

WNBA Players Demand Fair Pay as CBA Talks Intensify

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As the WNBA season resumed after the 2025 All-Star break in Indianapolis, the spotlight shifted from the court to the ongoing collective bargaining agreement (CBA) negotiations. The clash between Team Napheesa Collier and Team Caitlin Clark was overshadowed by a unified push from players for better wages and benefits, a demand underscored by their bold pregame T-shirts proclaiming, “Pay Us What You Owe Us.” With nearly 17,000 fans in attendance, the message was unmistakable: players are fed up and want change.

Nneka Ogwumike, president of the Women's National Basketball Players Association (WNBPA) and Seattle Storm All-Star, articulated the players' frustration. "The league's growth is undeniable, yet our salaries don't reflect the value we bring," she said in a recent interview. "We're demanding a fair share of the revenue, especially as investment pours in." With the current CBA set to expire on **31 October 2025**, here are five key points to understand about the high-stakes talks.

The existing CBA, signed in January 2020 under Commissioner Cathy Engelbert, was originally set to run until 2027. However, the WNBPA opted out last October, citing the league's unprecedented growth, bringing the expiration forward to October 2025. If no agreement is reached by then, the WNBA risks its first-ever lockout, potentially delaying or cancelling the 2026 season. Engelbert, speaking at the All-Star weekend, expressed cautious optimism: "I'm confident we can reach a deal by October, though we have some flexibility if we're close." Players, however, are bracing for all possibilities, with WNBPA vice president Napheesa Collier urging colleagues to prepare financially for a potential work stoppage.

At the heart of the negotiations are two priorities: a fair revenue-sharing model and a restructured salary system. Currently, WNBA players receive just **9.3% of league revenue** covering ticket sales, TV deals, and merchandise compared to **49–51% for NBA players**, **48% for NFL players**, and **50% for NHL players**. Ogwumike described the league's latest revenue-sharing proposal as "fundamentally different" from the players' expectations, which seek salaries that scale with the league's booming business. Collier, speaking on Saturday, called the league's offer "disappointing" and "nowhere near what we asked for." A meeting with over 40 players and league officials last week in Indianapolis was labelled "disrespectful" by some players, highlighting the growing rift.

The WNBA's meteoric rise has strengthened the players' case. The 2024 season, boosted by stars like Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese, was the most-watched in 24 years, with attendance up **26%** and merchandise sales soaring **40%**. Engelbert noted, "Sold-out arenas are now routine, and national viewership has climbed **23%** year-on-year." The league's expansion plans are equally ambitious, with the **Golden State Valkyries** joining this season and new teams slated for **Toronto and Portland (2026)**, **Cleveland (2028)**, **Detroit (2029)**, and **Philadelphia (2030)**. These franchises, some paying up to **\$245 million** in expansion fees, reflect the league's soaring valuation, with the Valkyries alone

worth over **\$490 million**, per a June Sportico report. A new **\$2.16 billion**, 11-year media rights deal starting in 2026 further underscores the WNBA's profitability.

With the threat of a lockout looming, players are exploring other options. The **Unrivaled 3x3** league, co-founded by Collier and Breanna Stewart, and the **Athletes Unlimited Pro Basketball** league offer lucrative alternatives. Unrivaled's inaugural season paid a **median salary of \$215,000**, far exceeding the WNBA's 2025 salary range of **\$64,500 to \$243,000**. Collier, speaking in April, emphasised Unrivaled's player-focused model: "Women's sports are booming, but the athletes aren't reaping the rewards. Our league offers equity and fair pay." These alternatives give players leverage, reducing their dependence on the WNBA and strengthening their resolve in negotiations.

As the **31 October** deadline approaches, the gap between the WNBPA and the league remains wide. Players are united in their demand for a fairer deal, driven by the league's undeniable growth and their pivotal role in it. While Engelbert insists progress is possible, the players' frustration signals a tougher road ahead. A lockout would be a blow to the WNBA's momentum, but the players' determination suggests they are ready to hold firm for what they believe they are owed.