

Are Pro Athletes

BY LAURA ANASTASIA

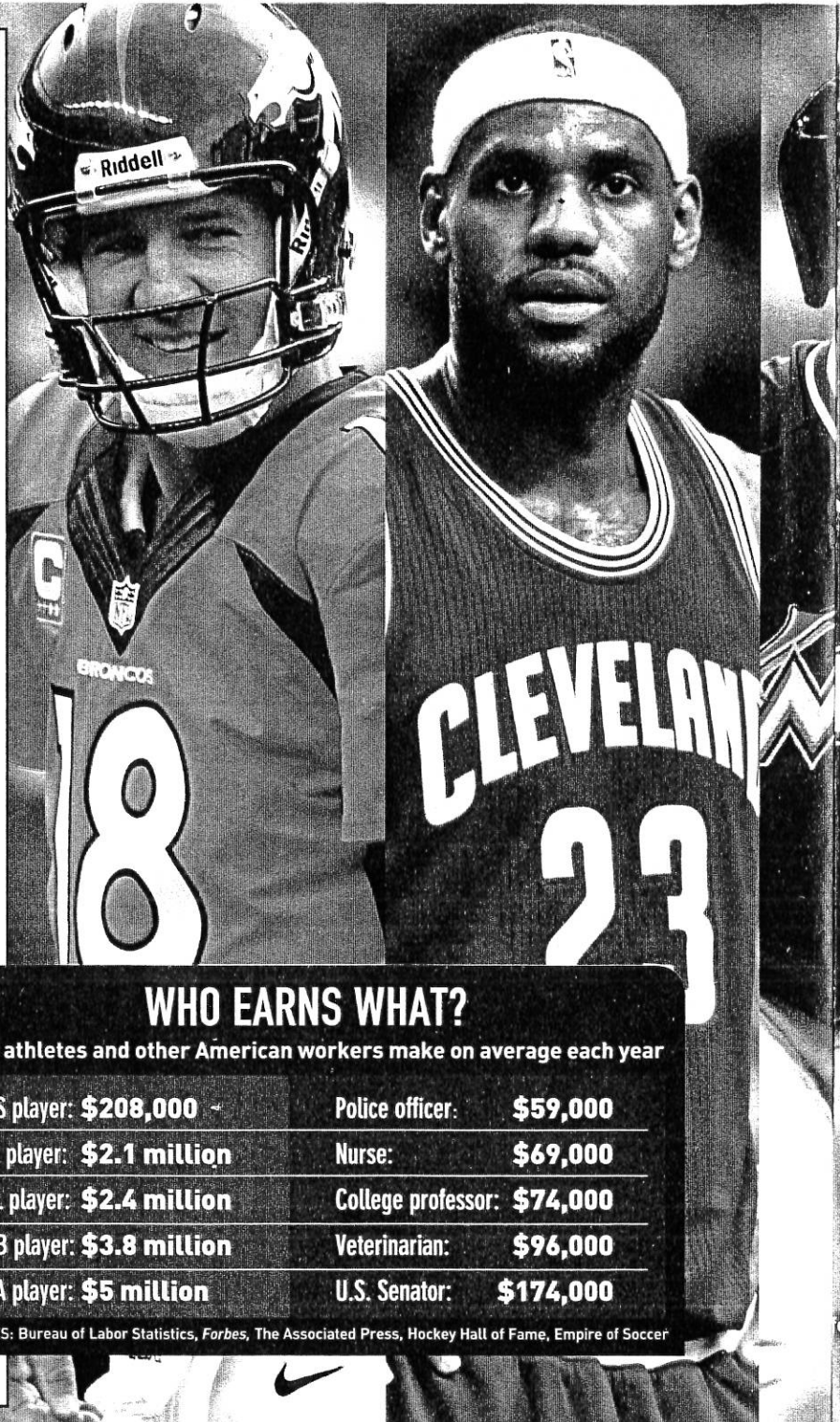
How much is a home run worth? Millions of dollars? The Miami Marlins think so. The Major League Baseball (MLB) team recently gave slugger Giancarlo Stanton the largest contract in North American sports history: \$325 million over 13 years.

Stanton's supersized salary follows his record-setting 2014 season. The 25-year-old outfielder topped the National League with 37 home runs despite missing the last 17 games because of an injury. He was also the runner-up for the league's Most Valuable Player (MVP) honor.

