Wasting 750 words on the NFL playoffs

By William Lauer

With apologies to Glenn Brownstein.

The National Football League season is winding to a close, with the second-round loser of the game between the New England Patriots and the Baltimore Colts having been chased out of the title round. The Patriots, who have been chasing the Baltimore Colts since the middle of the season, are in worse shape because the Colts lost to them. Now, had the Patriots lost on Sunday, then Miami could tie also. Then all three teams would be tied and New England would win the Pats and the Colts tie next week and Miami and Buffalo fight to a dead heat. Why? Because although Baltimore and Miami would be tied, Miami would defeat Buffalo, that would leave the Patriots and the Dolphins tied at 10-4. And Miami would win because they have won more games in the Eastern Division than have the Patriots.

If the Patriots lose to the Colts, and the Colts beat Miami, then Miami beats Buffalo, that would leave the Patriots and the Dolphins tied at 10-4 and Miami would win because they have won more games in the Eastern Division than have the Patriots.

Now, if the Patriots lose to Miami, then Miami beats Baltimore, and Miami would be tied for the lead at 10-4, and the Colts would win. Why? Because although Baltimore and Miami would be tied in Division play at 6-2, Baltimore would be 9-3 in American Conference play.

If the Patriots beat the Colts, and Buffalo — by some miracle — defeat Miami, then the Patriots would be the outright winners, with a 10-4 record. The Colts and the Dolphins would be 9-5.

So, you see, the Patriots must win next week and hope Buffalo beats Miami. Whereas, if the Colts had won on Sunday, there would have been a clinch playoff spot by beating Baltimore next week, regardless of what happens in the Baltimore-Miami game.

There are about a dozen other situations, or so it seems — such as if the Pacers lose to Miami, and Miami beats Baltimore, Baltimore would be tied at 10-4, and the Colts would win. Why? Because although Baltimore and Miami would be tied in Division play at 6-2, Baltimore would be 9-3 in American Conference play.

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By the most incredible bit of statistical manipulation since some medical experts subverted the nature of the current problem, the Colts and the Dolphins would be 9-5. And Baltimore and Miami would be tied in Division play at 6-2, Baltimore would be 9-3 in American Conference play.

It is my belief that the overwhelming responsibility of a professor is to provide as best an education as possible to the students at MIT. All other concerns should be secondary to this paramount goal. In relation to the drop date issue, it seems that only one of the CAP's two basic arguments relates to this idea. The other, which I find least convincing, refers to the deflation of the grading system. A system which is merely an over-simplification of the educational system and therefore secondary to the primary point, which is why professors hold this secondary concept so in high esteem? Could it be that they have misjudged their objectives to imply that their sole purpose is to segregate students into neat little groups regardless of their education? It seems certain that a professor should be able to ascertain whether a student has assimilated the education which he himself has provided by simply comparing the student to another variable quantity, that is his fellow students. At least the question is asked, whether he should hope to be the case. Grade deflation, therefore provides a poor basis for the drop date proposal.

The second of the CAP's arguments deals with the educational process in a very noble and fatherly way. Re-rated it might be, a student might be punished for being more than he can chew. While I am deeply touched by the CAP's approach, I must ask myself, for its overworked students, I am not the only one who has had enough courses I can take. I fail to see the heinous crime of learning only 1/3 of a course. Having personally overloaded to a small extent during all of my 3 years here, I will admit on retrospect that my effort was at times slightly diluted, but also found the extended background I have gained by overloading to be far more beneficial than any marginal gain I might have made by being myself. This is just one of the arguments centering around the student's control of his own education. The compelling argument is that as a necessary part of his education, a student should begin to realize his own limitations. He should therefore be served as much control over his own life as possible. Therefore, the CAP should not presume to tell the student where to set his limits.

In conclusion, while I admire the professors' concern over the students' potential, I can't help but think that if they directed their energies towards improving educational techniques, the need of which is of course apparent at MIT, that the prime objective of the professor would be better served. I would therefore like to request that each CAP member ask himself sometime before the next meeting, whether his actions are directed towards the improvement of the educational process or for the mere convenience of simplifying the responsibilities assigned with teaching a class.