

NBA and WNBA Salary Disparity Highlighted by Curry and Clark Comparison

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The chasm between NBA and WNBA salaries has sparked renewed debate, with the earnings of Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry and Indiana Fever's Caitlin Clark serving as a stark illustration. The disparity, laid bare by comparing their rookie contracts, underscores a broader issue in professional basketball that continues to fuel tensions.

In 2009, Stephen Curry, selected as the seventh pick in the NBA Draft, inked a four-year contract with the Warriors worth \$12.7 million, equating to roughly \$3.2 million in his debut season. By contrast, Caitlin Clark, the first overall pick in the 2024 WNBA Draft, signed a four-year deal with the Indiana Fever for a total of \$338,056, earning just \$84,514 in her rookie year. This means Curry's first-year earnings were over 37 times higher than Clark's.

The contrast has amplified calls for reform, particularly as WNBA players, including Clark, took a stand before the recent All-Star game. Donning black t-shirts emblazoned with "Pay Us What You Owe Us" in bold white letters, they signalled growing frustration with the players' union and league officials, who remain locked in stalled talks over a new pay agreement.

The numbers tell a sobering story. Under the WNBA's current collective bargaining agreement, set to expire early after its termination in October, players are entitled to 25% of the league's profits, contingent on meeting revenue targets. According to *IndyStar*, this caps top earners at approximately \$250,000 annually, with rookies starting at around \$72,000. Meanwhile, NBA players enjoy a far more generous 50% share of league revenue, guaranteed regardless of financial targets.

Curry's earnings trajectory further highlights the divide. From 2013 to 2017, he averaged \$11 million per year, a figure that soared to over \$40 million in 2017. His current four-year extension, signed in 2021, will see him earn \$59.6 million in the 2025-26 season alone. Even if Curry, now 37, takes a pay cut after his contract ends in 2027, his earnings will likely remain astronomical compared to WNBA salaries.

The pay gap reflects deeper structural differences. The NBA's global reach and higher revenue streams dwarf those of the WNBA, which struggles to secure comparable media and sponsorship deals. Yet, critics argue the disparity entrenches inequality, with female athletes undervalued despite their skill and growing fanbase. The protest shirts worn by Clark and her peers are a demand for change, but with negotiations faltering, resolution seems distant.

As the debate rages, the comparison between Curry's and Clark's earnings remains a powerful symbol of a divide that professional basketball must confront. Whether the WNBA can secure a fairer deal for its players will shape the sport's future.