Stanton's contract is \$50 million higher than the previous largest contract, Alex Rodriguez's 10-year, \$275 million deal with the New York Yankees in 2007.

Baseball players aren't the only athletes pulling in huge paychecks. Jay Cutler, a quarterback for the Chicago Bears, signed a seven-year, \$126.7 million contract last year. And LeBron James, a two-time National Basketball Association (NBA) champion, earned about \$19 million for last season alone.

As the number of multi-million dollar payouts in professional sports continues to grow, more people are asking whether athletes deserve the big bucks.



WHO EARNS WHAT?

What athletes and other American workers make on average each year

MLS player: \$208,000	Police officer: \$59,000
NFL player: \$2.1 million	Nurse: \$69,000
NHL player: \$2.4 million	College professor: \$74,000
MLB player: \$3.8 million	Veterinarian: \$96,000
NBA player: \$5 million	U.S. Senator: \$174,000

SOURCES: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Forbes*, The Associated Press, Hockey Hall of Fame, Empire of Soccer

Paid Too Much?

Supersized salaries spark debate over players' pay

YES Too Much Money

Playing games for a living isn't worth those million-dollar wages, says Jesse Spector, a sportswriter for *The Sporting News*.

People such as firefighters, computer programmers, and members of the military provide more valuable services but earn just a fraction of what professional athletes make. The average firefighter in the United States makes about \$48,000 a year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Even President Barack Obama's annual salary of \$400,000 is lower than most athletes' pay.

"It seems morally wrong that athletes would be paid more than people like firefighters, who serve the community and risk their lives," Spector tells *JS*.

Gwen Drew, a seventh-grade sports fan from Newtown, Connecticut, points out that athletes get to keep their mega-sized incomes whether they strike out or hit home runs. Plus, she adds, some players can earn the big bucks without ever leaving the bench.

"If you're not playing or not playing well, you still get paid, which isn't fair," Gwen says.

Others say that tickets to games would not be so expensive if the players didn't earn so much. The average ticket to an MLB game costs about \$28. Football fans have to shell out even more—an average of \$82 per ticket.

Even New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees has conceded that professional athletes are overpaid. The 2010 Super Bowl MVP has a five-year, \$100 million contract with the Saints.

"Unless you're finding a cure for cancer or creating world peace, I don't know if anybody deserves to get that much money," he said after signing the contract.

NO Worth Every Penny

Professional sports are a billion-dollar business, and players deserve their fair share of the profits, supporters say. Without athletes, the leagues wouldn't exist.

"Athletes generate a lot of money for their respective teams," says Mihir Bhagat, a sports reporter in Columbia, Missouri.

If anything, athletes aren't paid enough, some people say. Only about half of the \$4.7 billion in revenue the NBA is expected to make this season will go toward players' salaries.

Athletes also earn their high pay by putting their bodies at risk every game, supporters argue. Professional sports are physically demanding and sometimes downright dangerous, says Doug Glanville, an ESPN analyst and a former

MLB outfielder. A serious injury can end a player's career, he says.

"There's a chance, especially if you're playing football, that you're one play away from a crippling injury," Glanville tells *JS*.

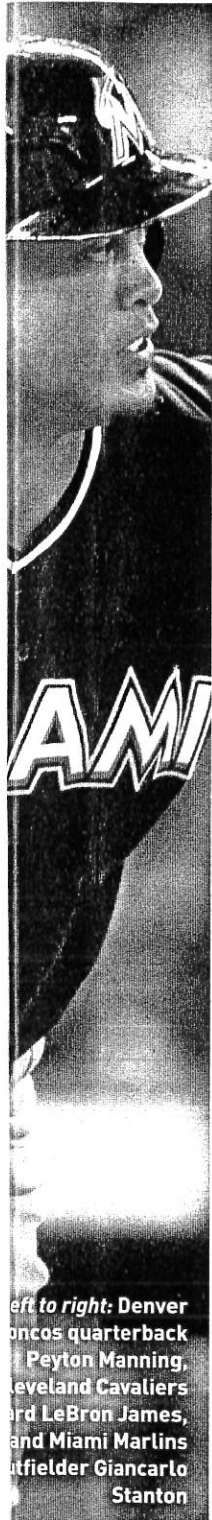
Players' earning potential is also limited by how long they can stay competitive. In many sports, players are considered past their prime by their mid-30s.

