



Who makes the biggest bucks in sports?

By Kerry Schmidt 08-06-2006

Whether you are a rapid sports fan or someone who doesn't know the difference between a touchdown and a strikeout, you know that sport stars make the big bucks.

Let's take a look at who rakes in all this dough and the sources from which the Ben Franklins emanate.

Also, let's compare various aspects of this money grab that may be of interest to you. If you do not give a damn, quit reading right now.

Note: The figures come from public records, players associations, agents, management firms and Burns Entertainment & Sports Marketing.

First off, by sport

Of the top 50 paid athletes last year, 21, came from the NBA, 17 from MLB, surprisingly only 6 from the NFL, three from NASCAR, two from golf and 1 from tennis.

Now, possessing great talent, and a great agent both have a lot to do with how much they rake in.

But for a chosen few, looks, image, personality and fan acceptance are, at least dollar wise, far more important than performance.

Of the top 50 earners, seven fit into the above category. That means they earn more from endorsements than they do from successes in their sport.

For the third year in a row, the top cat dollar wise, by far, is Tiger.

He raked in \$10,628,024 from golf winnings, then let that great persona and smile take over. He picked up some 87 million bucks from endorsements!

He's the miracle man on the course and the monster man on Madison Ave.

In second place, the other golfer, Phil Mickelson. He took in \$5.97 mil on the greens and 40 mill peddling products.

So, if you want your kid to be a rich athlete, have him/her take up golf (he/she won't get injured), get a personality and a good dentist.

The other six whose endorsements exceed their paychecks are LeBron James. 4.2 mil in salary while collecting 24 mil in endorsements.

Kobe Bryant, proving that you can have your sex and sell it too, got 18 mil for product pitches and 15.6 for salary.

The final four exemplify how people identify with a certain image or persona and good looks – SEXY.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. earned 5.7 mil for making 30 thousand plus left turns but took in 20 mill – almost four times the above – for projecting the good ole boy redneck image and the toughness that goes with it. Girls love him and they buy a bunch of stuff. Also, it does not hurt when you are the son of a legend who sadly lost his life on the track.

Fellow NASCAR driver, Jeff Gordon, turned left enough to take home 6.85 million, but used his Hollywood good looks and Madison Ave. savvy to rake in another 15 mil.

LeBron James made only 4.2 mil for playing this year, but has signed a 60 million dollar new deal, so the 24 million he got for endorsements will about equal his pay check next year.



Peyton Manning, the All-American boy, apple pie man, got 10million for being the best QB in the NFL, and 11 mil for, well, just being Peyton.

But the guy with the most lopsided ratio, is the makeover man himself, retiring tennis great Andre Agassi. You may remember his earlier years, when he pushed an image as a wild, over the edge guy; long hair, wild nights and many of what today would be called the “X-Gamer” generation traits.

Now, however, settled down, married to tennis legend Stefi Graff with two kids, he pours his time into charity work. He has built a multi million dollar complex in Las Vegas to help kids in sports and life.

While his aging legs earned him a “mere” 1.63 million on the court, he ranked fourth overall with 23 million bucks in endorsements.

The other athlete whose sales pitches totaled over 10 mil was Shaq. Add in his 20 mil salary and he manages to scrape by.

Showing that you either don’t have a marketable image or are just not loved, here are the bottom feeders from the talk trough.

Jeff Bagwell, a whopping 125,000.

The Celtics’ Brain Grant gets 150K, while other NBA’ers Anfernee Hardaway, Grant Hill, Jalen Rose and Eddie Jones, all household names.

Seven other players get between 300 and 500K for talking.

Don’t get me wrong, 500 K for just shilling a product, while pocket change to these guys, man, I’d do that in a New York minute.

Speaking of NY, of the 16 MLB players, 6 are paid by Mr. Steinbrenner.

Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez, who are having off years, still get 21 mill, and near total washouts this year, Jason Giambi and Mike Mussina (they are tied for 21st of the top 50 list) get 19 mil, while 40 plus year old Randy Johnson (No.25), gets 13 mil. Georgie Boy loves to shell out the mullah.

Back to the NBA.

Money grows on trees for these glandular freaks (see 21 of 50).

But how often do we see guys get contracts that are way out of whack for their production.

Check this out. NBA’ers, Keith Van Horn, Stephan Marbury and Rose, who both play for the worst team in the league, the Knicks, along with Grant, Jason Kidd, Chris Webber, Jermaine O’Neal, Tracy McGrady, Alan Iverson and Kevin Garnett all take home a larger pay check than 2-time MVP Tim Duncan, who is at 15.85 mil.

Adding insult to injury, Duncan’s teammates, Michael Finley (WHO?), ranks 20th on the list at 20 mi in salary.

Now here is one that really tells us either how stupid the owners are (wait, that’s a given) and how smart the agents think they are.

Of the 17 MLB’ers in the top 50, only one, yes, I repeat, only ONE player, Roger Clemmons, makes less than Barry Bonds!

All the above-mentioned Yankees, along with such super stars as Jeff Bagwell, Todd Helton, Chipper Jones, Lance Berkman, Billy Wagner and Carlos Beltram make more than Bonds, whose salary is 13 mil.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Now Bonds is in front of many of those nobodies with total income of 17 mil since he gets 4 mil in endorsements.

The reason the others don't get them is because who the hell as even heard of half of them.

Now some may not like Bonds due to the steroid issues – dammit, again he is innocent until proven guilty, has never flunked a test, the first Grand Jury did not indict him and whatever he may have or have not taken was not illegal until after 2004, but he definitely is one of the greatest players of all time, so to see those jokers getting larger salaries just shows why the owners are so dumb.

We've covered the top seven overall endorsers, but let's take a quick look at the top 3 or four “players with marketability” by their sport.

Golf only has the two, but they top every statistic.

In the NFL, the top salesmen are Manning, Tom Brady at 9 mil and Michael Vick at 7 mil. Legendary Brett Favre is ranked No. 30 overall at 17 mil (13 in salary, 4 in endorsements).

MLB's pitchers are Jeter at 7 mil, A-Rod at 6, Pujols at 5.5 and Bonds at 4.

Don't know about you, but I'm getting tired of lists, et al.

So, I will give you one more worthless one.

The top ten, combining earnings and endorsements.

Tiger, almost 98 million bucks!! Don't know if you saw that spread in *Sports Illustrated* on his house in Florida, but I could go in there and not stay in the same room for 3 years. Yea, getting by on 98 mil a year must be tough.

Then you have lefty at nearly 46 million (still gets it even after that horrendous collapse at the British Open).

No. 3 is Shaq, with 34 mil, No. 4 is his best buddy, Kobe, with just under 34, No. 5 is Carson Palmer, Bengals QB who has the No. 1 highest salary at 30.75 mil. He only has 800 K in endorsements, so he is down the list.

No. 6 is James, but as I said, next year he will be likely No. 2 behind Tiger.

No 7 is Jeter at 28 mil total, No. 8 is Rodriguez at 27 mil, followed by Earnhardt at 25.76 mil and rounding out the top 10 is Michael Vick, with 25.4 mil. Note. He may have to part with a good bit of that to keep his brother out of jail.

The overall bottom feeders, those who may need food stamps, are, starting with No. 50, Beltran at 14.5 mil, Wagner at 14.75, Berkman at 14.3, Jones at 14.8, Damon at 15, Curt Shilling at 15 (not bad for 42 years old), Edgerin James at 15.25, Steve Francis (who is he?) at 15.37, Jones at 15.5 and rounding out the poor spoiled brats is Paul Pierce (another household name) at 15.84.

I am numb, and numbered out.

Each of you need to pray for the down and outers at the bottom here, and wish them a better future.

My future can now include a wee dram of my single malt.