New Orleans CityBusiness



A player signs autographs for die-hard fans before the 75th Major League Baseball All-Star Game.

Pro Athletes' Salaries Aren't Overly Exorbitant[1] A

MARK SINGLETARY

I am going to try and make a point about the salaries that professional athletes get to play their games. I think I'm moving into a very solid "more power to 'em" position. I guess until recently I've thought the players were a bit selfish and their salaries would lead to the failure of professional sports.

Of course, the players are selfish and ultimately professional sports will fail or have to be restructured significantly. Who knows when that time will come? B

But the players are no more selfish than the owners who pay the salaries. And the owners are no more selfish than the television and radio networks that pay outlandish sums to broadcast the games.

All of us are looking for something. The games work best when those willing to pay match up evenly with what the others have to sell.

I've always thought of myself as the kind of guy who would give his left arm or eye or big toe to have a chance to play any of the major league sports. Now I think I can honestly say that I would give up a lot, but

1. **exorbitant** (ĭg-zôr'bĭ-tənt): exceeding all bounds of custom or fairness.

A ARGUMENT
You can immediately identify the author's claim by reading the editorial's title. **Paraphrase** the title, or restate it in your own words.

B EVALUATE REASONING
What **stereotype** does Singletary present in lines 10–13? Explain why his statement is unfair.

not everything, to have the chance to play one big game.

Pause and reflection make me think now that it would still be awesome to train hard, make a major league roster and spend an entire season with the team, but at some point the fun might turn into work.

I would probably begin to think that if I was good enough to make the squad, then I would deserve to be paid the same as my teammates. And if by chance I would happen to be star quality and could reasonably assume that coming to see me play was a big deal, then I might end up asking for a little more than the average player gets.

Also, when I read the sports or business pages of the newspaper, I see that television networks pay huge sums to broadcast my games. When I go to work, I realize that other companies want to name our stadium, promote our schedule and decorate our arena with their advertisements.

The historical argument for paying exorbitant salaries to athletes is the **brevity** of their careers. All of these athletes are a busted knee, concussion or torn rotator cuff[2] away from the end of their career, and very few sports offer guaranteed contracts that go beyond the season when the injury occurs.

Our fans are important to the economic health of our ball club. My teammates and I are responsible for finding and keeping fans. If I am a star, it can rightly be assumed the fans come to see me play.

When the fans come to see the stars perform, the value of the franchise[3] increases. I'm pretty smart and understand all this and how it relates to me. I also know what I make and how that relates to others that play my game.

So, it seems to me that even though I love the game, even though just playing the game is huge **compensation** and very, very satisfying, I want things to be fair.

Fair is fair. And fair is that the athletes deserve what the fans are willing to pay.

The owners probably don't care what the athletes make, as long as they can pass the cost on to sponsors and ticket buyers. The intelligence in sports ownership is the ability to predict exactly where the fans and sponsors lose interest.

Until that time, it seems fair to allocate as much as possible to the players that make the games entertaining. It's also the only way to win consistently in modern, major league sports. The smartest in all the groups are not only taking as much and passing along as much as possible, but they are also looking toward the future to see when it all ends. C

So, everyone benefits right up until the time that no one benefits.

compensation (kŏm'pən-sā'shən) *n.* payment

brevity (brĕv'ĭ-tē) *n.* shortness

C ARGUMENT
Reread lines 91–100, which contain Singletary's main **claim.** Paraphrase, or restate, his claim.

2. **concussion . . . rotator cuff:** A concussion is an injury to the brain caused by a fall or a blow to the head. A rotator cuff is the muscle and tendon that support the shoulder joint, a place of common injury among baseball pitchers.
3. **franchise:** a team that is a member of a professional sports league.

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DO PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES GET PAID TOO MUCH?



JUSTIN HJELM
Staff Reporter

YES. When asked in the early twenties what justified him making more money than the President of the United States, Babe Ruth[1] replied "Well, I had a better year."

For nearly a century, superstar athletes have demanded and received salaries grossly out of proportion with the average income of their times. What makes modern times different and more disturbing is that even the role players in professional sports are pulling in an exorbitant amount of money.

Fifty years ago, only the 40-home-run outfielder would make a huge salary. Now, however, the utility infielder who comes in as a defensive replacement three times a week makes ten times more than the average working man. D

Nolan Ryan[2] broke ground in 1979, becoming the first athlete to receive a $1-million-a-year contract. It took over a century for baseball to reach this milestone income figure, and just 25 years later a $1 million contract offer is considered an insult.

D ARGUMENT
"Athletes have always made a lot of money"—that's the argument Hjelm anticipates in lines 6–21. What is his **counterargument?**

1. **Babe Ruth:** a baseball player from 1914 to 1935, considered by many to be the best baseball player in the history of the sport.
2. **Nolan Ryan:** a baseball pitcher from 1966 to 1993 who held over 50 major-league records.