"Athletes only get to play for a certain [number] of years," says Joey Russomanno, a 10th-grader from Oakhurst, New Jersey.

Although athletes aren't saving the world by scoring home runs or touchdowns, they do have special abilities and entertain millions of people.

"Only a small number of people are able to perform at that [high] level," Glanville says. "A lot of people are paying to watch."

As long as those fans continue to show up or tune in, he says, the players deserve every penny they get.



Left to right: Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning, Cleveland Cavaliers guard LeBron James, and Miami Marlins outfielder Giancarlo Stanton

KEVIN TERRELL/AP IMAGES; PEYTON MANNING; CHARLES KRUPA/AP IMAGES; ILI EBRON; JAMES; PATRIC SCHNEIDER/AP IMAGES; GIANCARLO STANTONI



Should You Have Summer Homework?

School's almost done, but your homework might not be

by Laura Anastasia

Finally! It's the sound you've been waiting for all year. As the final bell rings on the last day of school, your whole class cheers. Freedom! About 10 whole weeks of summer lie ahead—no school, no classes, no teachers, and best of all, no homework. Maybe.

For some students, summer break doesn't mean a break from school assignments. Some teachers assign long lists of books to read, projects to complete, and workbooks to master during the summer.

Their goal is to help reinforce what students learned over the past school year. Research has shown that students' academic skills become rusty over the summer unless they practice them.

Not everyone supports summer homework, though. Some people say kids need to relax, enjoy time with friends and family, or get a job.

Should kids spend at least part of their summer hitting the books? *JS* spoke with students, teachers, and researchers on both sides of the issue.

YES Avoid Brain Drain

No summer homework? Beware of brain drain, warns Harris Cooper, the head of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University in North Carolina. He reviewed 39 studies on summer learning loss and found that, on average, students' scores on achievement tests drop between spring and autumn. The biggest losses are in math and spelling.

Sherry Casteel Williford, a high school English teacher in Orlando, Florida, assigns summer reading for exactly that reason. "If students don't use it, they lose it," she says. Her students have to read a book and answer open-ended questions about it over the summer.

Brain drain is more pronounced in kids from lower-income families, according to a study by Johns Hopkins University in Maryland. Kids from lower-income families who don't read books during summer break lose two to three months of reading proficiency every summer. That adds up to more than two years' worth of losses from kindergarten to ninth grade. But if those students read during the summer, the study found that they don't fall behind.

Eric Samuel, a 10th-grader from Herricks, New York, doesn't like doing schoolwork during the summer, but he admits that it does help. He usually has to read a book for English class, and his parents sometimes enroll him in summer classes in reading and math.

"If I'm taking classes in the summer, I don't forget anything," he says.

Assignments can also give students a jump-start on the school year ahead so teachers can spend less time on review and more time on new material. That is especially helpful for kids taking advanced classes, Williford explains.

"It is essential for those students to hit the ground running," she says.

NO Give Kids a Break

Summer is for running around, not for sitting inside doing homework, says Halley Chase, a middle school science teacher in Kansas City, Missouri. She suggests educational apps that her students can use if they want to but doesn't believe in giving formal summer assignments.

"Kids need to go outside and play and use their imaginations," she says.

Students have so much work during the school year that they need the summer to relax and have time to themselves, says Katie Reiss, an eighth-grader from Lake Mary, Florida.

"I don't think kids should be obligated to do anything over the summer," she tells *JS*. "They have to start school in August [in many states], and they may have exams soon after."

Besides, summer homework hasn't been directly linked with advancing students' skills, says Richard A. Allington, a professor of literacy education at the University of Tennessee.

"I know of no evidence that achievement is improved by completing teacher-assigned homework during the summer vacation period," he says.

Katie Thunshelle, a high school math teacher from Grand Rapids, Minnesota, agrees. Most kids don't absorb as much when they're learning solo during the summer, she says. Many need a teacher to check in with regularly so their assignments don't miss the mark.

"Who's to say students are doing it right, who's to say they're doing it on their own, and if they're not understanding it, is there help even available?" Thunshelle asks.

