

# MLB payrolls dropped for 1st time since 2010

By RONALD BLUM  
AP Baseball Writer

**NEW YORK** — Spending on Major League Baseball payrolls dropped last season for the first time since 2010, an \$18 million decrease attributable to drug and domestic violence suspensions and a player retiring at midseason.

Still, even a year with flat payrolls is unusual for MLB. The only previous drops since 2002 were by \$3 million in 2010 and by \$32 million in 2004.

Teams combined to spend \$4.23 billion on major league payroll last year, according to final figures compiled by the commissioner's office and obtained by The Associated Press. The decrease followed an offseason with a weak free-agent class that failed to push the average higher.

Seattle second baseman Robinson Cano lost about \$11.7 million and Chicago White Sox catcher Wellington Castillo approximately \$3.5 million after positive drug tests. Closer Roberto Osuna's domestic violence suspension cost him roughly \$2.1 million from Toronto and Houston, and Baltimore outfielder Colby Rasmus walked away from about \$1.5 million rather than try to come back from a hip injury.

World Series champion Boston had the highest payroll for the first time since the free-agent era started in 1976 at \$230 million. In a sign of increasing parity, a record 24 teams had \$100 million payrolls, and the Red Sox figure was the lowest for the top big league payroll since 2012. Luxury tax surcharges that started for the 2017 season appear to have changed behavior of



CANO CASTILLO OSUNA RASMUS

high-revenue teams. MLB Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem said the slice of revenue going to major and minor league players last year was 54.2 percent, the same as in 2012. He cited a \$9.4 billion revenue figure for 2018, up from \$9.1 billion in 2017, and luxury tax payrolls, which use average annual values of contracts and include benefits. MLB pegged the average salary increase at 29.1 percent since 2012 and the average luxury tax payroll rise since then at 28.4 percent.

“So although the top payroll in 2018 was the lowest since 2012, the average payroll has increased significantly, which means MLB has had payroll compression — which is a good thing for competitive balance,” he said.

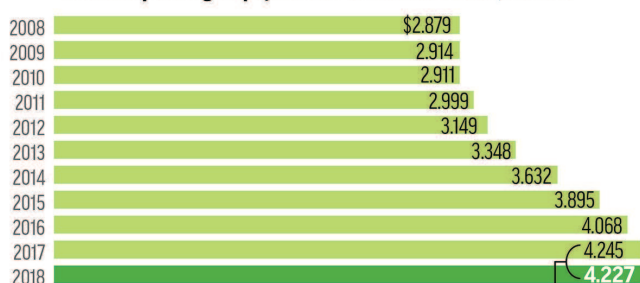
Union head Tony Clark declined to comment, spokesman Chris Dahl said.

Agent Scott Boras claimed the players' portion of the money has declined. “The luxury tax, the new elements have dramatically quelled the market,” he said. “The allocation of revenues to payroll has gone down.”

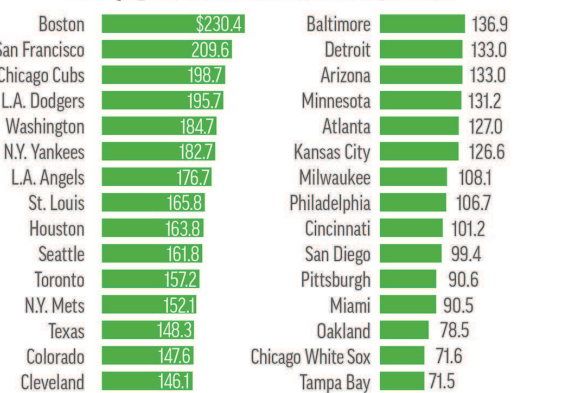
Both sides agree on one fact: The pace of free-agent signings has slowed dramatically in recent off-seasons. Jeff Berry, an agent who co-heads CAA Baseball,

## Spending on MLB payrolls dropped last season for the first time since 2010

Annual spending on payrolls for the 30 MLB clubs, in billions



2018 payrolls for the 30 MLB teams, in millions



NOTE: Figures are for 40-man rosters and include salaries and pro-rated shares of signing bonuses, earned incentive bonuses, non-cash compensation, buyouts of unexercised options and cash transactions. SOURCE: MLB

“Rather than saber rattling about a potential strike in three years, the focus should be on taking pro-active steps to address current labor issues in the hope of avoiding a strike in 2021.”

