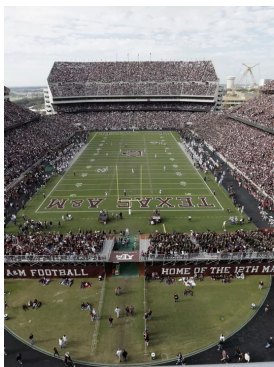




College football guarantee games: A gig economy worth more than \$175 million this season

Steve Berkowitz, Randy Peterson, Amanda Caffey, USA TODAY Network Published 1:14 p.m. ET Aug. 29, 2018 | Updated 2:43 p.m. ET Aug. 29, 2018



(Photo: The Associated Press)

College football's version of the gig economy gets rolling Thursday, as teams across the country begin the annual ritual of playing one-time, non-conference games in exchange for huge payouts.

This season, well over \$175 million will change hands just for teams getting on the field for these so-called "guarantee" games, according to an analysis of more than 275 contracts for matchups involving teams in the NCAA's top-level Bowl Subdivision.

While some of these agreements involve series of games on equal and relatively modest terms, the real money is elsewhere.

It's in about a dozen contests at off-campus sites, like the weekend's featured matchups: No. 6-ranked Washington vs. No. 10 Auburn on Saturday at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, and No. 8 Miami (Fla.) vs. No. 24 LSU at AT&T Stadium on Sunday night in Arlington, Texas. Those games will provide the participating schools a combined total of more than \$50 million in appearance fees that come with strings, including a need

to sell tens of thousands of tickets schools agree to purchase from third-party organizers.

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Meanwhile, millions more will come directly from the schools with the wealthiest athletics departments. In at least 45 instances this season, one of those schools will pay at least \$1 million to a lower-scale opponent while aiming to fill vast stadiums and — at least theoretically — get an impressive victory with minimal risk of defeat. Then there is Liberty, which is paying Old Dominion \$1.32 million to play a game Saturday in Lynchburg, Va., that will be its first as an FBS school.

More than 15 games this season will give the visiting team at least \$1.4 million.

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"The market just continues to go up," Iowa athletics director Gary Barta said. "I'm hearing stories of other schools paying \$2 million for games (in the future). You continue to wonder where the market is going to stop."

The greatest payout this season is the \$2 million Colorado State is getting from Florida for a game Sept. 15 that the schools created as part of package under which coach Jim McElwain fulfilled the \$7.5 million buyout he owed for leaving the Rams to join the Gators after the 2014 season. McElwain and Florida agreed to part ways during the 2017 season, and he is now an assistant coach at Michigan — which will be paying \$2 million for *not* playing a non-conference game against Arkansas. In 2016, Michigan canceled a two-game series that was to have started this season in Ann Arbor and been completed at Arkansas next year, which is when Michigan's payment will be due.

More conventional transactions for home-site games this season top out at \$1.7 million. That's the price for four contests, including Oregon State's visit to Ohio State on Saturday. Even that game has a distinction, however. It's the only home-site game this season matching Power Five conference schools that is not part of a series.

But when you're Oregon State, and you're struggling to compete financially within the Pac-12 Conference, or when you're a school in one of the FBS conferences outside the Power Five, you take to the road. Kent State will collect \$3.65 million by playing three of its first four games this season at Illinois, Penn State and Mississippi (its first Mid-American Conference game also is on the road, so Golden Flashes will play one home game in September). Next season, Kent State is set for paydays of \$1.9 million from Auburn and \$1.5 million from Arizona State. And in 2020, it is due a total of \$5 million for games at Arkansas, Kentucky and Alabama.

Middle Tennessee State — this season's adjunct member of the Southeastern Conference — will get just over \$3.1 million from Vanderbilt, Georgia and Kentucky, but the Vanderbilt game is the last of a four-game series that involved two at MTSU. The Blue Raiders have lost the first three games of that set against Vanderbilt, but in the first game they lost by just 17-13. And last season, they became a Power Five team's nightmare, beating Syracuse in a game for which Syracuse paid MTSU \$950,000. In an even sweeter turn for MTSU, its defensive coordinator, Scott Shafer, was Syracuse's head coach from 2013 through 2015.

Northern Illinois also pulled a lucrative upset last season, getting \$820,000 from Nebraska and a win in Lincoln. In addition to that payout, NIU had gotten just over \$1 million from Nebraska when a 2016 game between the teams set for Chicago was canceled.

The guaranteed payouts and chances for stunning wins give some schools ample reason to incentivize their coaches to play them.

This weekend, Bowling Green coach Mike Jinks will pick up a \$25,000 bonus for playing a guarantee game worth at least \$400,000 (the Falcons are getting \$900,000 to play at Oregon), and he can get another \$12,500 for a win over a Power Five team.

Wyoming's Craig Bohl can get \$100,000 if the Cowboys beat a Power Five team — and Washington State visits Laramie on Saturday.