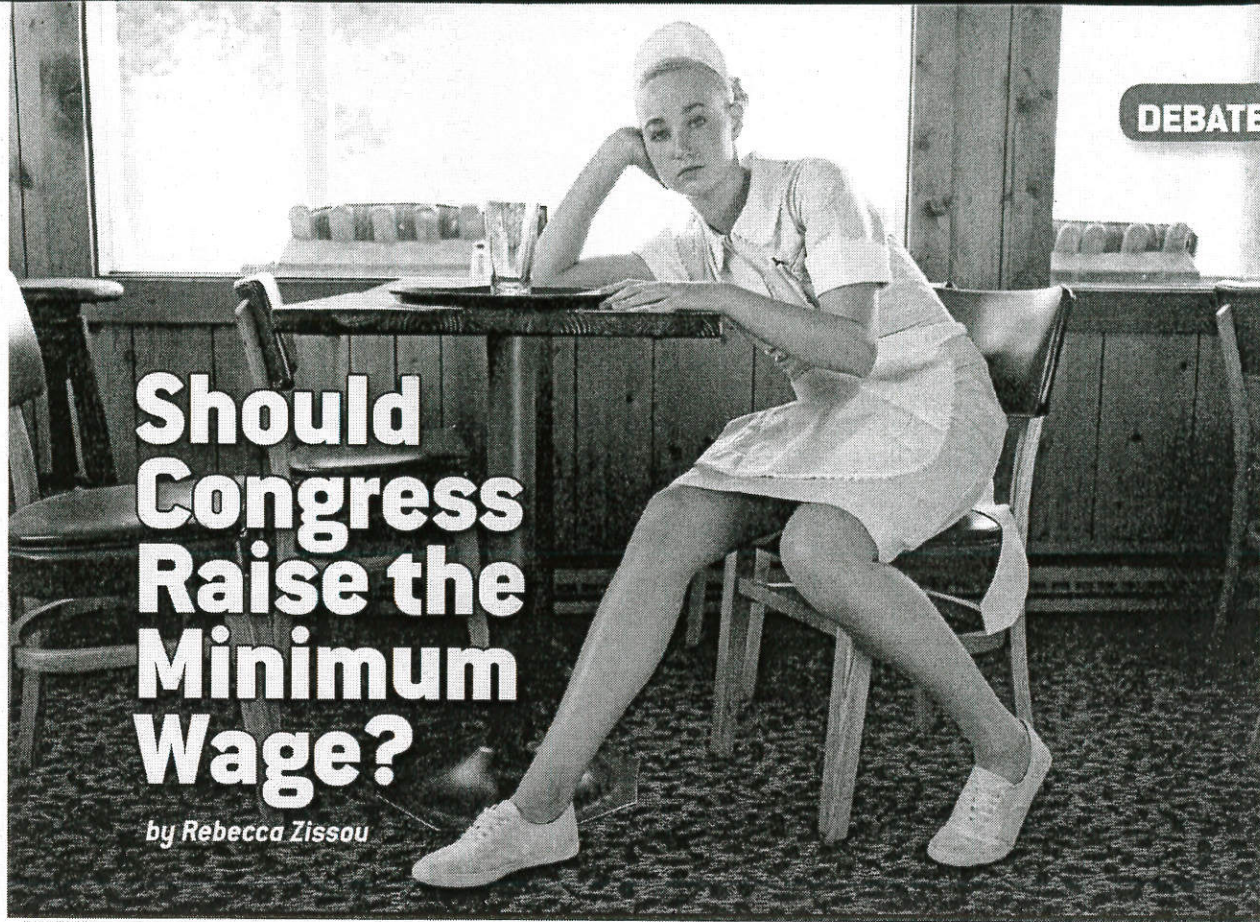
Plus, summer homework is hard to enforce, teachers point out. Some kids cheat, get help from their parents, or rush through assignments just to get them done.

"They're just going to write something down to appease their parents and run out the door," Chase says.



YOUR TURN

What other reasons can you think of to support each side of the debate?



Should Congress Raise the Minimum Wage?

by Rebecca Zissou

YES Amere Graham, an 18-year-old from Wisconsin, earns \$7.25 an hour working part-time at McDonald's. He's helping support his family, which is struggling to make ends meet. This summer, Amere joined thousands of other fast-food workers around the country who participated in walkouts to demand higher wages.

If President Barack Obama has his way, Amere and millions of other low-wage workers will get a raise. Obama wants Congress to raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$9 an hour. It would be the first increase since 2009. (Nineteen states already

Raising the minimum wage would help the economy.

have minimum wages that are higher than the federal level.)

