



Paying Football Coaches Not to Coach: The Mounting Costs of FBS Severance Payouts (As of Nov. 27, 2023)

Since the College Football Playoff (CFP) began in Fiscal Year 2015, Knight-Newhouse data show that severance pay for fired Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) football coaches at FBS public institutions **tripled**. (See Table 1 below). In the first year of the initial CFP, FBS coaching severance payouts at FBS public institutions totaled \$32 million. In 2022, severance payouts exceeded \$98 million.

These tallies significantly understate the soaring costs of FBS coaching buyouts for two reasons. They do not account for coaching severance for Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024, with the record-breaking payout at Texas A&M to its head coach (\$76 million), and the data only cover coaching severance at public institutions. [Note: Institutionally reported and audited data for FY23 will be accessible in our database in April 2024.] [Reported buyouts for head coaches at schools in the NCAA FBS conferences since last season (FY23 and FY24) are summarized in Table 2.]

Ballooning Buyouts: 2022 Fiscal Year Severance Pay Approached \$100 Million at FBS public institutions

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
2022	\$98,166,702
Grand Total	\$628,191,631

Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database.

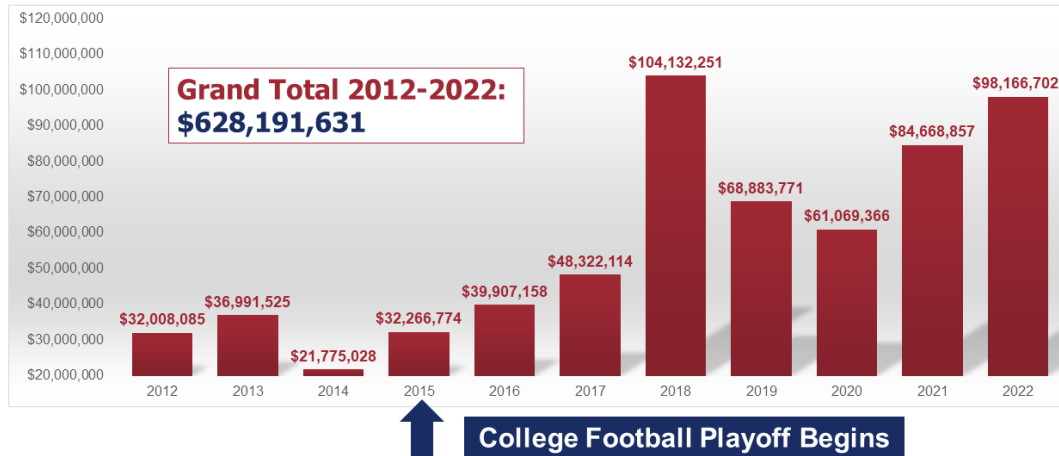
Data reported by institutions on NCAA Financial Report forms.

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



Ballooning Buyouts: Head and Assistant Football Coaches Severance

Public FBS Institutions – 2012-2022 **ACTUAL**



Source: Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Data. Data reported by public institutions on NCAA Financial Report forms.
Note: Total Severance includes only football head and assistant coaches

Two Most Recent Seasons (Fall 22 and Fall 23) – Knight-Newhouse Research on Football Head Coach Severance Payouts [Note: The total severance amounts will be larger since many will include payouts to assistant coaches who transition with the head coach]:

- **As of November 27, 2023, in the past two seasons alone, 10 Power 5 Head football coaches (public schools) have been fired with combined buyouts totaling \$176 Million, including the record-breaking payout at Texas A&M to its head coach (\$76 million). In the 2023 season, Power 5 public universities' severance obligations have hit a record high, with financial commitments exceeding an astonishing \$110 million to just four head coaches. See Table 2 attached.**

The “Cost of Doing Business” Copout

- The staggering severance 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 5 schools. In fact, these wasted millions are one of the clearest signs yet of financial dysfunction at FBS schools and the urgent need to overhaul the governance of FBS football and its financial framework. 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.
- In September 2021, the Knight Commission proposed a solution (our [2021 C.A.R.E. Model](#)) that would enable conferences instituting new financial frameworks in accordance with C.A.R.E. Model principles to 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.

- If FBS leaders do not act, the problem of ballooning buyouts and wasted dollars will soon get much worse, as total revenues from the upcoming CFP expanded playoff are estimated to generate more than \$1 billion annually in new revenues. In [our recent report](#), financial services firm CLA projects that at historical growth rates (based on data in Table 1), public universities’ severance payouts to fired FBS football coaches will approach **a half a billion dollars** (\$481 million) in 2032.
- 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. Knight Commission recommendations on how these new and uncommitted CFP revenues should be used, can be found [here](#).

Arne Duncan on trends with football coaching severance pay:



Knight Commission Co-Chair Arne Duncan

on multi-million dollar severance pay for college football coaches and data showing severance has tripled since the CFP began in 2015

November 17, 2023, Washington, D.C.

“We just had an FBS football coach get fired who will get paid about \$75 million dollars over the next eight years not to coach, but to NOT coach...This is simply a crazy severance package at a public, taxpayer-supported university.

We have reached a new low point in financial irresponsibility and reckless spending when an unemployed FBS football coach can be the highest paid public employee in the state. The level of absurdity here is mind-boggling.”

**Knight-Newhouse Research on Football Head Coach Severance Pay for Power 5 Conferences only
(*As of November 27, 2023)**

Table 2 - FY23 (2022 Season) and FY24 to date (2023 Season)

Institution	Fired Coach	Buyout total (In Millions)	Source
FY23 (2022 Season)			
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/
FY24 (2023 Season)			
Texas A&M	Jimbo Fisher	\$76	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/38880082/jimbo-fisher-expected-fired-texas-sources-confirm
Mississippi State	Zach Arnett	\$4	https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/38888927/mississippi-state-fires-head-football-coach-zach-arnett
Houston	Dana Holgorsen	\$14.8	https://www.houstonchronicle.com/texas-sports-nation/college/article/dana-holgorsen-houston-football-fires-coach-18506892.php
Indiana	Tom Allen	\$15.5	https://www.espn.com.sg/college-football/story/_/id/38983344/indiana-coach-tom-allen-fired-3rd-straight-losing-season
GRAND TOTAL		\$176.28	

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

Updated Nov. 27, 2023