

# WNBA, players' union agree to landmark deal in new collective bargaining agreement <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** The Washington Post

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 14 Jan 2020

## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

The WNBA and its players' union announced Tuesday morning that they have reached a tentative labor agreement that represents a profound shift in compensation and resources available to the players.

Under the proposed collective bargaining agreement, the average compensation for WNBA players will exceed six figures for the first time. The new deal also includes drastic improvement in maternity and child-care benefits, enhanced travel standards and an avenue to equitable revenue sharing, all of which positions the WNBA as a progressive leader at a time when female athletes around the world are demanding better pay and treatment from their leagues.

In soccer, the U.S. women's national team is suing the U.S. Soccer Federation over issues of gender discrimination. In hockey, the best players in the world are fighting to create a sustainable league. For the WNBA, Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said the new deal represents an investment in the players.

"It was important to have a progressive, aggressive, bold CBA to drive the value that these athletes can provide, to drive that value from our revenue sources and ultimately drive the revenue of our franchises up," Engelbert, whose term began in July, said on a conference call. "We are betting on women, as our players have said, in a big way here. Betting on the WNBA."

Billie Jean King, who is part of the ownership group of the Los Angeles Sparks, said in a tweet that the new CBA "will redefine what it means to be a professional female athlete today."

The WNBA is hoping the new deal makes the league a priority for its top players. Currently, most WNBA players make up for limited salaries in the domestic league by going overseas during the offseason to play in countries such as Russia, Australia and South Korea, where their earning potential is higher.

Year-round play is an unavoidable reality that also affects WNBA competition: The league lost one of its biggest stars for all of last season when Breanna Stewart of the Seattle Storm, the 2018 league MVP, suffered a torn Achilles' tendon while playing in Europe.

There is also the argument that if top players stay home during the offseason, they can devote part of their time to promoting the league.

"What I've come to find out is everyone is different in their choices of going overseas, their priorities, what's important," Seattle Storm guard Sue Bird said. "For me personally, I think had something like this been available when I first came out of college, I probably never would have gone overseas."

The new contract must still be approved by the league's board of governors. It was overwhelmingly approved by the players just hours after the WNBA announced the agreement — the text of which has not been made public — with what Women's National Basketball Players Association President Nneka Ogwumike called "unprecedented turnout of player voting."

If the deal is ratified, it will begin in May ahead of the 2020 season and run through 2027.

A steep increase in pay for players throughout the league is perhaps the new agreement's most notable element. It proposes what the league said is a 53 percent increase in total cash compensation, which consists of salary, additional performance bonuses, prize pools for newly created in-season competitions, and league and team marketing deals.

While the maximum salary for top players increases from just over \$100,000 to \$215,000, increased bonuses and compensation for marketing mean a top player could earn more than \$500,000 in a season. Other high-performing players have the chance to earn between \$200,000 and \$300,000, and the average cash compensation across the league will be nearly \$130,000. The average salary in 2018 was around \$70,000.

Additional cash compensation also includes a minimum of \$1.6 million in offseason marketing agreements that would allow for up to \$300,000 for select players.

The WNBA will also work to promote players for potential coaching opportunities. Engelbert said active players coaching in the NBA can be paid at market rate under the new deal, erasing an issue Washington Mystics guard Kristi Toliver unearthed last season. Toliver was paid just \$10,000 as an assistant coach with the Washington Wizards because of pay restrictions in the expiring CBA.

"Perhaps we should call it the 'Toliver Provision,' " WNBPA Executive Director Terri Jackson said.

Toliver declined to comment because the new deal has not yet been ratified.

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