"This single step would raise the incomes of millions of working families," says Obama. "It could mean the difference between groceries or the food bank, rent or eviction, scraping by or finally getting ahead."

Supporters say raising the minimum wage puts more money in the pockets of people who need it most. Under Obama's proposal, a full-time minimum-wage worker would earn an extra \$3,500 a year. That means American workers would have more money to spend on things like food and housing, and provide a boost to the economy.

NO Many companies that hire low-wage workers are against raising the minimum wage because it would increase their cost of doing business. To offset higher wages, they say they would have to raise prices, reduce the number of hours each employee works, or hire fewer employees.

Raising the minimum wage would mean fewer jobs.

The loss of low-wage jobs could hit young people particularly hard. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, teens make up about 24 percent of minimum-wage workers. If fewer jobs are available, teens and young adults with little or no work experience would be least likely to be hired.

"People want the lowest earners to make more money, but it actually accomplishes just the opposite," says Bob Huff, a Republican state senator in California. That state recently raised its minimum wage to \$10 an hour. The increase will go into effect in 2016. "I'd rather have the number of jobs we have now at \$8 an hour than fewer jobs at \$10 an hour," says Huff.

Some economists say that a more effective solution would be to expand government-assistance programs for low-wage workers. That would help struggling families without increasing unemployment, they say.



PHOTO: AP PHOTO, MAP: JIM MCMAHON/AP/WIDEWORLD

TONY ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

Web Watch

Should schools monitor students' social media activity?

by Rebecca Zissou

YES Some teens in Southern California just got a few more Twitter followers. The Glendale school district recently hired a technology company to monitor students' social media activity, including public posts on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The company, Geo Listening, searches the Web for comments related to violence, bullying, drug use, self-harm, or anything else that could put students at risk or violate the schools' codes of conduct. Then it alerts district officials to any potential problems.

Monitoring students' social media activity helps school officials identify signs of trouble, says

Monitoring posts keeps students safe.

Richard Sheehan, the Glendale superintendent.

"We think it's been working very well," he says. "It's designed around student safety and making sure kids are protected."

Geo Listening doesn't read private messages or hack into kids' personal accounts, so students' privacy isn't violated, says Chris Frydrych, the company's founder.

"Geo Listening monitors public posts to social networks and reports concerns and code violations to designated school staff," Frydrych tells *JS*. "We employ no deceptive practices."

NO Brendan Hamme, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, says the district has overstepped its boundaries. "This program is sweeping and far afield of what is necessary to ensure student safety," he tells *JS*. It "intrudes deeply into students' privacy and conduct outside of school."

Justin Patchin, the co-director of the online Cyberbullying Research Center, says that monitoring students' posts isn't a good use of school resources.

The Glendale school district is paying Geo Listening more than \$40,000 a year to monitor the social media accounts of about 14,000 middle and high school students.

"Instead of hiring a company to monitor the online activities of students, schools should work to empower the students themselves to watch over and support their fellow classmates," Patchin tells *JS*. "Most of the time, when there is a threat to cause harm—either to oneself or others—other students see or hear about it."

Critics also say that searching kids' posts encourages kids to be secretive. They point out that students can easily avoid being monitored by making their comments private.

Searching kids' posts is an invasion of privacy.





I BEG YOUR PARDON!

Should trash talk be banned?

New Jersey bans foul language in high school sports

by Rebecca Zissou

YES When football star Sean Chandler and his teammates at Camden High School in New Jersey take the field this fall, there'll be one thing missing: trash talk. The Garden State recently cracked down on young athletes who go too far when taunting their opponents. Under the new policy, players who make harassing comments about an opponent's race, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, or sexual orientation will be sidelined for at least one game and could find themselves under investigation by the state's Division on Civil Rights.

"High school sports should be about . . . instilling life lessons about grace, courage, teamwork, and

Sportsmanship is important.

adversity," says New Jersey Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman. "Sometimes we lose sight of those lessons

on the field and in the stands."

Sean, 17, supports the ban. He says young athletes need to learn to respect their opponents—both on and off the field. "Sportsmanship is important," he told *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. "It builds character."

Instead of trying to intimidate other players, says sports psychologist Jonathan Katz, teens should focus on the game. "Their time and energy is better spent on improving their own performance," he tells *JS*.

NO Opponents of the new rule point out that trash talk has been a standard part of sports for years. Some of the greatest professional athletes, including Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, and Muhammad Ali, were also great at insulting their opponents.