San Francisco had the second-highest regular payroll at \$210 million, followed by the Chicago Cubs at \$199 million.

Top-spending teams cut payroll to get below the luxury tax threshold in order to reset their tax rate. Only the Red Sox and Washington Nationals paid tax.

The Los Angeles Dodgers dropped to fourth at \$196 million after leading the major leagues for four straight years. The Dodgers, who spent a record \$291 million in 2015, cut by \$48 million from 2017 and had their smallest payroll since 2012, yet they won a second straight NL pennant.

Washington was fifth at \$185 million, followed by the New York Yankees at \$183 million — a drop of more than \$25 million from 2017 and their smallest since 2003. The Yankees had not been as low as sixth since they were ninth in 1992 at \$34.5 million in the final season of owner George Steinbrenner's 2½-year suspension.

Just five of the top 10 spenders made the playoffs, with San Francisco and Washington missing along with the Los Angeles Angels (seventh at \$177 million), St. Louis (eighth at \$166 million) and Seattle (10th at \$162 million).

Other playoff teams included Colorado (14th at \$148 million), Cleveland (15th at \$146 million), Atlanta (20th at \$127 million), Milwaukee (22nd at \$108 million, up \$40 million from 2017's big league low)

and Oakland (28th at \$78 million).

Tampa Bay had the lowest payroll for the first time since 2007, at \$75.1 million finishing \$92,526 below the Chicago White Sox.

Payrolls are for 40-man rosters and include salaries and prorated shares of signing bonuses, earned incentive bonuses, non-cash compensation, buyouts of unexercised options and cash transactions. In some cases, parts of salaries that are deferred are discounted to reflect present-day values.

The average salary dropped for the first time since 2004 and for only the fourth time since record-keeping started 50 years ago, according to players' association calculations. The union pegged its average at \$4,095,686, down \$1,436 from last year.

Since the union started keeping track in 1967, the only previous declines had been by \$66 in 1987, when owners were found to have conspired to hold down salaries among free agents; a 5 percent decline in 1995 following a 7½-month strike that wiped out the World Series for the first time since 1904; and by 2.5 percent in 2004.

MLB determined its average was \$4,007,987, up from \$3,955,920 in 2017. The average is based on 968 players on major league rosters and disabled lists on Aug. 31, the last day before the active player limit expanded from 25 to 40. That figure is impacted by the number of players on the DL because replacements usually make close to the minimum.

The union includes option buyouts in its average calculation while MLB does not.

# Cardinals hire ex-Texas Tech, current USC coach Kingsbury

By BOB BAUM  
Associated Press

**PHOENIX** — The Arizona Cardinals have hired former Texas Tech coach Kliff Kingsbury, a move aimed at providing guidance for young quarterback Josh Rosen and resuscitating the worst offense in the NFL.

The Cardinals announced the hiring Tuesday after a long interview earlier in the day, saying Kingsbury had agreed to terms on a four-year contract with a team option for a fifth. He was to be introduced at a news conference at the team's training facility in Tempe on Wednesday.

Kingsbury was fired after going 35-40 in six seasons at Texas Tech, but his teams were known for their high-scoring performances. His prize pupil in those days was current Kansas City Chiefs All-Pro quarterback Patrick Mahomes. Tuesday's hiring came barely a month after Kingsbury was hired as offensive coordinator at USC.

Kingsbury, also a former offensive coordinator at Texas A&M where he worked with Johnny Manziel, replaces Steve Wilks, who was fired after going an NFL-worst 3-13 in his one season in Arizona.

That means Kingsbury will take over a team with the No. 1 overall draft pick, along with a bevy of other picks and lots of salary cap space.

After a one-year experiment with a defense-oriented coach in Wilks, Cardinals president Michael Bidwill acknowledged he got that hire wrong and vowed to get this one right. The Cardinals hope the hire can match the magic that happened when Sean McVay was hired by the Los Angeles Rams.

Arizona's move is back to an offense-centered coach, a philosophy that worked well in the previous hire of Bruce Arians,



AP Photo/Brad Tollefson, File

In this Nov. 10, 2018, file photo, Texas Tech coach Kliff Kingsbury walks off the field after the team's NCAA college football game against Texas in Lubbock, Texas.

who won 50 games in five seasons before retiring after the 2017 season.

