

Who's to blame for athletes' salaries? We are

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By Fred Bowen

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Summer is the offseason for professional football and basketball. It's the time when teams are making deals and decisions about players who may help win championships.

This summer has been busy. Look at some of the biggest - and most expensive - offseason deals.

- The Washington Wizards signed star guard John Wall to a contract extension that will pay him \$170 million over four seasons.

- The Golden State Warriors and Houston Rockets signed similar contracts with their superstars, Stephen Curry and James Harden.

- The Washington Redskins failed to sign quarterback Kirk Cousins to a long-term deal. As a result, Cousins will play for almost \$24 million this season and then become a free agent.

The money that teams pay star players is eye-popping. Wall, Curry and Harden will each make \$40 million to \$45 million a year for playing basketball.

To give you some idea how much that is, about half of the households in the United States make less than \$56,000 per year. Forty-five million dollars is more than 800 times (!) that figure.

So athletes in popular sports make a lot more money than important people such as teachers, police officers and firefighters. Somehow that doesn't seem fair.

But one of the reasons pro athletes make so much money is that we love to watch their games. Media companies pay the leagues and teams billions of dollars for the rights to show the games on television and other video devices.

These businesses pay the money because they know millions of fans will watch the games. TV networks then sell ads for cars, pizza and lots of other stuff that they show during the games. I once counted more than 150 ads during a single pro football game on television.

The teams also make money by selling shirts, hats, coffee mugs and anything else you might want with the team logo. I'll bet plenty of KidsPost readers have lots of team stuff. The Washington Redskins even have pacifiers and bibs with the team logo for the family's littlest football fans.

So if you think athletes make too much money, maybe you should stop watching the games or buying team products.

That might not be such a bad idea. Too many people, including kids, spend too much time watching sports instead of doing other things. Kids should play touch football or shoot hoops at the park instead of watching millionaires play games on television.

Or turn off the TV and read a book. Or play a board game. Or at least stop being surprised that pro athletes make so much money. We are the ones helping pay their salaries.

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Bowen writes the sports opinion column for KidsPost. He is the author of 22 sports books for kids. His latest book is called "Outside Shot."