

Salaries for College Baseball Coaches Mirrors Popularity

Written by Jordan I. Kobritz

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Original Article

College baseball has come a long way. But in terms of coach's salaries, it still has a long way to go.

Proof that both statements are true was no more evident than when the University of Oregon recently announced the signing of former Cal State Fullerton head coach George Horton to lead the resurrection of the Ducks baseball program. Horton, a two time national coach of the year, led the Titans to the 2004 College World Series title. In his new position, Horton will be guaranteed a base salary of \$400,000, with the chance to earn an additional \$285,000 in incentives.

Horton instantly became the highest paid coach in the Pac-10. According to published reports, Pat Casey, who led the Oregon State Beavers to the last two College World Series titles, is next on the conference pay scale at approximately \$300,000 per year.

But Horton is far from the highest paid baseball coach in the country. Coaches in several conferences - chief among them the SEC, ACC, and Big-12 – have contracts that guarantee them considerably more than Horton will earn in Eugene. Texas coach Augie Garrido, who preceded Horton at Cal State Fullerton and led the Titans to three national championships, and Miami coach Jim Morris head the list, earning \$600,000 per year in base pay.

Salaries for baseball coaches have been climbing steadily, in spite of the fact that only a handful of programs around the country are profitable. Oregon Athletic Director Pat Kilkenny thinks the Ducks, who will begin play in the 2009 season, can add to the list. Kilkenny told *The Oregonian* that he intends to turn baseball into a revenue-producing sport within seven years, no small feat considering that every existing Pac-10 program operates in the red. That's the same position UO was in when they dropped baseball as a varsity sport in 1981, citing inflation and the

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universal scapegoat, Title IX.

One pre-requisite to making money in college baseball is a premier facility. The schools that are profitable – Arkansas, Texas and Mississippi State among them – have stadiums that compare favorably with the best facilities in Minor League Baseball. Oregon appears to have the financial wherewithal to join them. Nike Chairman and OU grad Phil Knight has agreed to endow the athletic program to the tune of \$100 million. And for good measure, the Ducks have approached the Minor League Eugene Emeralds to determine their interest in contributing to the construction of a 5,000-seat on-campus stadium that the teams would share.

Fielding a competitive team is another pre-requisite to making money and with the signing of Horton, the Ducks are poised to compete for a berth in the playoffs. Baseball is the collegiate poster child for parity. Division I schools have a maximum of 11.7 scholarships available and recent NCAA amendments have shortened the season, giving northern teams the ability to compete with the perennial powers in warm weather climates.

In spite of recent advances, salaries for college baseball coaches still pale in comparison to the salaries earned by their counterparts in the revenue-generating sports of football and men's basketball. A *USA Today* survey published last year found that the average base salary of a Division 1 football coach hovered around \$1 million. That was before Nick Saban signed his \$4 million-per-year blockbuster with Alabama, triggering a new round in the upward spiral of coaches' salaries.

NCAA men's basketball coaches aren't far behind football coaches in the salary department. Basketball coaches in the ACC, SEC and Big-12 earn on average \$1.2 million, double the figure of the highest paid baseball coaches in the same conferences.

While Horton's salary may seem modest in some circles, it wasn't very many years ago that college baseball coaches were earning less than the likes of teachers, police and firemen. Which is why the announcement of Horton's new contract at Oregon had baseball coaches salivating from coast to coast, even if they still have a long way to go to catch up with the salaries of basketball and football coaches at the same institutions.

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