And Bidwill's latest choice is a risk, given that the 39-year-old Kingsbury has no NFL coaching experience and no record of success in terms of wins and losses at the college level.

He does, however, bring unquestioned knowledge of successful offenses and in working with young quarterbacks. Under Kingsbury's tutelage, both Case Keenum and Mahomes led the nation in passing as college quarterbacks.

“Yeah, I think he can be a great NFL coach,” Mahomes said Tuesday before the hiring was announced. “He has the work ethic. He has the passion for the game. I know that he loves the sport. So I know he'll be able to relate to quarterbacks. He would put in the work and now it's just about him finding where he needs to be at.”

Kingsbury was let go after six seasons at Texas Tech and joined the USC staff as offensive coordinator on Dec. 5. His quick departure will leave the Trojans scrambling for a

replacement.

Kingsbury's challenge now will be to build a staff. He particularly needs a strong coordinator for a defense that had its share of troubles last year trying to switch from a 3-4 to 4-3 scheme.

The new coach inherits a team that finished last in the NFL in all major offensive categories last year. Rosen, who as a rookie took over as starter four games into the season, had an up-and-down year with no significant improvement.

Playing behind a makeshift offensive line decimated by injuries, he wound up last among quarterbacks who played regularly, completing 55 percent of his passes for 2,278 yards and 11 touchdowns with 14 interceptions and a 66.7 quarterback rating.

Rosen, who was picked 10th overall in last year's draft, is probably the No. 1 reason Kingsbury got the job.

The Cardinals' record last year was their worst in 18 years and matched the worst since the franchise moved to the desert from St. Louis in 1988.



AP Photo/Mark Zaleski, File

Tennessee Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota talks with offensive coordinator Matt LaFleur before a preseason NFL game Aug. 30, 2018, against the Minnesota Vikings in Nashville, Tenn.

# LaFleur accepts offer to become Packers coach

By TERESA M. WALKER  
Associated Press

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** — The Green Bay Packers are turning to fast-rising offensive whiz Matt LaFleur to aid Aaron Rodgers and end a two-year absence from the postseason.

LaFleur accepted an offer Monday to become the next head coach of the Packers, according to a person familiar with the decision. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither the Packers nor the Titans had announced the decision.

The 39-year-old LaFleur spent this season as offensive coordinator for the Titans, his first calling plays in the NFL. He takes over for Mike McCarthy, who was fired during the season following a stunning home loss to Arizona on Dec. 2. Offensive coordinator Joe Philbin went 2-2 to close out the season as the Packers failed to reach the playoffs for the second straight year with a 6-9-1 record that was the second straight under .500 for the storied franchise.

He was offensive coordinator with the Los Ange-

les Rams in 2017, leading a group that paced the NFL in scoring and was 10th in total offense under coach Sean McVay, who called the plays on offense. LaFleur was the quarterbacks coach in Atlanta for two seasons, including when Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan was the NFL MVP in 2016. LaFleur also has coached with Washington and Houston, and was the quarterbacks coach for Notre Dame in 2014.

He will be charged with returning the Packers to the playoffs on a regular basis. McCarthy's tenure of 12-plus seasons was by and large successful, highlighted by the 2010 Super Bowl season and nine playoff appearances.

Still, the once potent offense that could make up for other deficiencies slowed in 2018, a tumultuous year that began with Rodgers leading a stirring comeback victory in the opener over the Bears. The two-time NFL MVP returned after halftime from a left knee injury that nagged him the rest of the season.

Rodgers' 62.3 percent completion rate was his low-

est since 2015 (60.7) and his 25 touchdown passes were a low for a season in which he played at least 15 games, though so were his two interceptions. Injuries to Randall Cobb and Geronimo Allison forced the Packers to turn to rookies perhaps earlier than expected, though Davante Adams emerged as an elite receiver.

The relationship between LaFleur and Rodgers will be closely watched after the sometimes tenuous moments between the star QB and McCarthy. They characterized their relationship as close, but with ups and downs that come with two headstrong competitors who had worked together for more than a dozen years.

The Packers reportedly interviewed several candidates with head-coaching experience, including Philbin, Chuck Pagano, Adam Gase and Jim Caldwell. They instead opted for LaFleur, who had never called plays before this season and until now has never been in charge of an entire roster.

It is just one element of an offseason of change ahead in Green Bay. Clay Matthews, one of