Contributing: Christopher Schnaars



2018 COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Guarantee payouts for non-conference games this weekend

Date	Matchup	Visiting team's amount	Home team's amount
Aug. 30	New Mexico State at Minnesota	\$800,000	
Aug. 30	Weber State at Utah	550,000	
Aug. 30	Northwestern State at Texas A&M	515,000	
Aug. 30	UC-Davis at San Jose State	400,000	
Aug. 30	Central Connecticut at Ball State	400,000	

Aug. 30	Savannah St. at Ala.-Birmingham ¹	275,000	
Aug. 30	Kennesaw State at Georgia State	135,000	
Aug. 31	Utah State at Michigan State	1,400,000	
Aug. 31	Western Kentucky at Wisconsin	1,350,000	
Aug. 31	Monmouth at Eastern Michigan	325,000	
Aug. 31	Syracuse at Western Michigan	300,000	
Sept. 1	Washington vs. Auburn ²	4,100,000	\$4,200,000
Sept. 1	Louisville vs. Alabama ³	2,750,000	4,500,000
Sept. 1	West Virginia vs. Tennessee ⁴	2,500,000	2,500,000
Sept. 1	Mississippi vs. Texas Tech ⁵	2,500,000	3,750,000
Sept. 1	Oregon State at Ohio State	1,700,000	
Sept. 1	Old Dominion at Liberty	1,320,000	
Sept. 1	UNLV at Southern California	1,250,000	
Sept. 1	Appalachian State at Penn State	1,200,000	
Sept. 1	Florida Atlantic at Oklahoma	1,200,000	
Sept. 1	Texas State at Rutgers	1,200,000	
Sept. 1	Coastal Carolina at South Carolina	1,200,000	
Sept. 1	Akron at Nebraska	1,170,000	
Sept. 1	Central Michigan at Kentucky	1,150,000	
Sept. 1	Kent State at Illinois	1,150,000	
Sept. 1	Northern Illinois at Iowa	1,000,000	
Sept. 1	Bowling Green at Oregon	900,000	
Sept. 1	Brigham Young at Arizona	600,000	
Sept. 1	Eastern Illinois at Arkansas	525,000	
Sept. 1	Southern at Texas Christian	500,000	
Sept. 1	Austin Peay at Georgia	500,000	
Sept. 1	Tennessee-Martin at Missouri	475,000	
Sept. 1	Charleston Southern at Florida	475,000	
Sept. 1	Nicholls State at Kansas	450,000	
Sept. 1	South Dakota State at Iowa State	425,000	
Sept. 1	South Dakota at Kansas State	425,000	
Sept. 1	James Madison at North Carolina St.	425,000	
Sept. 1	Richmond at Virginia	405,000	
Sept. 1	Missouri State at Oklahoma State	400,000	
Sept. 1	Elon at South Florida	400,000	
Sept. 1	Cincinnati at UCLA	400,000	
Sept. 1	Texas vs. Maryland ⁶	400,000	3,500,000
Sept. 1	Stephen F. Austin at Mississippi St.	400,000	
Sept. 1	VMI at Toledo	375,000	
Sept. 1	Alcorn State at Georgia Tech	375,000	
Sept. 1	Furman at Clemson	360,000	
Sept. 1	Howard at Ohio	350,000	
Sept. 1	Central Arkansas at Tulsa	350,000	
Sept. 1	Portland State at Nevada	350,000	
Sept. 1	Massachusetts at Boston College	350,000	
Sept. 1	Navy at Hawaii	350,000	
Sept. 1	North Carolina A&T at East Carolina	330,000	
Sept. 1	South Carolina St. at Georgia Southern	325,000	
Sept. 1	Incarnate Word at New Mexico	325,000	
Sept. 1	Northern Arizona at Texas-El Paso	325,000	
Sept. 1	Texas-San Antonio at Arizona State	300,000	
Sept. 1	Southeast Missouri at Arkansas State	300,000	
Sept. 1	Washington State at Wyoming	300,000	
Sept. 1	Boise State at Troy	300,000	
Sept. 1	Mercer at Memphis	300,000	
Sept. 1	Jackson State at Southern Mississippi	300,000	
Sept. 1	Fordham at Charlotte	250,000	
Sept. 1	Grambling at Louisiana-Lafayette	250,000	
Sept. 1	Southeastern Louisiana at Louisiana-Monroe	250,000	
Sept. 1	Marshall at Miami (Ohio)	200,000	
Sept. 1	North Carolina at California	200,000	
Sept. 1	Indiana at Florida International	200,000	
Sept. 1	Idaho at Fresno State	175,000	
Sept. 1	Louisiana Tech at South Alabama	150,000	

Sept. 1	Middle Tennessee at Vanderbilt	150,000
Sept. 1	Southern Methodist at North Texas	100,000
Sept. 1	Houston at Rice	100,000
Sept. 2	Miami (Fla.) vs. LSU ⁷	4,750,000

1. Savannah State gets \$275,000, plus 40% of proceeds of sales by its ticket office.
2. Washington agreed to buy 7,917 tickets; Auburn agreed to buy 40,088.
3. Louisville agreed to buy 10,000 tickets; Alabama agreed to buy 18,000.
4. Each school agreed to buy 12,500 tickets. Each school gets \$400,000 bonus of if 66,000 tickets are sold; each gets additional \$100,000 if 70,000 are sold; each gets another \$200,000 if game is sellout (at least 72,500 tickets sold).
5. Mississippi agreed to buy 15,000 tickets; Texas Tech agreed to buy 25,000.
6. Maryland agreed to buy 25,000 tickets.
7. LSU agreed to buy at least 25,000 tickets. Terms for Miami unavailable.

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