

# Baseball Salaries

## Thirty Years Ago

*How the Pay Checks of the 80's Compared with a Big League's Income Today*

By WILLIAM H. DUNBAR



"Old Hoss" Radbourne who won twenty straight victories for Providence in his best season. The records show that he received \$4,500 for his best paid year's work in the majors

THE vexed question in baseball is always the salary problem. Twenty odd athletes to a club, each with a clear idea of what he is worth to his sceptical employer create more dissension than all other baseball tangles combined. The stars of the diamond now receive a much larger income than used to be the case, but even in the 80s, according to the records, the salary problem had begun to loom large on the horizon.

THE most interesting item in a big leaguers personal affairs, at least from the layman's viewpoint, is his salary. Probably more speculation is current among fandom's laity concerning the pay envelope of a famous diamond star, than any other theme in baseball. We all know how Grover Cleveland Alexander re-

linquished a job paying \$12,500 per annum for his thirty per in the army. But in fairness to big Aleck we must rate his salary this year at \$17,500, for he received a cash bonus of \$5,000 for fixing his signature to one of the briefest contracts on record.

### SIDE LIGHTS ON THE BASEBALL SALARY QUESTION THIRTY YEARS AGO

PLAYER	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889
M. J. Kelly	\$1,300	\$1,400	\$1,700	\$2,000	\$2,250	\$2,500	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$4,000
H. Richardson	1,250	1,300	1,500	2,000	2,100	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,200
E. Williamson	1,400	1,400	2,000	2,300	2,500	2,500	2,500	3,000	3,000
George Gore	1,100	1,200	1,800	2,100	2,100	2,100	2,500	2,500	1,500
D. Brouthers	875	1,200	1,600	2,000	2,500	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,700
J. H. O'Rourke	2,000	2,000	2,250	3,000	4,500	3,000	3,500	3,500	3,500
J. L. White	1,600	1,600	1,600	1,600	2,500	3,500	3,500	3,500	3,500
J. C. Rowe	1,200	1,400	1,650	2,000	2,100	3,500	3,500	3,500	3,500
E. Hanlon	1,200	1,400	1,500	1,700	1,700	2,100	2,100	2,800	3,100
G. A. Wood	875	1,000	1,400	1,600	1,600	1,800	2,000	2,100	2,500
Jas. Galvin	1,200	1,300	1,700	2,600	2,600	2,000	2,100	3,000	3,000
Fred Pfeffer	750	1,000	1,600	1,800	1,800	2,100	2,400	3,000	3,000
Wm. Ewing	1,000	1,200	3,100	3,100	3,100	3,500	3,500	4,500	5,000
J. W. Ward	1,700	2,400	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	4,000	4,250
T. J. Keefe	1,500	1,500	2,800	2,800	3,000	3,000	3,000	4,000	4,500
Roger Connor	900	1,200	2,000	2,000	2,200	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,500
A. A. Irwin	—	—	1,600	1,700	1,800	2,600	2,600	2,600	4,000
C. Radbourne	—	—	2,000	3,000	4,000	4,000	4,500	4,250	4,000
Sydney Farrar	—	—	900	1,200	1,500	1,600	1,800	2,000	2,000
C. G. Buffington	—	1,000	1,000	1,800	2,800	2,000	2,500	2,650	2,800
G. E. Andrews	—	—	—	1,500	1,800	1,800	2,000	2,400	2,250
Fred Dunlap	—	1,300	—	—	—	4,500	4,500	7,000	5,000
James Fogarty	—	—	—	1,000	1,300	1,400	1,900	2,000	2,500
D. Richardson	—	—	—	700	1,100	2,000	2,000	2,400	2,600
Con. Daly	—	—	—	1,500	1,800	1,800	2,500	2,000	2,000
F. H. Carrol	—	—	—	—	2,800	2,000	2,000	2,500	2,500
Ed. Morris	—	—	—	—	2,500	2,520	2,900	3,000	3,000
Con. Mack	—	—	—	—	—	2,250	2,250	2,500	2,750
Chas. Getzein	—	—	—	—	—	1,750	1,900	2,150	2,800
James Ryan	—	—	—	—	—	1,080	1,800	2,300	3,000
Wm. Nash	—	—	—	—	—	1,750	2,000	2,500	3,000

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## WHAT THE OLD TIMERS EARNED

The accompanying list embodies 228 items, each item representing the salary paid for one season to a Major League ball-player in the 80's.

The smallest salary in the list is \$700 given to D. Richardson in 1884.

The largest salary is \$7,000 (including bonus) which was paid to Fred Dunlap in 1888.

The men whose names appear in this list were stars of their day and their salaries no doubt were much superior to those paid the average player of the time.

By adding the total salaries in the accompanying list and dividing by the number of items, 228, we find that the average annual salary received by a good player in the period from 1881 to 1889 was \$2,427.