"It's sports—there's always going to be trash talking, no matter what," says Thomas Holley, a high school basketball and football player in New York City. It's "been around forever."

Others argue that trash talk gives athletes a mental edge over their opponents. According to a recent study by Florida State University, talking trash increases players' self-confidence and helps them perform better. It psychs out opponents, making them doubt their abilities and lose concentration.

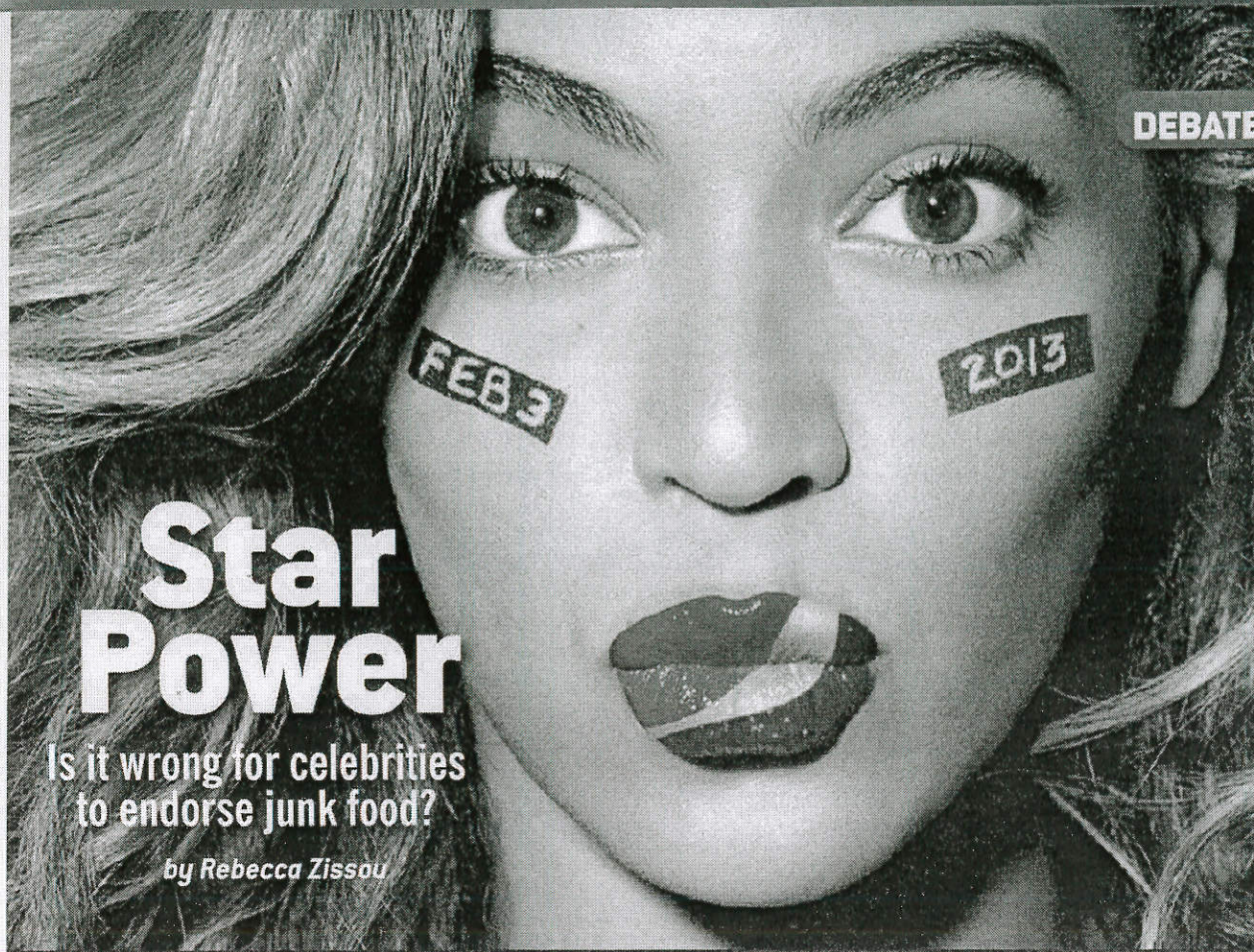
Ray Nash, of the Catholic High School Athletic Association in New York, calls the policy "an overreaction." He says state governments shouldn't be involved in regulating trash talk.

