

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2008

SPEAKUP

THE FORUM FOR YOUR IDEAS, EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS

Split decision



PAUL SCHMID/THE SEATTLE TIMES

Divorce-court alternative

I was surprised at the Jan. 25 story *Shaq's expenses are as big as he is* — not because Shaquille O'Neal spends so much, but because he could have avoided exposing his finances to the public.

Collaborative family law is a kinder, gentler process.

Instead of filing for a dissolution-of-marriage action, O'Neal could have handled his case through the collaborative family law process. This is a relatively new method of handling divorce cases, practiced by attorneys who have

received special training in collaborative law.

If O'Neal had taken this route, the allegations in his petition accusing his wife, Shaunie, of improprieties and his financial affidavit would not have been made public. The collaborative process is confidential, with only a minimum of documents filed in the public record.

For a couple with children, collaborative family law is a way for the husband and wife to jointly resolve disputes without attacking each other, sparing children the stress and anxiety that frequently comes with contested divorces. The collaborative approach preserves relationships instead of destroying them.

- ROBERT J. MERLIN, Coral Gables