



NBA Player Salary vs. Performance

An Exploratory Data Analysis | 2025-26 Season

Team Geom_smooth | STA 199

• Isaac • Katie • Hillary • Tate • Diego

Introduction & Data



Research Question

Does star power drive NBA salaries beyond what on-court performance supports?

Hypothesis

More recognized players do earn more even if they aren't top statistical performers.

Metrics: PPG, FG%, MP, All-Star status

Source: www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2026_per_game.html
<https://www.basketball-reference.com/contracts/players.html>

537 players, 30 teams, season snapshot Feb 2026

Stats + contracts joined via inner_join

01

Scraped via rvest

02

Cleaned headers & \$

03

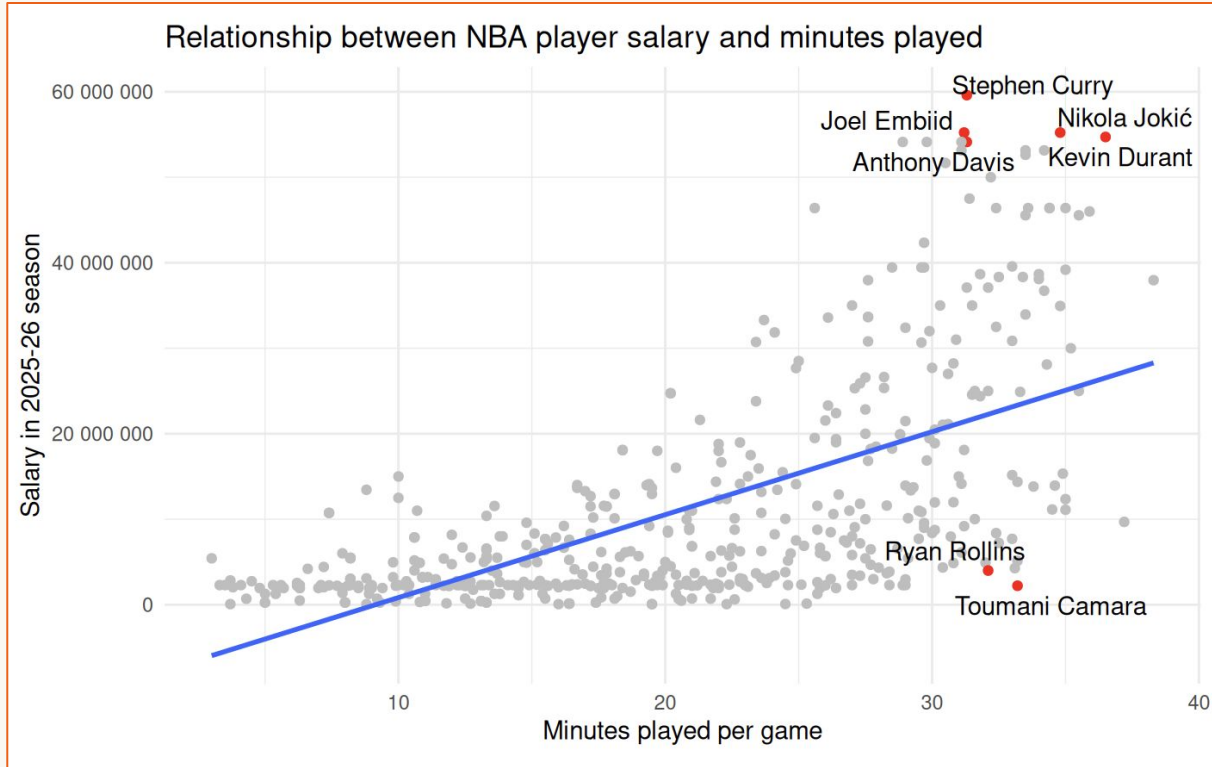
Filtered multi-team

04

Inner joined datasets

Minutes Played vs. Salary

Katie — Do players who play more minutes earn more?

