

**Stimulus Material: GED Ready® - RLA**

**Are Professional Athletes Overpaid?**

Current Issues Blog

NO

by Jennifer Fontaine, sports promoter

- 1 In the United States, sports are big business. That's \$435 billion-per-year big, according to a 2012 market research estimate of the entire sports industry. The center of this business is professional athletes. They are the ones making the diving catches, bone-crushing tackles, and clutch three-point shots at the buzzer that thrill us all. They are the reason a fan pays \$1,000 for a playoff ticket. An athlete's salary is determined by basic math. If a sport pulls in billions of dollars, high salaries are paid out. That is the business of sports.
- 2 Additionally, the size of athletes' salaries is often exaggerated. Few actually earn tens of millions of dollars a year. In 2010 and 2011, the average professional athlete's annual salary was \$1.9 million for football, \$3.34 million for baseball, and \$5.15 million for basketball. While some superstars do earn \$30 million, \$40 million, or even \$50 million, those players are the best of the best, imbued with rare talents. Amateurs playing catch in the backyard should not delude themselves into thinking such abilities come easily.
- 3 Professional athletes work harder than people in almost any other profession. They perfect their skills during years of grueling training. The few who make the pros must train even more. Then, after all that work, athletes' careers are relatively short. Compare a baseball player's \$3 million a year for only a few seasons to a highly paid doctor's \$500,000 a year for 40 or more years. The athlete's pay no longer seems excessive. And injuries, which are all too frequent, can end a career prematurely. Some athletes will literally pay for knee, back, or head injuries for the rest of their lives. Treatments such as knee-replacement surgery can cost tens of thousands of dollars.
- 4 Being an athlete comes at a heavy physical price. Yet professional athletes choose to play the game—for us, the fans and ticketholders. Their physical feats inspire the young children watching games on TV to reach for greatness themselves. Who can deny the value of that?

YES

by Roberto Hinojosa, high school math teacher

- 5 Without teachers, police officers, and firefighters, our society would collapse. And yet these professionals are paid a tiny fraction of the salaries earned by many professional athletes. This makes no sense whatsoever.
- 6 Those who most support our way of life by protecting and educating our citizens should be paid more than athletes. Teachers not only inspire and motivate youngsters but also impart the knowledge that helps children and teenagers become productive adults. Athletes, on the other hand, are nothing more than highly paid entertainers; they serve no important function in the future well-being of our country.
- 7 The average U.S. household income in 2012 was \$54,000. Consider these average salaries for 2012:
  - for a teacher, \$50,950
  - for a police officer, \$50,512
  - for a lead firefighter, \$57,000
- 8 Now compare those averages with the highest professional athlete salaries in the same year:
  - for football, \$32.4 million
  - for baseball, \$31 million
  - for basketball, \$20.3 million
- 9 While many Americans are struggling to make ends meet and find good jobs, it is frustrating to read about yet another athlete holding out for a few million dollars more. Nothing justifies paying one person a yearly salary that is more than most people make in a lifetime. For modest salaries, police officers and firefighters protect our lives and property at great risk to themselves. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 4,325 on-duty firefighters lost their lives in the United States from 1977 through 2011. Very few professional athletes died on the job during that same time.
- 10 Teachers and public servants should be paid at least as much as athletes. Otherwise, the message our society sends is that we value entertainment more than real, meaningful work.

**Prompt**

In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.