

Story summary (130-150 characters (1-2 sentences) describing what the slideshow is covering, including the primary data source.):

Using Spotrac's database of pro sports contracts, Stacker counts down the richest deals in NFL history.

(---Slide1---) Largest NFL contracts in history (---1Slide---)

The NFL offseason gave sports fans some much-needed excitement over the past few months. Still, none of the deals handed out set a new record for the largest contract in NFL history. Overall, NFL contract values have skyrocketed in recent years, with many players surpassing the \$100 million mark. It's not just quarterbacks, either, that are being paid the big bucks. Defensive anchors, pass rushers, and dynamic wide receivers rake in the huge dollars, too. (Words to the wise: If you're looking for big money, it helps to negotiate with the Dallas Cowboys.)

[Stacker](#) compiled a list of the largest NFL contracts in history using active contracts from [Spotrac](#) and historical contracts from a variety of news sources. The contracts are ranked by highest total contract value through 2020.

Some of the deals were handed out more than a decade ago to names who have long retired or moved into the broadcast booth. One common trend you will see throughout is a player is bequeathed with a big contract, but rarely finishes out that deal with the same team. In the NFL, contracts are not guaranteed, so teams often employed a strategy of loading contracts with large overall numbers, knowing they could cut ties toward the end of a deal. Recently, players have become less willing to budge over guaranteed money, and are calling for large chunks of contracts to have guaranteed money paid up front.

Occasionally superstar players like Tom Brady will take smaller contracts for the benefit of a team trying to get under a salary cap. While the current leader on this list has held the top spot for two years, expect that number to be broken in the coming years. Young superstars like Patrick Mahomes, Lamar Jackson, and Deshaun Watson are due big paydays and will make some of the current list of 50 largest NFL contracts in history seem like small potatoes. Click through to find out the math behind the biggest spending sprees in football.

(---Slide2---) #49 (tie). C.J. Mosley (---2Slide---)

- Contract value: \$85.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$17.0 million

The New York Jets had tons of [salary cap room](#) to spend entering the 2019 offseason. Needing a defensive general, the Jets paid big money to nab C.J. Mosley of the Baltimore Ravens. Since his 2014 rookie year, Mosley made four Pro Bowls in Baltimore, but was largely [hampered by injuries](#) during his first year in New York.

(---Slide3---) #49 (tie). Olivier Vernon (---3Slide---)

- Contract value: \$85.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$17.0 million

Seeking to upgrade their defensive line in 2016, the New York Giants paid out [over \\$50 million](#) in guarantees to free agent Olivier Vernon. Injuries derailed Vernon's time in New York, and he was [traded to the Cleveland Browns](#) before the 2019 season, as the Giants sought to save salary.

(---Slide4---) #47 (tie). Dee Ford (---4Slide---)

- Contract value: \$85.5 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$17.1 million

Dee Ford collected 13 sacks in 2018 and wanted to get paid. The Kansas City Chiefs were unable to reach a contract extension with Ford and [traded him to the San Francisco 49ers](#), where he signed his current five-year deal. Ford tallied [half as many sacks](#) this season, and became the [subject of trade rumors](#) again.

(---Slide5---) #47 (tie). Troy Aikman (---5Slide---)

- Contract value: \$85.5 million (9 years)
- Average salary: \$9.5 million

In 1999, Troy Aikman signed what was then one of the biggest contracts in NFL history, with an extension that would run until 2007. However, as the Dallas Cowboys' dynasty came to an end, by 2001, Aikman's contract became an albatross and he was cut before a [\\$7 million](#) bonus kicked in. Aikman retired rather than play for another team.

(---Slide6---) #43 (tie). Ezekiel Elliott (---6Slide---)

- Contract value: \$90.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$15.0 million

Before the 2019 season, Dallas Cowboys running back Ezekiel Elliott held out for a new contract. Elliott's game of chicken worked out, as he received an extension that included [\\$50](#)

[million](#) in guaranteed money, making him the richest running back in NFL history. Elliott [led the league](#) in rushing in two of his first three years as a pro.