"Unsportsmanlike conduct on the field in any sport should be dealt with by coaches and officials," he told the *New York Post*.

Trash talk gives athletes a competitive advantage.

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Star Power

Is it wrong for celebrities to endorse junk food?

by Rebecca Zissou

YES Beyoncé had a busy summer. She spent hours in the studio putting the finishing touches on her latest album, kicked off her Mrs. Carter Show World Tour, and posed for H&M's new ad campaign. But it's the pop star's other big project that has many people gulping: her \$50 million endorsement deal with Pepsi.

Michael Jacobson of the Center for Science in the Public Interest says it's irresponsible for Beyoncé to promote a product "that is quite literally sickening Americans." Research shows that drinking high-calorie, sugary drinks like soda contributes to a range of health problems, including obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes. Jacobson is urging the pop star to back out of the deal.

Stars should promote healthy habits.

Beyoncé isn't the only star getting flak. New York Giants quarterback Eli Manning has come under fire for endorsing Dunkin' Donuts, and Taylor Swift is facing criticism for promoting Diet Coke. Given celebrities' huge influence over kids, some people say stars should be more careful about the products they promote. Critics say these ultra-fit celebrities should lend their support to causes promoting healthy foods and encouraging kids to exercise.

NO Some people say it's unfair to point the finger at celebrities for promoting products that millions of people already enjoy. According to a 2012 study, nearly 50 percent of Americans drink sugary soda every day, even though most know it's bad for them. Plus, Beyoncé's supporters say, it's not her responsibility to encourage healthy eating habits.

Others say that celebrity endorsements have been a standard part of show business for years. They say endorsements are just a way for stars to earn additional money and gain more publicity. Today, celebrities lend their names to everything from potato chips to car insurance. Some professional athletes, like Miami Heat forward LeBron James who promotes Coca-Cola and McDonald's, earn more from endorsements than from playing sports.

In the end, it's up to individuals to make their own decisions about what they eat and drink, says Melissa St. James, a marketing professor at California State University.

"The responsibility ultimately lies with the consumer," she tells JS.

Endorsements are a standard part of show business.

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Toss the Tiara?

Should the U.S. ban child beauty pageants?

by Laura Anastasia



YES France's Senate recently voted to ban beauty pageants for kids younger than 16. The competitions focus too much on appearance, legislators say. "We are fighting to say what counts is what [kids] have in their brains," Senator Chantal Jouanno told reporters in Paris. Pageant critics want the United States to adopt a similar ban. They argue that "high-glitzy" pageants like the ones featured on *Toddlers & Tiaras* force kids to grow up too fast. The pint-size stars on that TV show often pile on fake hair, heavy makeup, and even false teeth before taking the stage. Many kids wear revealing

Pageants force kids to grow up too fast.

outfits that critics say aren't age-appropriate.

Opponents say pageants put too much emphasis on looks. "Many of these kids grow up with a never-ending drive for physical perfection," Martina Cartwright tells *JS*. Her research on child pageants was recently published in a medical journal. "This can lead to eating disorders and poor self-esteem."

Others worry that pageants' intense competition and hours of preparation may be too much for kids—not to mention the financial burden. According to Cartwright, participation in a single competition can top \$3,000.

NO Participating in pageants builds confidence and self-esteem—qualities that benefit children for life, pageant supporters say. "The self-confidence it gives kids is amazing. When they do interviews [as adults] for jobs and colleges, they really have an advantage," says Tami Soudbakhsh, director of the Little Miss and Mr. Pageants in Las Vegas.

Despite how the competitions are portrayed on TV, a growing number of "natural pageants" don't allow makeup, supporters say. Even at glitzier competitions, appearance is just one component. "It's also about elegance, poise, uniqueness, having fun, eye contact, and remembering to smile," Soudbakhsh tells *JS*.

Pageants help kids make friends from all over the country, says Stephanie Warren, director of America's Natural Supreme Beauties. The competitions also encourage children to help out in their communities. Warren's pageant contestants make care packages for U.S. troops serving overseas. The competitions

also have financial rewards, Warren tells *JS*. Her daughter, Alexis, 7, has won \$2,500 in pageants in the past two years. That money is now in her college fund. "She's going to go to school on pageant money," Warren says.

