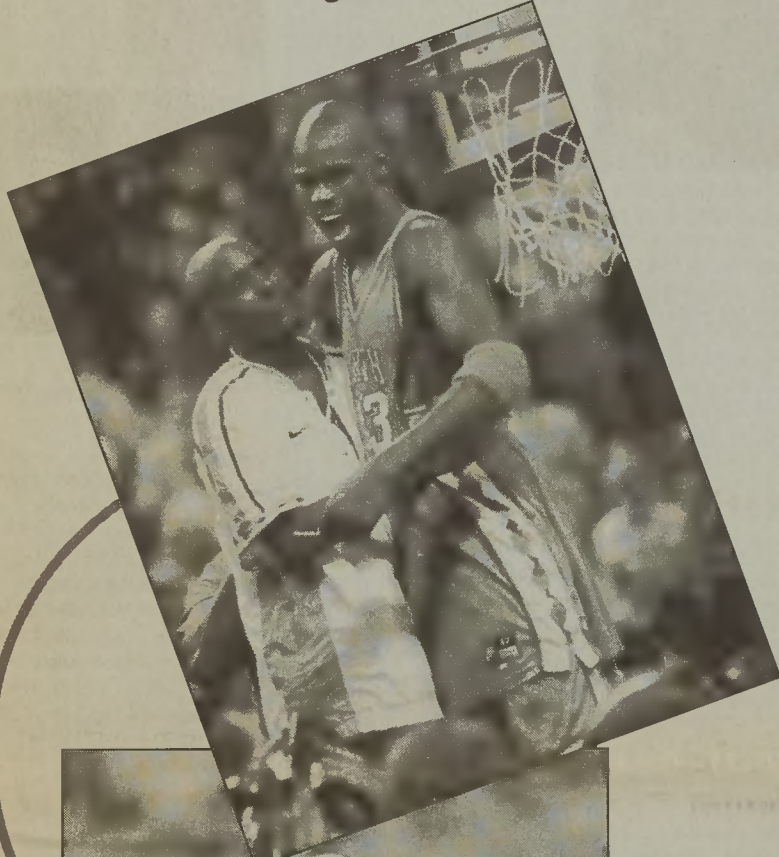
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