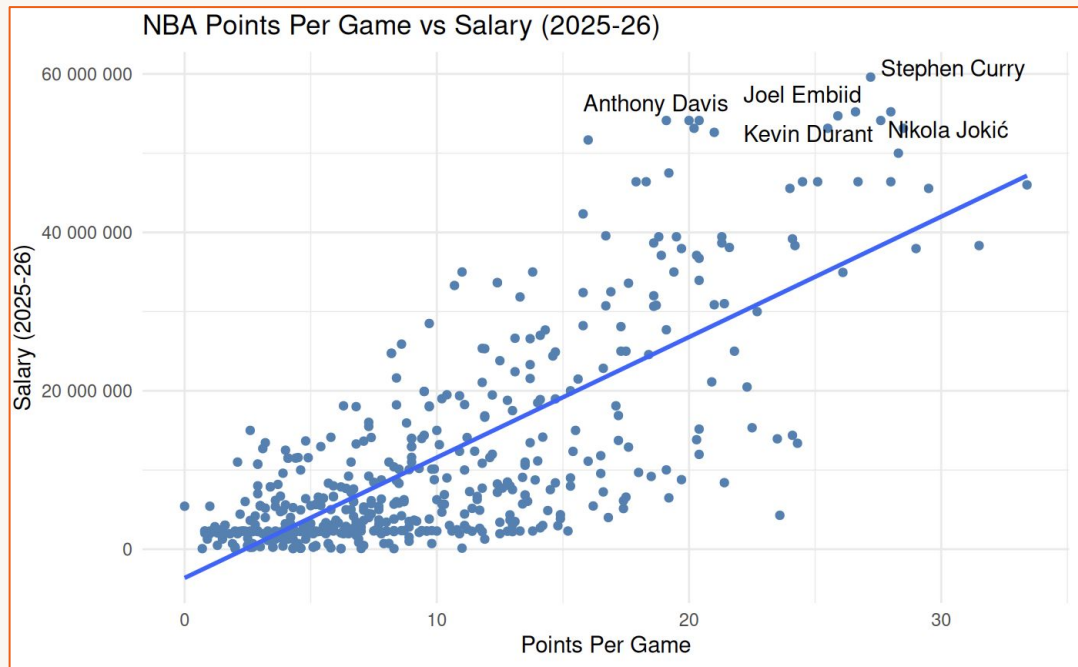


Key Findings

- ★ **General positive trend** of more minutes played correlating to higher average salary
- ★ **Top earners are all outliers** (disproportionate salaries despite high minutes played)
- ★ Other players (e.g. Ryan Rollins) **play similar minutes** to top earners at much **lower salaries**
- ★ Large cluster of players earning the lowest salary at a wide range of minutes played

Points per game vs. Salary

Diego — Are the best performers also the highest paid?

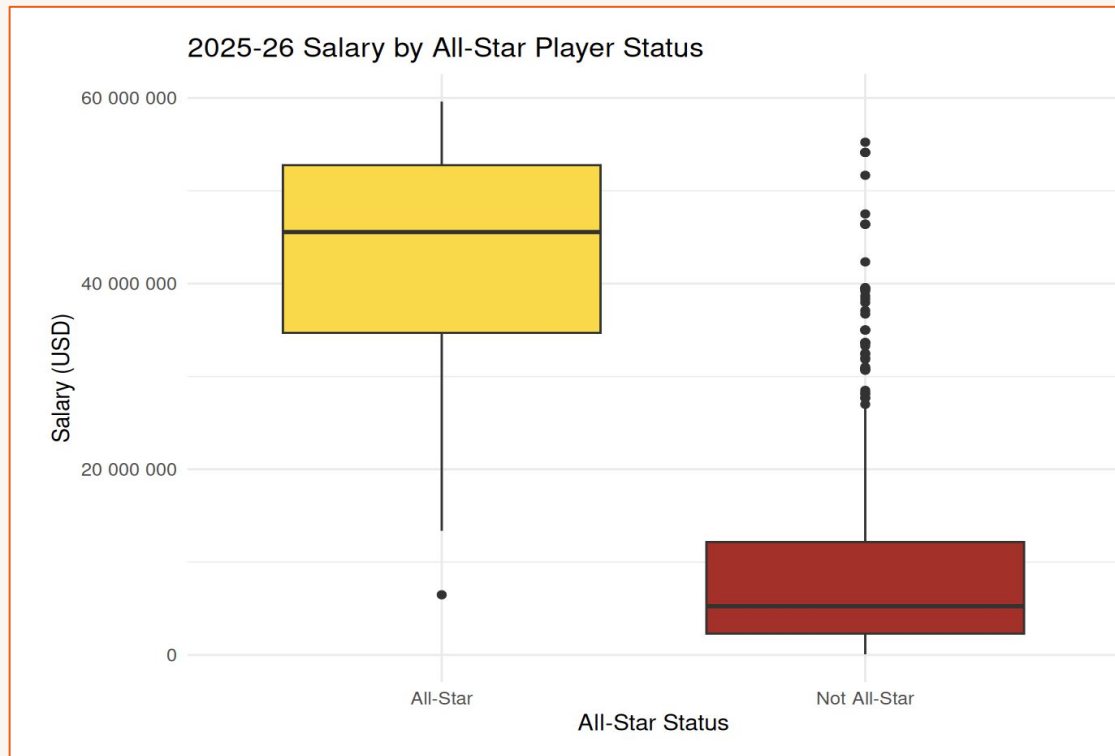


Key Findings

- ★ There is a **positive relationship** between points per game and salary, meaning higher scorers tend to earn more.
- ★ The top 5 highest paid players are not the top 5 scorers, suggesting scoring alone **does not** determine salary.
- ★ Players like Anthony Davis earn \$50M+ while averaging 20 PPG, while players with similar scoring **earn less**.
- ★ Name recognition and reputation appears to **inflate salaries** beyond what scoring stats would predict.