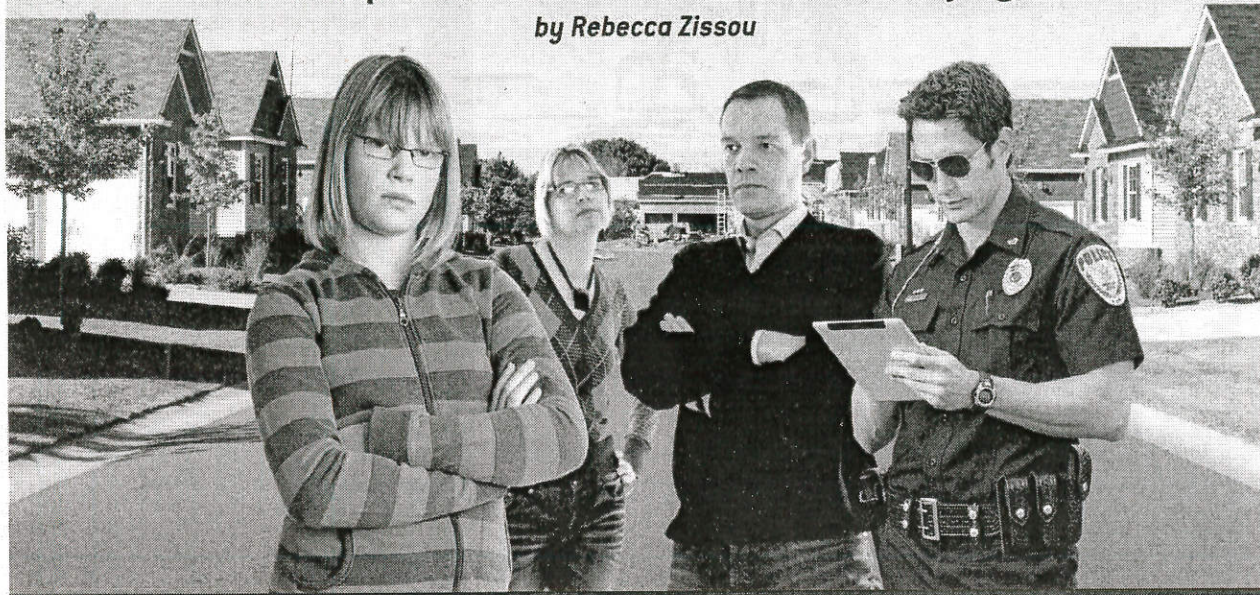
Pageants build self-confidence.



PARENTS, PAY UP!

Should parents be fined for their kids' bullying?

by Rebecca Zissou



YES School officials have tried many things to prevent bullying—issuing suspensions, hiring security guards, and even installing cameras to catch bullies in the act. Now some lawmakers have a new way to deal with bullies: Fine their parents. In Monona, Wisconsin, parents can be charged up to \$177 when their kids are caught taunting another student. In Kansas City, Missouri, parents can be fined up to \$1,000.

"I hope this sends a message that we will not tolerate this behavior," says Kansas City Councilman Scott Taylor.

Research shows that nearly one in three students—about 13 million kids—are bullied each year. About 160,000 students stay home from school every day out

Parents should be held responsible for their kids.

of fear of bullying, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Supporters hope the fines encourage parents to keep an eye on their kids and take

responsibility for their actions. Joel Haber, a bullying expert in New York, says it's important that parents talk to their kids about bullying and correct their bad behavior. Parents "need to be part of the solution," he tells *JS*.

NO Opponents say bullies should be held accountable for their own actions. After all, parents can't keep track of their kids at all times. If anyone is going to be fined, they say, it should be the bullies themselves, not their parents.

Others say the new laws are difficult to enforce. They point out that most bullying incidents go unreported and that in many cases, victims have a hard time proving what happened.

William Grace Frost of Community Matters, an anti-bullying organization in California, says the most effective bullying-prevention programs focus not on punishment, but on empowering kids to stand up to bullies. Studies show that when bystanders intervene, the bullying stops nearly 60 percent of the time.

"The best way to prevent bullying and other forms of mean-spirited behavior is by changing the school climate . . . by waking up students' courage and equipping them with skills that help them safely and effectively intervene," Frost tells *JS*.

Instead of fining parents, Frost says, school officials need to show bullies that their behavior is wrong, how it affects their victims, and that it won't be tolerated—by their peers or their teachers.

Fining parents won't stop bullies.

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