

Will high salaries kill sports, entertainment?

by Mark Pavilons

It's great work if you can get it!

Being a star athlete or entertainer is definitely key-to-the-city rich.

Salaries of the pros keep skyrocketing, reaching never-before-seen levels. And consumers are feeling the pinch.

New York Mets' right fielder Juan Soto is baseball's highest-paid player, slated to collect an estimated \$126.9 million in 2025. Los Angeles Dodgers' two-way phenom Shohei Ohtani will join him in the nine-figure club with an estimated \$102 million.

While there's no debating their talent, the golden era of sports seemed more "normal" when personalities and talent "not pay" cheques "oomed" large.

And then, the 1960s sports era was the first time American sports started seeing multiple contracts in the six-figure range. Names like Sandy Koufax, Mickey Mantle, and Wilt Chamberlain highlight this list of the highest-paid athletes of the 1960s.

Hank Aaron pulled in roughly \$80,000 in the 1960s.

Hockey wages have risen sharply, too, way beyond the money paid to hockey's greats like Gretzky, Messier and the like.

Russian-born Kirill Kaprizov's eight-year, \$136-million deal is set to become the biggest in NHL history.

When Bobby Orr retired in the 1978-79 season, he was paid \$500,000, but for most of his career, he earned \$200,000 or less per season. Gordie Howe hit the \$100,000 mark in 1969-70.

The entry level players in the NHL "today" many just teenagers "earn" roughly \$700,000, with most racking up well over \$1-million.

Toronto boasts some of the greatest fans in any league, any sport. And we've got a few trophies to prove that we can compete with anyone in the world.

But of course, fandom comes with a price, too.

At a recent Maple Leafs game, my brother-in-law forked out \$49.50 for two cans of tall boys!

I didn't venture near any of the concessions but I "imagine" you can spend a small fortune in snacks at any game.

I'm not convinced the prices can't be subsidized in some way to give patrons a break.

Sports aside, top singers and A-Listers are raking in the dough, too.

Through acting and business ventures, the top earning entertainers include Tom Cruise (\$100 million), Dwayne Johnson (\$88 million) and Ryan Reynolds (\$71.5 million).

Top box office stars, like those mentioned, can earn \$20 million per film, along with some profit or product sharing.

By comparison, John Wayne's biggest pay cheques were from his late-1960s movies at \$1 million.

Clint Eastwood was paid only \$15,000 for his first "Man with No Name" movie and he earned roughly \$500,000 per film in the 1960s.

The salaries per episode for our favorite TV show stars can hit seven figures -- trend set by Seinfeld, Friends and The Big Bang Theory cast members.

Michael Jackson, one of the top stars of all time, earned roughly \$37 million in 1985.

Taylor Swift, the indisputable diva of all time, is estimated to be worth just over \$1-billion.

Today, the top talk show hosts, which neither act, sing, nor play sports, do quite well. Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Kimmel and Jimmy Fallon earn roughly \$15 million annually.

So, my friends, the ceiling seems to be quite high if you're a popular athlete or entertainer. In sports, the idea is to make as much as you can early on, because careers won't last into your 40s given the physical demands.

But actors can work well into their 80s and 90s.

Some will say the salaries 40 years ago are comparable to today's wages, but I don't think that's true. "Adjusted" figures don't paint an accurate picture of the top-billing talents.

Many stars were also expendable over the course of Hollywood's tainted history.

Athletes keep making record amounts, especially in baseball, as witnessed by some post-World Series contracts.

While all of these professionals may very well deserve these massive salaries, one has to ask just where will it end?

Sports organizations have salary "caps," but that magic line keeps moving.

For others, there is no real limit. And the more you have, the more you continue to make, with wise investments, business dealings, etc.

Keanu Reeves once said that he has enough money for several centuries. He has given away millions and has taken pay cuts just to work with notable actors. But he's the exception. Must be his Canadian upbringing.

We consumers -- movie watches, video streamers, concert-goers and sports fans -- subsidize these massive salaries.

One day, though, I think we'll begin to see the breaking point in terms of TV sit-coms and sports dynasties. The bubble will burst -- production companies and team owners will have to put the brakes on skyrocketing pay cheques.

The movie-going public is already opting for more stay-at-home streaming options. Alas, theatres, especially the smaller ones, will one day become a thing of the past.

And that's sad. Who doesn't have fond memories of watching a flick in a crowded, dark, dingy theatre? I saw Jaws with my sister and ET with my mom when I was a kid and will never forget those experiences.

And while home-made popcorn can be pretty good, there's nothing like movie popcorn, especially those massive tubs!

Of course, many of us still have family movie nights in the comfort of our living rooms.

While streaming services offer a multitude of choices, you pay a premium for this service, too, on top of regular cable, internet, etc. And now, more services are tossing in commercials and you have to pay to go ?commercial free.? Talk about squeezing every penny out of consumers.

We average folks are willing to part with our hard-earned, after-tax dollars for some R&R. We tell ourselves we deserve it.

Quite right. But nothing ? not a World Series game or concert tickets ??s worth maxing out the credit cards for.

Take it from Bob Marley: ?You entertain people who are satisfied. Hungry people can't be entertained ? or people who are afraid. You can't entertain a man who has no food.?