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Other famous big leaguers have cut juicy melons in the form of financial reward. Eddie Collins is reputed to draw down the tidy sum of \$15,000 per year for his dazzling work with the World's Champions. Tris Speaker, as the chief luminary of the Forest City Club must get at least as much. Walter Johnson is supposed to be growing richer at the rate of \$16,000 per annum for winning the majority of games that Washington is able to jimmy from opposing pitchers. And the only Tyrus, so rumour claims, counts his annual pay check in a row of ciphers with a big 2 in front of them.

Salaries soared to dizzy heights in the Federal League war. And just now they are undergoing the inevitable reaction, accelerated no doubt, by the wisdom of war retrenchment. But the history of big league salaries has usually been one of ever recurring boom days followed by a corresponding slump.

The old-timers tell us that no such salaries blossomed in the good old days of Pop Alison and Mike Kelly. Very true. We can all remember when Ty Cobb held out for an advance and received \$12,500, up to that time the largest salary ever paid a ball-player. But when curiosity prompts the investigator to pry into the salary secrets of bygone days he will find that the old-time heroes whose names are memories now, really received a very substantial stipend, all the more impressive when it is considered that the purchasing power of the dollar was considerably more in the 80's than in these days of war price inflation.

A page torn from baseball history when the game was young reveals some curious information on this interesting question. Omitting the formative years up to 1880, when the game was slowly gaining its first grip on the popular interest and pausing at the threshold of the early nine-ties with the brotherhood war in the offer-

ing we will find that many old-timers really received pretty comfortable salaries during years when interest was merely normal. But even more interesting it is to trace the steady rise in salaries from 1881 to the close of 1880 and the days of the famous brotherhood war with its period of temporary salary inflation.

In 1881 Mike Kelly the Ty Cobb of his day, was drawing down the sum of \$1,300 a year. Evidently either the club or Kelly thought possible danger lurked in the number 13 for the next year his salary received a raise to \$1,400. The following season it rose again, to \$1,700. In 1884, it was an even \$2,000. In 1885 it was \$2,250. The following season it stood at \$3,500. But in 1887 it rose to \$4,000, where it remained for the three seasons ensuing.

Now \$4,000 is not a whale of a salary in these days. But the fact remains that there are very many major leaguers now in uniform who never received \$4,000 and in all probability never will. Of course,

they were not in King Kelly's class. But nevertheless considering the times, Kelly really drew a very satisfactory pay check.

Buck Ewing, considered by most old timers as the greatest catcher who ever lived, was drawing down the sum of \$1,000 in 1881. But in 1883 his salary had soared to \$3,100. In 1886 it was \$3,500. In 1888 it was \$4,500 while in 1889 it was a round \$5,000.

There is no possible doubt that Ewing was worth it. Had he lived in these days his salary would have been considerably above \$5,000, no doubt. And yet even now \$5,000 would be considered a very good salary by most ball players.

Fred Pfeffer was getting \$750 in 1881. Five years later his salary had risen to \$1,800. In 1889 it was \$3,000.

Ed Hanlon drew down \$1,200 in 1881. He was raised at least every other year and in 1889 was getting \$3,100.

Dan Brouther's slugging netted him \$875 in 1881. The following season he drew \$1,200, the next \$1,600, the next \$2,000, the next \$2,500, the next \$4,000. Pretty steady rise for Brouthers. And in 1889 he was getting the snug sum of \$4,700.

"Old Hoss" Radbourne of pitching fame drew \$2,000 in 1883, \$3,000 in 1884, and \$4,000 in 1885. He bit off raises in much bigger chunks than most of them but passed his zenith in 1887 when he was paid \$4,500. The next season he received \$4,250 and the next a flat \$4,000.

Fred Dunlap is credited with the largest amount received in any one year by a ball player in the early days. This amount was \$7,000 and Dunlap drew that tidy sum in 1888. It is only fair, however, to admit that his salary called for \$5,000 while \$2,000 additional was paid him on his transferral from Detroit to Pittsburgh.

Among other interesting information the data at hand informs us that Connie Mack drew \$2,250 as a player in 1886 and was getting \$2,750 in 1889. Perhaps in these days of business uncertainty and huge investments Connie sometimes sighs for the time when he was a simple ball player instead of a magnate and drew his pay check regularly, free from the risks and worries of big business.

Baseball has grown wonderfully since 1889. A single franchise now costs more than an entire circuit thirty years ago. An old-time ball park with its moderate real estate investment and wooden stands would represent but a fraction of the cost of a modern huge baseball plant with its steel and concrete stands. Naturally the players' salaries have increased over early standards. But the records show that the stars of the 80's, many of them, really drew pretty good pay for fielding without gloves and batting .400 in the old days.

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