(---Slide7---) #43 (tie). Trey Flowers (---7Slide---)

- Contract value: \$90.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$18.0 million

In 2018, the Detroit Lions signed Matt Patricia as head coach, and the former New England Patriot assistant was expected to build a team based on the "[Patriot Way](#)." Patricia began poaching former Patriots and in March 2019, snagged [Trey Flowers](#), who spent his first four seasons in New England. Flowers was the Patriots' [top pass rusher](#), and was coached by Patricia when he was New England's defensive coordinator.

(---Slide8---) #43 (tie). Odell Beckham, Jr. (---8Slide---)

- Contract value: \$90.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$18.0 million

Odell Beckham Jr. wowed fans with his acrobatic catches during his time with the New York Giants, and Big Blue rewarded the former LSU star with a contract in 2018 that included [\\$65 million](#) guaranteed. However, Beckham was [traded](#) less than a year later to the Cleveland Browns, ending a dazzling, yet [roller coaster tenure](#) in New York.

(---Slide9---) #43 (tie). Stephen Davis (---9Slide---)

- Contract value: \$90.0 million (9 years)
- Average salary: \$10.0 million

The contract of former NFL running back Stephen Davis serves as Example A of how weird football contracts can be. The 2000 Davis deal with the Washington Redskins was worth over \$90 million, with incentives that could make it worth almost \$140. However, only a [\\$6.5 million signing bonus](#) was guaranteed, and Davis was [out of Washington](#) after the 2002 season.

(---Slide10---) #42. Alex Smith (---10Slide---)

- Contract value: \$94.0 million (4 years)
- Average salary: \$23.5 million

With Patrick Mahomes ready to take over as quarterback of the Kansas City Chiefs, former starter Alex Smith went to Washington [in January 2018](#), and signed a massive new contract. Smith ended up suffering a [gruesome leg injury](#) that threatened his life, yet the signal caller still hopes to play football again one day.

(---Slide11---) #41. Adrian Peterson (---11Slide---)

- Contract value: \$96.0 million (7 years)
- Average salary: \$13.7 million

Towards the end of Adrian Peterson's monster seven-year deal, the star Minnesota Vikings running back worried the final years [would not be paid out](#). Peterson voiced his displeasure without the guarantees, and eventually earned his full salaries over the next two seasons, but 2016 would be the end of Peterson's tenure in Minnesota. In 10 years with the Vikings, Peterson ran for [11,747 yards](#).

(---Slide12---) #40. Michael Thomas (---12Slide---)

- Contract value: \$96.3 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$19.3 million

Last summer, Michael Thomas held out and was rewarded with a contract that paid him [\\$61 million in guarantees](#), the most of any non-quarterback in NFL history. Thomas went on to catch [149 passes for 1,725 yards](#), both NFL highs in 2019.

(---Slide13---) #39. Tyron Smith (---13Slide---)

- Contract value: \$97.6 million (8 years)
- Average salary: \$12.2 million

Offensive lineman Tyron Smith's [multi-year deal](#) with the Dallas Cowboys gave him the highest total value contract of any player in his position. However, Smith, a seven-time Pro Bowler, is not the highest-paid lineman per year, as that title goes to [Laremy Tunsil](#), who just signed a three-year, \$66 million deal in April.

(---Slide14---) #38. Peyton Manning (---14Slide---)

- Contract value: \$98.0 million (7 years)
- Average salary: \$14.0 million

In 2004, the Indianapolis Colts gave franchise quarterback Peyton Manning a \$98 million deal that was [the richest in team history](#). Manning won one Super Bowl in 13 years in Indianapolis, and then signed an almost equally monstrous contract [with the Denver Broncos in 2012](#).

(---Slide15---) #35 (tie). Amari Cooper (---15Slide---)

- Contract value: \$100.0 million (5 years)

- Average salary: \$20.0 million

After signing quarterback Dak Prescott to a long-term deal, the Dallas Cowboys tied up his favorite target. [Amari Cooper](#), who was traded to Dallas in 2018, signed a five-year pact in March. Not everyone was enamored with the signing, though, as former NFL coach Rex Ryan described Cooper as, well, let's just say it's [a word that rhymes with nerd](#).

