

Paying Football Coaches Not to Coach: The Mounting Costs of FBS Buyouts

Since the College Football Playoff (CFP) began in Fiscal Year 2015, Knight-Newhouse data show that buyouts for FBS football coaches at **FBS PUBLIC** institutions grew more than 2.5 times in the next six years (See Table 1 below). In the three years prior to the initial College Football Playoff, FBS coaching buyouts at FBS public institutions averaged about \$30 million a year. In the next six years, the average tally of payouts at public universities jumped to about \$68 million a year.

These tallies significantly understate the soaring costs of FBS coaching buyouts for two reasons. They do not include more recent coaching buyouts during the last season (Fiscal Year 2022) and the current season and they only cover coaching buyouts at public institutions. [Note: Institutionally-reported and audited data for FY22 will be accessible in our database in March 2023.] **After adding publicly-reported buyouts for FY2022—just for fired head coaches at Power 5 schools at public and private schools—it’s clear that football coaching buyouts have tripled since CFP began.** [FY 2022 reported buyouts for head coaches at Power 5 schools are summarized in Table 3.]

Ballooning Buyouts: A Decade of Wasting More than a Half-Billion Dollars

Table 1

Fiscal Year		Severance total_football coaches*
2012		\$32,008,085
2013		\$36,991,525
2014		\$ 21,775,028
2015	\$	\$32,266,774
2016	\$	39,907,158
2017	\$	48,322,114
2018	\$	104,132,251
2019	\$	68,883,771
2020	\$	61,069,366
2021	\$	84,668,857
Grand Total	\$	530,024,929

Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database.

Data reported by institutions on NCAA Financial Report forms.

*Note: Total Severance from database includes football head and assistant coaches

Two Most Recent Seasons (Fall 21 and Fall 22) – Knight-Newhouse Research on Football Head Coach Buyouts:

- **As of November 1, in past season and a half alone, 14 Power 5 Head football coaches (public and private schools) have been fired with combined buyouts OVER \$150 million.**
 - As on Nov. 1 of this season, **6** Power 5 football *head coaches* were fired with buyouts exceeding **\$65 million**. [*Updated on 11.1.22 to include Auburn buyout of Bryan Harsin.*] See Table 2 attached.
 - During the last football season (2021, which is 2022 Fiscal Year), there were **8** Power 5 football *head coaches at public and private institutions* fired with buyouts totaling more than **\$92 million**. See Table 3 attached.

The “Cost of Doing Business” Copout

- The staggering payments made to fired FBS football coaches are often dismissed by college presidents, trustees, and athletic directors as no more than the “cost of doing business,” particularly at Power Five schools. In fact, these wasted millions are one of the clearest signs yet of financial dysfunction at FBS schools and the urgent need to update revenue distribution and governance of FBS football. It is not inevitable that non-profit educational institutions, especially publicly funded institutions, should dish out tens of millions of dollars to fired football coaches.
- Last year, the Knight Commission proposed just such a solution (our [2021 C.A.R.E. Model](#)) that would require conferences instituting new financial frameworks — frameworks that could implement penalties on schools and teams for excessive coaching buyouts and compensation. This type of system would be akin to “luxury taxes” in pro sports. Such a conference-based system would not violate antitrust laws.
- Division I sports need a more sophisticated financial framework that ensures more revenues are connected to their core mission—athletes’ education, health, safety, and success. If FBS leaders do not act, the problem of ballooning buyouts and wasted dollars will soon get much worse, as revenues from the upcoming CFP media contract and expanded playoff are estimated to generate more than \$1 billion annually in new revenues.

Len Elmore on trends in Washington Post on Oct. 7, 2022:



Knight Commission co-chair Len Elmore

Washington Post, October 7, 2022,
on multi-million dollar buyouts for fired college football coaches

“You hear athletic directors say, ‘This is the cost of business.’
But it’s really not. What it is is that there is more money than ever
available for them to throw at these coaches.

With this windfall (revenue from conference broadcast deals and the
College Football Playoff), it’s almost like ADs — and even the college
presidents who okay it — are playing with Monopoly money.

It’s just setting a trend that is spiraling out of control.”

**Knight-Newhouse Research on Football Head Coach Buyouts for Power 5 only
(*As of November 1, 2022)**

FY23 (2022 Season)

Table 2

Institution	Fired Coach	Buyout total (In Millions)	Source
Auburn	Bryan Harsin	\$15.58	https://twitter.com/PeteThamel/status/1587128600746147842
Arizona St. (updated settlement Oct. 3., 2022)	Herm Edwards	*\$4.40	https://www.statepress.com/article/2022/10/herm-edwards-50-percent-buyout-contract
Colorado (updated 10.2.22)	Karl Dorrell	\$8.70	https://www.on3.com/college/colorado-buffaloes/news/colorado-releases-buyout-details-karl-dorrell-announces-interim-head-coach-mike-sanford/
Georgia Tech	Geoff Collins	\$11.30	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/34670009/sources-georgia-tech-yellow-jackets-fire-ad-todd-stansbury-football-coach-geoff-collins
Nebraska	Scott Frost	\$15	https://journalstar.com/sports/huskers/football/scott-frost-receives-full-buyout-as-nebraska-severance-bill-tops-50-million-since-2005/article_512e140e-d89e-5193-bd8b-9ef6b23abeae.html
Wisconsin	Paul Chryst	\$11	https://www.jsonline.com/story/sports/college/uw/2022/10/03/wisconsin-pay-fired-football-coach-paul-chryst-11-million-buyout/8171623001/
GRAND TOTAL		\$65.98	

*ASU reached a settlement with Edwards post-firing that reduced their contracted buyout figure.

Knight-Newhouse Research on Football Head Coach Buyouts for Power 5 only

FY22 (21 Season)

Table 3

Institution	Fired Coach	Buyouts <i>in Millions</i>	Media Source/Verification
Florida	Dan Mullen	\$12.00	https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/sec/2021/11/21/dan-mullen-fired-florida-fourth-season-after-loss-mizzouri/8711535002/
LSU	Ed Orgeron	\$16.95	https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/sec/2021/10/17/ed-orgeron-lsu-football-part-ways-coach-buyout/6077606001/
Miami (private)	Manny Diaz	\$8.00	https://247sports.com/Article/Manny-Diaz-buyout-Miami-Hurricanes-owe-fired-coach-north-of-8-million-177492645/
Southern Cal (private)	Clay Helton	\$12.00	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/32204357/usc-trojans-fire-head-football-coach-clay-helton
			https://www.latimes.com/sports/usc/story/2020-07-16/clay-helton-salary-40-percent-raise-usc-football
TCU (private)	Gary Patterson	\$18.00	https://www.star-telegram.com/sports/college/big-12/texas-christian-university/article255437736.html
			https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/2017/11/24/patterson-signs-new-deal-to-stay-at-tcu-through-2023-season/107993200/
Texas Tech	Matt Wells	\$7.00	https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/big12/2021/10/25/texas-tech-fires-matt-wells-midway-through-third-season/8540928002/
Virginia Tech	Justin Fuente	\$8.75	https://roanoke.com/sports/college/va_tech/the-huge-financial-cost-of-virginia-tech-s-decision-to-part-ways-with-coach-justin/article_2d1493dc-4700-11ec-b65f-8bc24f297a42.html
Washington	Jimmy Lake	\$10.00	https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/ncaaf/pac12/2021/11/14/washington-huskies-fire-football-coach-jimmy-lake/8618826002/
GRAND TOTAL		\$92.70	

Additional Source to confirm other media reports:

<https://twitter.com/ByBerkowitz/status/1460601382264877066>