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MLB Players Break \$2B Salary Barrier

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By RONALD BLUM, AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) - Led by Texas shortstop [Alex Rodriguez](#) at \$22 million, baseball salaries topped \$2 billion the first time this year.

The [New York Yankees](#) led all clubs with a record payroll of nearly \$126 million — \$92 million more than Tampa Bay.

The figures are the result of a study by The Associated Press of contracts for 849 players on opening-day rosters and disabled lists.

Players will earn \$2.023 billion, up from \$1.934 billion last season. Owners, however, did slow the increase during a troubled offseason in which baseball unsuccessfully tried to eliminate two teams.

The average salary of \$2,383,235 was up 5.2 percent from last year. That was less than half of the 13.9 percent increase of 2001 and the smallest percentage jump since 1998.

"It goes up every year," [New York Mets](#) manager Bobby Valentine said. "The only time they didn't go up was during the collusion years."

While the average salary has increased 126-fold from 1967, when it was \$19,000, the Consumer Price Index ([web sites](#)) has gone up only five-fold since then. And while baseball players average \$13,000 a day during the season, the average annual household income in the United States is \$57,045, according to latest figures from the Census Bureau ([news](#) - [web sites](#)). That's about four days' average pay for someone who wields a bat and a glove.

Still, baseball's average is almost half the NBA's \$4.2 million last season, according to figures compiled by the league. The NHL's average was \$1.43 million last season and the NFL's average was \$1.1 million, according to their unions.

Just behind Rodriguez are Toronto first baseman [Carlos Delgado](#) (\$19.4 million), Los Angeles pitcher [Kurt Brown](#) (\$15.7 million) and Boston outfielder [Manny Ramirez](#) (\$15.4 million). [Barry Bonds](#), who hit a record 50 homers for San Francisco, is tied for fifth with the [Chicago Cubs'](#) [Sammy Sosa](#) at \$15 million.

Figures include salaries and prorated shares of signing bonuses and other guaranteed income, and for some parts of salaries deferred without interest are discounted to present-day value.

With high-revenue teams adding stars, the gap between rich and poor increased for the seventh straight year since the 1994-95 strike.

The Yankees were No. 1 for the fourth straight season and sixth time in seven years at \$125.9 million. Boston was second at \$108.4 million, followed by Texas at \$105.3 million and Arizona, which ended the Yankees' run of straight World Series titles, at \$102.8 million.

"You just go out there and play," said the Yankees' [Jason Giambi](#), whose \$120 million, seven-year contract was the richest of the offseason. "We had one of the lower payrolls when I played in Oakland and we did well."

The Devil Rays were last at \$34.4 million, and just above were Montreal (\$38.7 million), Oakland (\$39.5 million) and Minnesota (\$40.2 million).

"It's always going to be a challenge until we get the payroll up to compete with those other teams," Tampa Bay general manager Chuck LaMar said. "If you continually sign young players and develop players through a scouting system, it's truly the only way you can compete with teams with a higher payroll."

While the Yankees have 14 players at \$4 million or higher, the team says it spends within its means and has almost a complete lack of deferred salaries. New York estimates it will have an actual cash outlay of about \$240 million this year and revenue of more than \$240 million.

In contrast, the Diamondbacks have deferred \$51.75 million of this year's salaries, more than half their payroll.

Baseball commissioner Bud Selig says the difference between top and bottom is part of the reason the sport is moving to a new economic system, saying the low-revenue teams can't compete.

"Obviously, there are some clubs that have been very cautious in their spending," he said.

Selig said fans of many teams have lost "hope" and "faith" because of the spending imbalance.

"I don't concern myself with money. I concern myself with what goes on between the lines," said Pittsburgh manager Lloyd McClendon, whose club is 24th at \$42.3 million. "I prepare my team to play on a daily basis and the experts tell you if we can compete or not."

Reflecting the concentration of wealth among the top stars, the number of millionaires dropped from 425 last year to 312. But players at \$2 million or more increased from 312 to 321, and those at \$14 million and higher went from 10 to eight.

The median salary — the point at which an equal amount of players are above and below — dropped to \$975,000 from \$975,000.

Selig has proposed slowing salary growth with a luxury tax on high-payroll teams and a vast increase in the amount of locally generated revenues, proposals the union had been cool to accepting.

Union head Donald Fehr said the failed attempt to eliminate the Twins and Expos slowed the growth in salaries, but he did not yet estimate by how much.

"You didn't know what players were going to be available and under what conditions," he said. "It obvious affect people."

Rob Manfred, management's top labor lawyer, said a relatively weak free-agent class and events outside contributed to a slowing.

"It was a unique offseason, given Sept. 11 and the economy," he said.


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