(---Slide16---) #35 (tie). Brett Favre (---16Slide---)

- Contract value: \$100.0 million (10 years)
- Average salary: \$10.0 million

When Brett Favre signed a \$100 million extension in 2001, he said he'd be a "[Packer for life](#)." Favre lasted in Green Bay through 2007, before he played with the New York Jets and Minnesota Vikings. Favre retired with [508 touchdown passes](#), fourth most all-time.

(---Slide17---) #35 (tie). Albert Haynesworth (---17Slide---)

- Contract value: \$100.0 million (7 years)
- Average salary: \$14.3 million

Albert Haynesworth's 2009 contract extension [guaranteed \\$41 million](#), the most of any NFL deal ever at that point. Haynesworth only played [two more seasons](#), as injuries slowed the career of one of the league's more dominant defensive lineman. Recently, Haynesworth [has battled kidney disease](#).

(---Slide18---) #34. J.J. Watt (---18Slide---)

- Contract value: \$100.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$16.7 million

J.J. Watt's 2014 contract extension guaranteed him [\\$51.8 million](#), the most for any defensive player at the time. Watt has only played [two full seasons](#) since signing the deal, but remains one of the league's top pass rushers. He will be a highly sought after talent if he hits free agency when his contract runs out after the 2021 season.

(---Slide19---) #33. Justin Houston (---19Slide---)

- Contract value: \$101.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$16.8 million

Justin Houston became the NFL's [highest paid linebacker in 2015](#), with his massive nine-figure deal. Houston never matched his production pre-2015, and [moved onto Indianapolis by 2019](#), where he played [defensive end](#).

(---Slide20---) #31 (tie). Ben Roethlisberger (---20Slide---)

- Contract value: \$102.0 million (8 years)
- Average salary: \$12.8 million

In 2008, the Pittsburgh Steelers made Ben Roethlisberger the [highest-paid player in team history](#). Roethlisberger still suits up for the Steelers, and has earned over [\\$227 million in cash value](#) over 16 seasons. Big Ben has earned six Pro Bowl nods and won two Super Bowl rings in Pittsburgh.

(---Slide21---) #31 (tie). Daunte Culpepper (---21Slide---)

- Contract value: \$102.0 million (10 years)
- Average salary: \$10.2 million

Daunte Culpepper's 2003 contract made him [the third-highest paid player](#) in NFL history at the time (behind Donovan McNabb and Drew Bledsoe). Culpepper made the Pro Bowl each of the two following seasons, but his career became [derailed by injuries](#), and he exited the NFL after the 2009 campaign. Before playing pro football, Culpepper was drafted [to play MLB baseball](#).

(---Slide22---) #30. Fletcher Cox (---22Slide---)

- Contract value: \$102.6 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$17.1 million

Before the 2016 season, the Philadelphia Eagles inked Fletcher Cox [to a new megadeal](#), expecting him to be an anchor of their defense for years to come. Cox has since made [four Pro Bowls](#) and helped the Eagles win a Super Bowl. Recently, Cox was named to the 2010s [All-Decade team](#).

(---Slide23---) #29. Drew Bledsoe (---23Slide---)

- Contract value: \$103.0 million (10 years)
- Average salary: \$10.3 million

Drew Bledsoe was [compared to](#) Bill Russell, Ted Williams, and other Boston sports legends when he signed a 10-year deal with the New England Patriots in 2001. Months later, Bledsoe was [out with injury](#) and a young upstart named Tom Brady took over as quarterback of the Patriots. Bledsoe left the Patriots in 2002.

(---Slide24---) #28. Frank Clark (---24Slide---)

- Contract value: \$104.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$20.8 million

The Kansas City Chiefs, on the cusp of ascending to the top of the AFC, [locked up](#) Frank Clark before the 2019 season. Clark came from Seattle, where he had two seasons [with 10 sacks or more](#). In the 2019 playoffs, Clark registered five sacks and the Chiefs went on to win the Super Bowl.