All-Star vs. Non All-Star Salary

Tate — Does the All-Star label come with a pay bump?

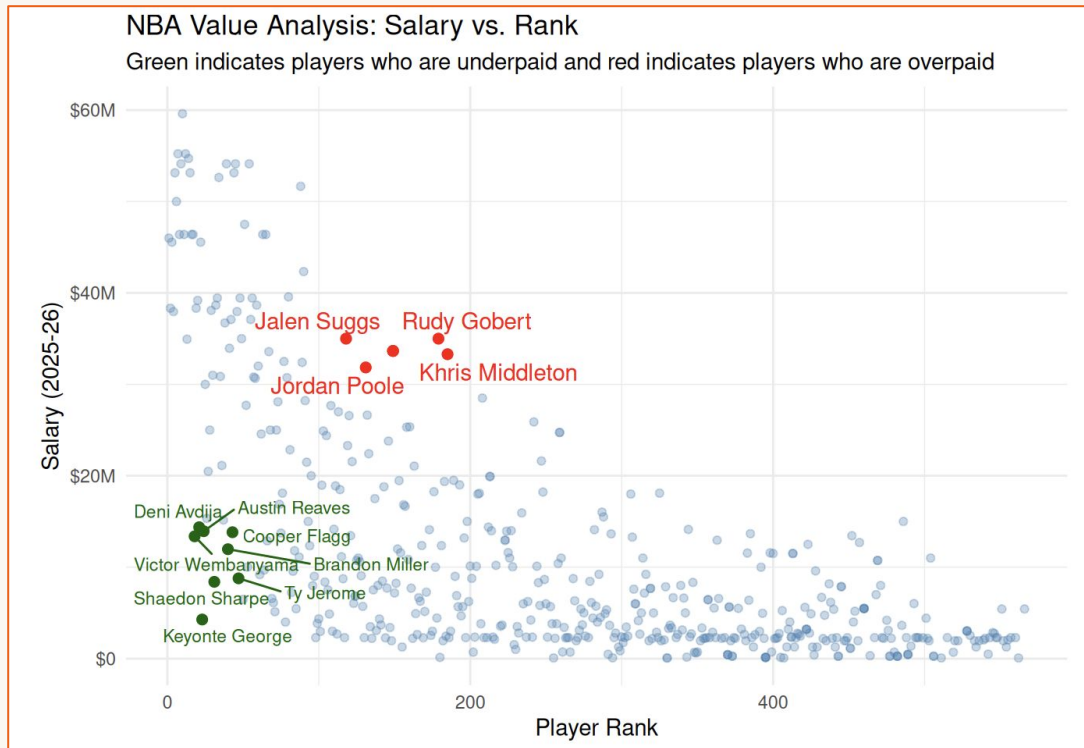


Key Findings

- ★ All-Stars earn about **8.67x more** at the median, but Non-All-Star salary variance is large (driven by a systemic class of overpaid veterans)
- ★ Legacy deals and **reputation** inflate salaries beyond current output
 - Joel Embiid (~\$50M+) as a non-All-Star is the clearest example
- ★ The **mismatch** appears both ways
 - Jalen Duren earns \$6.5M despite All-Star performance, exposing how rookie deals underprice breakout players
- ★ Scoring and salary **correlate** positively but imperfectly; reputation drives contracts more than current stats

Performance Rank vs. Salary

Hillary — Are the highest ranked performers also the most paid?



Key Findings

- ★ There is a noticeable pattern of higher ranked athletes being paid more, however, there are many outliers.
- ★ Rudy Gobert, Jordan Poole, Khris Middleton, and Jalen Suggs are all being paid more than \$30M a year but are not ranked among the top 100 players. In this plot, one can see that players ranked considerably higher than them are being paid a similar amount. It is also worth noting that all of these players are household names.
- ★ Shaedon Sharpe, Keyonte George, Brandon Miller, Ty Jerome, and Deni Avdija are among a group of players who rank higher than 50 but are paid less than \$15M a year. It is also worth noting that most players in this group are not household names.

Discussion & Conclusions

Key Takeaways

- Points/game and minutes played both show a **positive** relationship, meaning players that score more and play more tend to earn more
- Players like Rudy Gobert and Jordan Poole who are not ranked among the 100 best players are **paid similarly** to players that are.
- **All star** is strongly associated with higher salaries (All stars earning roughly 8x more than non All stars)
- Players like Stephen Curry earn above what their minutes suggest, while Ryan Rollins earn far below despite having similar playing time to **top earners**

Limitations

- Mid-season snapshot — stats change
- Excludes two-way / G-League players
 - Potential to exclude a max of 90 players
- Salaries are set prior to season reflects expectation, based on past performance not current output
- No endorsements, market size, or external factors



Our findings support our hypothesis, more recognized players do earn more

Data: Basketball-Reference.com | Questions ?