The contracts of professional athletes have gone unchecked for too long, and now athletes are among the wealthiest people in our nation.

Athletes are paid far too much for simply playing games. Essentially, as anyone can tell you, sports are entertainment. We pay to see these athletes perform at the highest level. E

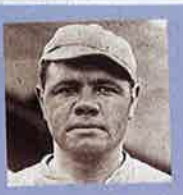
It is a sad commentary on our societal values that these entertainers are raking in seven-figure salaries while teachers, police officers, and fire fighters make less than one percent of the income of some athletes. Entertainment is a necessary thing, but it is not needed nearly as much as countless other occupations are.

What kind of message are we sending our children with these backward values?

From the perspective of a young person, sports seem like the better and easier path. Would a child rather play basketball and make millions or go to school for years and end up making $50,000 a year?

Dissenters will say that it is not that cut and dried,[3] and they are probably right. Making a professional sporting league is exceptionally difficult. But fewer and fewer kids are realizing this.

One only needs to look as far as the NBA draft[4] for proof of this.



Athlete: Babe Ruth
Sport: Baseball
Team: New York Yankees
Contract Year: 1921
Contracted Salary: $39,638
Salary Adjusted to 2004 Dollars: $418,303



Athlete: Jackie Robinson
Sport: Baseball
Team: Brooklyn Dodgers
Contract Year: 1947
Contracted Salary: $8,500
Salary Adjusted to 2004 Dollars: $72,002



Athlete: Bill Russell
Sport: Basketball
Team: Boston Celtics
Contract Year: 1956
Contracted Salary: $19,500
Salary Adjusted to 2004 Dollars: $135,425



Athlete: Nolan Ryan
Sport: Baseball
Team: Houston Astros
Contract Year: 1979
Contracted Salary: $1,100,000
Salary Adjusted to 2004 Dollars: $2,862,121

E ARGUMENT
Reread lines 33–38. What is Hjelm's **claim** about the salaries of professional athletes? As you continue to trace Hjelm's argument, note how he **supports** his claim.

dissenter (dĭ-sĕn'tər) *n.* one who disagrees or holds a different opinion

3. **cut and dried:** simple
4. **NBA draft:** the process by which teams in the National Basketball Association select, or draft, players. Generally, the teams with the worst records from the preceding year get the top draft choices.

MATH CONNECTION

How much more was Alex Rodriguez's contracted salary in 2004 than Kenny Anderson's was in 1999?



Athlete: Kenny Anderson
Sport: Basketball
Team: Boston Celtics
Contract Year: 1999
Contracted Salary: $5,845,000
Salary Adjusted to 2004 Dollars: $6,627,374



Athlete: Alex Rodriguez
Sport: Baseball
Team: New York Yankees
Contract Year: 2004
Contracted Salary: $21,726,881

A decade ago, a high school player skipping college was a rarity. In 1994, you could count the early entrants on one hand. Now, however, there are numerous high schoolers declaring for the draft every year, some of whom do not even get drafted. These players forfeit their college eligibility and will struggle for years to make an NBA team. After that, without a college education, they struggle to find a decent job.

Also troubling are the egos of the athletes receiving these giant paychecks. They have no ability to relate to the public. During the NBA lockout in 1998-99, players were crying poverty. F

Kenny Anderson, then a guard for the Boston Celtics, complained of not being able to afford the insurance on his eight cars. The sense of **entitlement** that these athletes have is **appalling.** They play a game that many would play for meal money and get paid like royalty, and then have the gall to whine that they are not paid enough.

It's startling that people have blasé[5] attitudes about $100 million contracts. Eight-figure deals are not something to be yawned at, but with their current frequency, it is becoming that way. Athletes are paid far too much for what they do, but I believe that society is more at fault for this than the athletes themselves are.

We simply put too much importance on entertainment, and with this statement I condemn myself and the rabidity[6] with which I follow sports. The once tightly controlled finances of the sporting world have been torn apart and the winds of greed and America's **voracious** thirst for entertainment have scattered the pieces so that they can never be put together again.

F EVALUATE REASONING

Reread lines 77–82. What stereotype is Hjelm making about professional athletes? Explain.

entitlement (ĕn-tīt'l-mənt) *n.* the state of having a right or claim to something

appalling (ə-pô'lĭng) *adj.* outrageous; terrible
appall *v.*

voracious (vô-rā'shəs) *adj.* possessing an insatiable desire; greedy

5. **blasé** (blä-zā'): unconcerned; uninterested.
6. **rabidity:** craziness or unreasonable extremeness.