(---Slide25---) #27. DeMarcus Lawrence (---25Slide---)

- Contract value: \$105.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$21.0 million

DeMarcus Lawrence blossomed from a second round pick to one of the stalwarts of the Dallas Cowboys defense. Lawrence was rewarded with [a huge deal in 2019](#), after two consecutive Pro Bowl nods. Last season, Lawrence recorded his lowest total of sacks when playing more than half a season.

(---Slide26---) #26. Eli Manning (---26Slide---)

- Contract value: \$106.9 million (7 years)
- Average salary: \$15.3 million

After helping the New York Giants upset the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XLII, Eli Manning was rewarded with a deal that made him [the richest quarterback in the NFL](#). Manning would win another Super Bowl MVP, but was [benched during the 2019 season](#), as the Giants turned to rookie Daniel Jones. After the season, Manning retired.

(---Slide27---) #25. Tony Romo (---27Slide---)

- Contract value: \$108.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$18.0 million

Despite Tony Romo's [reputation](#) for not coming up big in the playoffs, the Dallas Cowboys [rewarded him richly in 2013](#). Romo only played until 2016, but found success in the booth, where he is now the [highest paid sports TV broadcaster](#).

(---Slide28---) #24. Aaron Rodgers (---28Slide---)

- Contract value: \$110.0 million (5 years)

- Average salary: \$22.0 million

[In 2013](#), the Green Bay Packers made Aaron Rodgers the highest-paid player in the NFL by salary per season. Rodgers only played nine games in his first season under his new deal, but remains firmly entrenched as the Packers starter. Or so it seemed until April...

(---Slide29---) #23. Ndamukong Suh (---29Slide---)

- Contract value: \$114.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$19.0 million

Despite a [reputation](#) as a volatile player, Ndamukong Suh [cashed in big](#) during the 2015 season. Suh only played three seasons in Miami, but was recognized on the 2010s [All-Decade team](#).

(---Slide30---) #22. Von Miller (---30Slide---)

- Contract value: \$114.1 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$19.0 million

After winning a Super Bowl MVP and cementing himself as one of the Denver Broncos' best defensive players ever, Von Miller received [his big pay day in 2016](#). Miller also became one of the NFL's most recognizable faces in a variety of [TV ads](#). Recently, Miller spread awareness of COVID-19 after he [tested positive for coronavirus](#).

(---Slide31---) #20 (tie). Donovan McNabb (---31Slide---)

- Contract value: \$115.0 million (12 years)
- Average salary: \$9.6 million

In 2002, Donovan McNabb became one of pro sports' richest men, when the Philadelphia Eagles signed him [for \\$115 million](#). By 2009, the Eagles needed to [restructure](#) McNabb's deal, and he was playing in Washington by the next season.

(---Slide32---) #20 (tie). Andy Dalton (---32Slide---)

- Contract value: \$115.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$19.2 million

Despite the Cincinnati Bengals lack of playoff success, they unofficially anointed Andy Dalton as their franchise quarterback for the foreseeable future [in 2014](#). A megadeal made Dalton one of the richest players in the NFL, even with an 0-3 playoff record. In April, Dalton was released and [signed with the Dallas Cowboys](#).

(---Slide33---) #19. Ryan Tannehill (---33Slide---)

- Contract value: \$118.0 million (4 years)
- Average salary: \$29.5 million

The Tennessee Titans made [a huge investment](#) in Ryan Tannehill this offseason, believing that the former blue chip prospect can finally fulfill his potential in Nashville. In 2012, Tannehill was the eighth overall pick, selected by the Miami Dolphins, but never made a Pro Bowl until he left Florida. Tannehill [supplanted Marcus Mariota](#) as Titans starter last season and led Tennessee to a surprise win over the New England Patriots in the playoffs.

(---Slide34---) #18. Carson Palmer (---34Slide---)

- Contract value: \$119.8 million (9 years)
- Average salary: \$13.3 million

In 2003, the Cincinnati Bengals took Carson Palmer with the top pick in the draft. Two years later, the Bengals offered Palmer [a massive deal](#), believing he'd retire with the team. Palmer lasted in Cincinnati until 2010, before spending the second half of his career with the Oakland Raiders and Arizona Cardinals.

