# Are Pro Athletes Overpaid?

**W**hen basketball player Stephen Curry signed a new contract with the Golden State Warriors in 2017, jaws dropped at his salary: a whopping $201 million over five years. That's about $40 million a year—one of the highest annual salaries in team sports. The National Basketball Association (N.B.A.), the National Football League (N.F.L.), and Major League Baseball (M.L.B.) are the three biggest sports organizations in the U.S. They reap billions of dollars every year from TV deals and merchandise and ticket sales. The top players in these leagues earn huge salaries that most Americans can only dream of. Are pro athletes overpaid? Two sportswriters weigh in.

## World's Highest-Paid Athletes, 2018

| ATHLETE | TOTAL EARNINGS, INCLUDING ENDORSEMENTS | SALARY/ WINNINGS |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Floyd Mayweather (boxing) | $285 million | $275 million |
| 2. Lionel Messi (soccer) | $111 million | $84 million |
| 3. Cristiano Ronaldo (soccer) | $108 million | $61 million |
| 4. Conor McGregor (mixed martial arts) | $99 million | $85 million |
| 5. Neymar (soccer) | $90 million | $17 million |
| 6. LeBron James (basketball) | $88.5 million | $33.5 million |
| 7. Roger Federer (tennis) | $77.2 million | $12.2 million |
| 8. Stephen Curry (basketball) | $76.9 million | $34.9 million |
| 9. Matt Ryan (football) | $67.3 million | $62.3 million |
| 10. Matthew Stafford (football) | $59.5 million | $57.5 million |

SOURCE: FORBES

## YES

There's no question that professional athletes are paid too much. In 2018, the average annual salary for an M.L.B. player was $4.1 million. Mike Trout, a centerfielder for the Los Angeles Angels, gets $35.8 million a year. In the N.B.A., the average annual salary was $7.1 million. In the N.F.L., the average was "only" $2.7 million, but one of football's highest-paid players, Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, just signed a four-year contract for $134 million.

Compare those wages with the national average salary for a firefighter: about $45,000 a year. It's about $56,000 for a schoolteacher and nearly $74,000 for an emergency room nurse.

Does it make any sense that someone who throws a football for a living is paid more than 700 times as much as someone who helps save people's lives, or that swinging a bat gets you nearly 650 times as much as educating kids? In my opinion, no.

> **Someone who tosses a ball shouldn't earn 700 times as much as someone who saves lives.**

However, it's not the athletes' fault that their wages are so high. The main problem is the huge amount of money involved in professional sports. Team owners and the three big leagues rake in billions of dollars a year.

Some of it comes from fans who shell out big bucks for costly game tickets and hugely overpriced snacks at stadiums and arenas, and for hoodies and hats with their favorite team's logo. But far more comes from the multibillion-dollar deals made with cable and TV networks to broadcast games.

With leagues and team owners making such massive sums, the athletes who put their bodies on the line for their sports deserve a large share of it. But they're still earning way too much money.

Maybe highly paid athletes (along with team owners) should have to pay a special tax that would help fund better salaries for firefighters, teachers, nurses, and other people who work for the greater public good.

**—JESSE SPECTOR**
**Sportswriter and radio host**

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Big earners: Aaron Rodgers, Mike Trout, and Stephen Curry



**NO** When fans look at professional athletes' salaries, it's easy to say they make far too much money for playing a game. After all, athletes earn more money than teachers, first responders, and members of the military. More than half the people in the United States make less than $62,000 a year.

But it's important to remember that those athletes are an essential part of enormously profitable companies. The National Football League, Major League Baseball, and the National Basketball Association generate billions of dollars in revenue. Without the players, the leagues wouldn't exist. Players' salaries are simply their share of all the cash these hugely successful businesses bring in.

Plus, making it to the pros takes years of hard work. And the few athletes who get that far have relatively short careers—just 5 to 10 years to earn a living, compared with 40 or 50 years for other jobs.

Besides, not all athletes make millions of dollars.

> **Professional athletes put in years of hard work—and deserve every penny they earn.**

The lowest-paid N.F.L., M.L.B., and N.B.A. players make about $500,000. (While that's still a lot, it's not nearly as much as their top-level teammates earn.) And pros in less popular sports make even less than that. For example, players in the National Women's Soccer League make only between $16,000 and $44,000 a season.

Also, think about who'd get the money if the athletes made less. Lower salaries wouldn't necessarily lead to lower ticket and hot dog prices for fans who go to the games. The billionaire owners of the N.F.L., M.L.B., and N.B.A. teams would likely pocket the difference.

The truth is, some professional athletes make huge salaries because millions of people are happy to pay money to see those players make the amazing catches and breathtaking plays we love to watch.

So if you think pro athletes make too much money, maybe you should stop watching them.

—**FRED BOWEN**

*Washington Post* sportswriter and author



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