

Are Athletes Overpaid?

Two writers face off on the debate.

YES

Athletes Make a LOT of Money

And it's not OK. BY JESSE EDELMAN

Consider this: LeBron James made \$71 million last year. Nurses who dedicate their lives to the care of others didn't make that much. Firefighters who pull little kids out of burning buildings didn't make that much. The President of the United States—who runs the entire country—didn't make that much. Not even close.

And that is a problem.

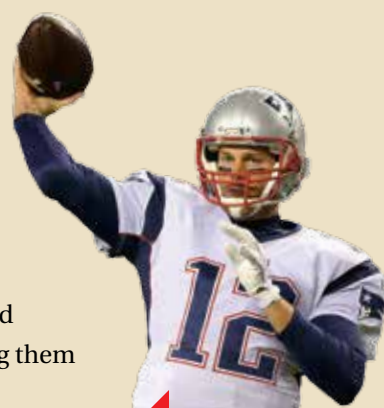
What does it say about our society when we pay athletes—men and women who play games for a living—millions more than we pay people who save lives? Do we value entertainment more than health and safety? Is competition more important to us than compassion and **public service**?

Of course, not all professional athletes make as much as LeBron, but the average salaries for professional football, baseball, basketball, and hockey players all tend to be in the \$2 million to \$5 million a year range. Compare that with the average income for a family: \$54,000. What's more, many Americans will work a full-time job until they are about 70 years old and not make as much in a lifetime as an athlete like Tom Brady makes in one year (\$36 million).

It's true that the careers of athletes are short, which means players have a smaller window of time to earn money. But retired athletes can go on to **lucrative** jobs. Many former pros become coaches, sports commentators, or public speakers.

Athletes *do* deserve to make a decent living. They inspire and entertain us, and they work hard. Training can be grueling. Injuries are a constant threat, especially in contact sports like football and hockey. But there are plenty of people who have difficult and dangerous jobs, and no one is handing them **exorbitant** sums of money.

Professional athletes are certainly impressive, but are they really worth millions of dollars more than the rest of us?



Tom Brady's annual earnings: \$36 million

Average salary of a nurse: \$70,000/year



JUSTIN EDMONDS/GETTY IMAGES (TOM BRADY); SHUTTERSTOCK (NURSE)

NO

You Can't Put a Price on Talent

Professional athletes are some of the most impressive humans on the planet. BY MACKENZIE CARRO

NO one can deny that LeBron James gets paid a lot of money—but no one can deny that he hasn't earned it either. LeBron makes slam dunks look as easy as hopscotch. He's broken the records of greats like Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson. He's a living legend.

Athletes like LeBron dedicate their lives to their sport—to training, traveling, and pushing themselves to the limit. And while their lives may *seem* glamorous, think about this: Like gladiators charging into the arena, athletes face injuries that can be not only career-ending but also life-altering. In fact, many retired athletes have **chronic** health problems because of the strain they put on their bodies. Retired New York Jets wide receiver Wesley Walker told *Newsday* that he suffered so much nerve damage and muscle loss as a result of playing football that today he can barely open a water bottle.

The toll a professional athlete's career takes on his or her body means more than a lifetime of pain (and medical bills); it also means a short career. Athletes need salaries that will carry them past the 5 to 15 years they are able to play.

That is not the only reason athletes deserve their high salaries. Without the showstopping feats of stars like Serena Williams and Stephen Curry, many jobs wouldn't exist. Sports journalists, stadium workers, cheerleaders, and coaches are among those who can thank the professional sports **industry** for their employment.

It may seem unfair that athletes get paid to play a game, but remember who they are really playing for: us. We're the ones who pack stadiums in rain and snow to watch their games, who crowd around the television to cheer them on, who feel **immeasurable** joy when our team wins.

The work of professional athletes certainly pays off for us. Shouldn't it pay off for them too?



Many athletes use their fame and fortune to make the world a better place. LeBron James helps get college scholarships for kids who couldn't otherwise afford to go.

SCAVENGER HUNT

Directions: Hunt through each essay for the following elements.

1. Underline the **central idea**, or **central claim**.
2. Put a star next to two pieces of **supporting evidence**.
3. Circle the **counterargument**.
4. Put a double star next to the writer's **rebuttal**.

YOU decide: Who made the stronger argument?

BARBARA J. PERENIC/TNS/NEWSCOM