(---Slide35---) #17. Larry Fitzgerald (---35Slide---)

- Contract value: \$120.0 million (8 years)
- Average salary: \$15.0 million

The Arizona Cardinals made Larry Fitzgerald the richest player [in franchise history](#) with this whopping 2011 deal. Two years earlier, Fitzgerald had the Cardinals on the cusp of a Super Bowl title, and despite not reaching the big game since, he remains one of the league's most sure-handed receivers with [1,378 career receptions](#). Next season, Fitzgerald will team with [DeAndre Hopkins](#) to form one of the NFL's most lethal pass catching duos.

(---Slide36---) #16. Joe Flacco (---36Slide---)

- Contract value: \$120.6 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$20.1 million

Is Joe Flacco [elite](#)? That remains one of football's most heated debates, but one fact is for sure: Flacco was paid like an elite quarterback. In 2013, the Baltimore Ravens signed Flacco to a deal that paid him [\\$20 million](#) per year on average, but last season, Flacco moved on to Denver with Lamar Jackson the new starter in Baltimore.

(---Slide37---) #15. Derek Carr (---37Slide---)

- Contract value: \$125.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$25.0 million

In the summer of 2017, the Oakland Raiders made [Derek Carr](#) the league's highest-paid player. Carr was coming off two straight Pro Bowl seasons and the Raiders appeared to be on the upswing with Amari Cooper, but the team has played below .500 ball under new coach Jon Gruden. Now Carr's starting position may be in jeopardy with Oakland's signing of [Marcus Mariota](#).

(---Slide38---) #14. Colin Kaepernick (---38Slide---)

- Contract value: \$126.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$21.0 million

The San Francisco 49ers signed [Colin Kaepernick](#) to a huge contract in 2014, expecting him to be their quarterback of the future. However, Kaepernick [opted out](#) of his deal after the 2016 season, after losing the starting quarterback job amidst his protests against racial inequality. Kaepernick has not played in the NFL since.

(---Slide39---) #13. Jay Cutler (---39Slide---)

- Contract value: \$126.7 million (7 years)
- Average salary: \$18.1 million

The [Chicago Bears](#) committed to Jay Cutler long term in 2014, but only kept the quarterback in the Windy City through 2016. Cutler played one season with the Miami Dolphins, before retiring. Cutler then became a [reality TV](#) star.

(---Slide40---) #12. Carson Wentz (---40Slide---)

- Contract value: \$128.0 million (4 years)
- Average salary: \$32.0 million

One year after leading the Philadelphia Eagles to their first Super Bowl title, Carson Wentz was rewarded with a [contract extension](#) that was the largest in NFL history. Wentz made the Pro Bowl in 2017, but his status as the Eagles' future quarterback is a bit muddled, with Philadelphia drafting [Jalen Hurts](#) in April.

(---Slide41---) #11. Michael Vick (---41Slide---)

- Contract value: \$130.0 million (10 years)

- Average salary: \$13.0 million

Michael Vick is another player who once held the title of [NFL's highest-paid player](#), when he signed a nine-figure deal with the Atlanta Falcons in 2004. Vick's fall from grace is well documented, due to his involvement in [dog fighting](#). Vick played seven more years after serving a two-year suspension, but never recaptured the glory that made him seem like [a human video game character](#) on the field.

(---Slide42---) #10. Calvin Johnson (---42Slide---)

- Contract value: \$132.0 million (8 years)
- Average salary: \$16.5 million

After leading the NFL with [122 catches and 1.964 yards](#) in 2012, Calvin Johnson, also known as Megatron, was rewarded with a [mega contract](#). Three years later, Johnson surprisingly [retired](#) while still in the prime of his career.

