

April 28, 2023



Joel Feldman of Schwartz Sladkus Reich Greenberg Atlas in Boca Raton. Courtesy photo

‘It’s Truly a Passion of Mine’: Boca Raton Lawyer Negotiated FAU Basketball Coach’s 10-Year Extension

Joel Feldman said that he was most proud of negotiating a clause requiring a 20% increase per year in the basketball program's operating budget.

April 28, 2023 at 05:17 PM



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Joel Feldman, a family law attorney in Boca Raton, is the man behind the 10-year contract extension for Florida Atlantic University's men's basketball coach Dusty May. May's salary will pay more than \$15.7 million by the end of 10 years.

“That’s an unusual contract length. In all sports, people can be extremely successful, and they can be let go a short time after,” he said. “There’s such confidence in Coach May, and we’re sufficiently satisfied with the

financial considerations, that he was willing to make the long-term commitment to the university,” Feldman said. “He loves South Florida, Boca in particular. His family is very happy here, and he’s got an incredible relationship with the athletic director and the rest of the athletic department that he was willing to make that long-term commitment.”

Feldman says he and his wife, one of the first four-year graduates of FAU, have always been big supporters of the university. Not only is his firm, Schwartz Sladkus Reich Greenberg Atlas, a big sponsor, but supporting college sports, particularly basketball, is a passion of Feldman’s.

“My college and law school education, the recreational part of it, has given me the ability to be involved in college basketball for so long,” he said. “It is truly a passion of mine, so the opportunity to represent Coach May was really a pleasure and really fits in with my personality.”

Job offers came flowing in for May when FAU’s basketball team was seconds away from going to the NCAA finals this year. Feldman wanted to ensure that the university would put resources into improving the facilities and practice for a high-profile coach, since the school can’t compete economically with some of the major universities across the country.

“We wanted to make sure the university was making a commitment to Dusty on a long-term basis to improve those facilities, which was the biggest challenge,” Feldman said. “I think particularly for the university, not so much for Dusty. His biggest challenge was not taking money that other schools were flashing at him. FAU’s challenge was to increase his

participation in its involvement in the infrastructure of the athletic department.”

Feldman is most proud of taking the lead on the operating budget for the basketball program.

“We specifically were able to negotiate a clause that requires that there be a 20% increase per year in that operating budget, which includes the ability to get out and recruit other students,” he said. Feldman also wanted to ensure “that all of the expenses of the basketball team are being covered and covered in a way that speaks well of the university.”

The new budget will ensure that there’s room to improve all aspects of the operation of the team, he said.

Feldman has previously done legal work for FAU’s sports program, individual players and alumni—from family law-type cases to contract negotiations. When dealing with a state university, attorneys have to keep in mind the contract will be a public record, he said.

“You need to craft the contract to have provisions in there that will be in compliance with the Florida statute in terms of disclosures and income reporting,” he said. “Lawyers sometimes need to take a step back. We are advocates for our clients, but sometimes we get too hung up in the numbers. We’re not there to necessarily negotiate for the biggest dollar possible and potentially have a contract fold—that’s what agents are for. We’re there to make sure we protect the client in the contractual terms but not to create problems about the numbers. We have to learn as attorneys to stay in our lane.”