

A Comparison of NBA and WNBA Player Salaries

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Abstract: This paper compares player base salaries in the NBA and WNBA (the premier male and female U.S. professional basketball leagues respectively). Unsurprisingly, average salaries in the NBA (\$8,264,922) are considerably higher than average salaries in the WNBA (\$73,738). Thinking about intra-league salary inequality, Gini Coefficients are computed for both the NBA (0.5434) and WNBA (0.2462). Thus, while WNBA salaries are much lower than NBA salaries, WNBA salaries are distributed much more equally than are NBA salaries. Following these observations, there is a discussion as to what contributes to the difference in salary levels and distributions between the two leagues.

population (order from lowest income to highest) on the horizontal axis and cumulative income on the vertical axis.

Methodology and Data:

The data collected for this research was found on sportrac.com, one of the largest online sports team and player contract resource on the internet (“About Sportrac”). It uses sources such as accurate NBA and WNBA news and contract data received from basketball insiders and RealGM to know the base salary figures (“Sources & Affiliates”). This allowed the base salary to be collected for all players that are involved in the thirty NBA teams and twelve WNBA teams from the year 2019-2020. Information collected from this website on the 443 players in the NBA, and the 113 players in the WNBA includes: the player’s number, first name, last name, position, team, and 2019-2020 base salary. These facts and figures have been analyzed to produce total league payroll, average league salary, and a Gini coefficient for each league.

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have different clauses and time periods of payment. Therefore, the base salary is a rate that the player is guaranteed to make for the given year of 2019-2020, and therefore is the most accurate form of long term data. Another limitation to this study would be assessing how women's and men's basketball inequality compares to other sports

From the data assessed, the NBA total league payroll amounted to \$3,661,360,623 and the average salary was equal to \$8,264,922.40. The lowest earning player has a base salary of \$568,422, compared to the top earning player receiving \$40,231,758 as his base salary. This creates a difference of \$39,663,336 between the highest and lowest paid players in the NBA league. As stated in Table 1, players who earn the top 50% of the total league payroll cumulatively obtain \$3,200,536,522, so that players who earn the bottom 50% of the total league payroll cumulatively make \$460,824,101. Therefore, the 50% of players earning the most in the NBA account for only 87% of the total income, whereas the 50% of players earning the least comprise 13% of the total league payroll.

Table 1. NBA Salary Distribution.

Table 2. WNBA Salary Distribution.		
Percentage of highest earning players	Earnings	Percentage of total league payroll

salaries of about 65% of the WNBA league players. To elaborate on this more, Forbes found that the NBA referees salaries are \$150,000, which means that they earn more than the highest paid WNBA player. Therefore, it is clear to see why WNBA players choose to not rest but instead compete year round in both Europe and America (“The Business Of Being A WNBA Player”).

Nonetheless, it is not just basketball that displays pay disparities. For example, in the 2018 world’s highest-paid athletes roundup, consisting of the top 100 highest paid athletes across

The income data gathered showed that the WNBA Gini coefficient is equal to 0.2462. This would indicate that it is closer to the minimum (0) value than the maximum (1) value and would stipulate relative equality

population (in regards to this paper, the population is the NBA and WNBA). However, this gauge should not be thought of as an absolute measurement of income. For example, a high-income country and a low income country may have the same Gini coefficient due to the incomes being distributed similarly within each country. Nevertheless, as we can see in the

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