(---Slide43---) #8 (tie). Jared Goff (---43Slide---)

- Contract value: \$134.0 million (4 years)
- Average salary: \$33.5 million

Jared Goff helped the Los Angeles Rams reach the Super Bowl in Feb. 2019, and was richly rewarded with a new contract [before the following season](#). Goff threw for over 4,600 yards last season, but the former #1 overall pick could not lead the 2018–19 NFC champions back to the playoffs.

(---Slide44---) #8 (tie). Aaron Rodgers (---44Slide---)

- Contract value: \$134.0 million (4 years)
- Average salary: \$33.5 million

After signing a \$110 million deal earlier in his career, Aaron Rodgers [broke the bank again](#) in 2018. However, the Green Bay Packers shocked many when they selected quarterback [Jordan Love](#) in the first round of the 2020 NFL Draft. Rodgers is 36, but still threw for [over 4,000 yards](#) and made the Pro Bowl last season.

(---Slide45---) #6 (tie). Aaron Donald (---45Slide---)

- Contract value: \$135.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$22.5 million

Aaron Donald posted a stunning 20.5 sacks in 2018. As a result, the Los Angeles Rams paid Donald handsomely, offering the [richest deal in NFL history for a defensive player](#).

(---Slide46---) #6 (tie). Matthew Stafford (---46Slide---)

- Contract value: \$135.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$27.0 million

The Detroit Lions' decision to make [Matthew Stafford](#) the highest player in the league in 2017, was met with some skepticism. Stafford had just completed a run of seven consecutive seasons with 4,000 or more yards, but he's only played in three playoff games. Stafford has been durable through much of his career, but his 2019 campaign ended prematurely due to a [spine injury](#).

(---Slide47---) #5. Jimmy Garoppolo (---47Slide---)

- Contract value: \$137.5 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$27.5 million

One year after Matthew Stafford got paid like no other player before him, [Jimmy Garoppolo](#) claimed the top spot with his \$27.5 million average salary. Garoppolo was drafted in the second round in 2014 by the New England Patriots, but instead of becoming Tom Brady's heir, he was shipped to San Francisco before the 2017 season. Garoppolo helped the 49ers reach the Super Bowl last season, but struggled in the big game, [tossing two interceptions](#).

(---Slide48---) #3 (tie). Russell Wilson (---48Slide---)

- Contract value: \$140.0 million (4 years)
- Average salary: \$35.0 million

Garoppolo's reign as the highest-paid NFL player only lasted about two months. The Seattle Seahawks gave Russell Wilson [a new deal in April 2019](#), making the Super Bowl XLVIII champion the richest man in the league on an average salary basis. Wilson threw for [4,110 yards and 31 touchdowns](#) last season.

(---Slide49---) #3 (tie). Andrew Luck (---49Slide---)

- Contract value: \$140.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$23.3 million

Despite missing nine games in 2015, the Indianapolis Colts locked up [Andrew Luck](#) long-term with the highest value contract ever in the summer of 2016. Luck would miss the entire 2017 season, but returned and threw for a career best 4,593 yards in 2018, earning [Comeback Player](#)

[of the Year](#) honors. Luck, however, [shocked the football world](#) when he retired one month before the start of the 2019 season.

(---Slide50---) #2. Khalil Mack (---50Slide---)

- Contract value: \$141.0 million (6 years)
- Average salary: \$23.5 million

While the Oakland Raiders paid big money to retain Derek Carr, they reached an impasse with linebacker Khalil Mack before the 2018 season. Unable to come to terms on a new contract, the Raiders [traded Mack to the Chicago Bears](#), where he became the highest-paid defensive player in NFL history. Mack has made two Pro Bowls in Chicago, and tallied [21 sacks](#).

(---Slide51---) #1. Matt Ryan (---51Slide---)

- Contract value: \$150.0 million (5 years)
- Average salary: \$30.0 million

Matt Ryan has never won a Super Bowl, but he holds the honor as having signed the richest contract in NFL history. In May 2018, the Atlanta Falcons, who drafted Ryan third overall in 2008, gave him [a \\$150 million deal](#). Ryan has thrown for [61 touchdowns and over 9,300 yards](#) since inking his latest contract, but has not led Atlanta back to the playoffs.