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Missouri shows how schools pay a price for football success

By Steve Wieberg and Steve Berkowitz, USA TODAY

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Missouri's search for the right football coach meandered through three fitful decades until finally, nine years ago, the Tigers came upon Gary Pinkel.

A No. 1 ranking, two Big 12 Conference divisional championships and five bowl appearances later, they are hellbent on hanging on to him.

That means pulling out the checkbook and ponying up. Keeping Pinkel well paid. Satisfying his assistants, too. Investing more heavily in facilities, support staff and the other accouterments that have become essential to life in college athletics' fast lane.

A little less than a year ago, the school gave Pinkel a second contract extension and raise in three years and his third since he arrived at Mizzou in late 2000. His salary guarantee has more than quadrupled in that time, to \$2.52 million this season. His assistants' collective pay has more than doubled.

After turning around a program that had two winning seasons in 17 years before his arrival, Pinkel now is the fourth-highest paid coach in the Big 12. The coaches of the conference's two bellwether programs, Oklahoma's Bob Stoops and Texas' Mack Brown, are guaranteed a respective \$4.303 million and \$3 million this season. And a newly reworked contract brought Texas Tech's Mike Leach to \$2.7 million. The Big 12 average: \$2.1 million.

Including salaries, Missouri's total spending on football has climbed from a little less than \$7 million in 2004 to a projected \$13.2 million this year. Its overall outlay for athletics has gone up by more than a third in that time to a projected \$64 million in 2009-10.

"I know Missouri's not an outlier here," says Mike Alden, Mizzou's athletics director since 1998. The upward spending habits of Florida, Texas and other powerhouse programs are well-chronicled. What's notable, USA TODAY finds in its analysis of financial filings with the NCAA in the four years from 2004-05 to 2007-08, is the pull they exert on down the athletics' food chain.

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Cincinnati hired an up-and-coming coach in Mark Dantonio, lost him to Michigan State, hit on another in Brian Kelly and has evolved into a Big East power that's unbeaten and ranked among the nation's top five this season. En route, its head coach's salary ballooned 144% from 2004 to 2007. Its football assistants' collective salaries rose 20% in that time. And total spending on athletics went up 44%, far outpacing a 3% rise in overall spending by the university.

Boise State's ascent to national prominence came amid a 52% rise in athletics spending in that same four-year period, close to tripling a 19% increase in total institutional expenditures. Ball State more than doubled the salary of football coach Brady Hoke and fattened its athletics budget by 36% — almost double the rate of increase in spending by the school — and still saw Hoke bolt for San Diego State after a 12-win breakthrough last season. He is making more, at a guaranteed \$676,800 this season, and also cited better pay for his assistants in making the move.

Oregon State's athletics budget grew 29% while its institutional budget shrank 9%, the financial filings show.

Darkening the picture are the troubled economy and budgetary pain it has brought Missouri and most all of higher education. Athletic departments spend away while academics — the schools' reason for being — are getting slammed.

"It's something Division I athletics has to be aware of and come to terms with, ultimately," Missouri Chancellor Brady Deaton says. "Because given the factors in play right now, it's not clear this is a sustainable path."

Winning is rewarded

Mizzou's fiscal distress actually is modest compared with, say, the 10-school University of California system, which saw state appropriations slashed by \$813 million. In exchange for a pledge by the state's public colleges and universities to hold off on tuition increases, the legislature in Jefferson City, Mo., made no cuts in their appropriations this year.

Still, MU has instituted a systemwide hiring freeze, frozen the pay of most of its approximately 18,000 full-time faculty and staff and tinkered with its pension plan, the latter in particular raising faculty hackles.

Amid all that, Pinkel and his program are making history.

The Tigers rebuilt their lineup this season and won't reach a third consecutive Big 12 championship game. But they're 5-4 and need one win in the final three weeks of the regular season to qualify for another bowl, which would be their school-record fifth in a row under Pinkel.

"Sometimes, you've got to spend money to make money," reasons Martin Rucker, a state representative from St. Joseph. "As long as he's successful in doing that and continuing to provide a positive image of the university, I don't know how you can argue to not pay him."

If not without introspection.

A Democrat who sits on the state's House education appropriations committee, Rucker has been sold on Pinkel since the coach stepped into his living room seven years ago to recruit the youngest of his four children. He likes Pinkel's grasp of X's and O's, he says. He loves his honesty. He admires his attention to life beyond the field.

And yet, Rucker and others detected some unease when the school gave Pinkel his latest extended contract and raise near the end of last season. Atop his guarantee, Pinkel — who declined to speak on the record about his salary — can pocket as much as \$850,000 in a given year in incentives.

"I'm not saying he doesn't deserve a raise," says Rucker, a sheet metal worker by trade whose son, Martin II, went on to become an All-America tight end at Mizzou. "It's just the economic times we're going through."

"A few other legislators, I don't know if they were really upset, but (they were) just questioning, 'Why would you give the guy a raise when we're here trying to balance the budget and we're cutting this and cutting that and can't give all the money we want to higher ed?' It wasn't a real firestorm. It was some people probably thinking out loud."

A few months later, Alden and Missouri also were compelled to redo the contract of basketball coach Mike Anderson after he guided the Tigers within a game of the NCAA tournament's Final Four in March. In truth, Alden says, he had talked about a new deal earlier. But urgency rose when Anderson's success made him a speculated candidate for job openings at Georgia and Memphis.

He got a \$500,000 raise to \$1.35 million annually and will pocket another \$1.4 million in deferred pay if he stays through the seven-year term of the agreement.

"When you pay that much money to athletics personnel simply because of the competitive situation, it really comes across wrong. Especially to those who are involved in education," says another Missouri state representative, Republican Mike Thomson of Maryville. A teacher, counselor and coach for more than 30 years on the high school level, he chairs the House education appropriations committee.

"But I totally understand the other side of it — what a successful athletic program does for the whole university," Thomson says. "It not only picks up your alumni base, but it's almost a self-recruiting tool. How do you discount the value of a good program? And where does a good program start? It starts with good people."

'Costs to be the boss'

It figures that there are good people on Mizzou's faculty, too. Its average professor's salary rose 9% — to \$102,800 — in the four years from 2004 to 2008, according to surveys by the American Association of University Professors. In that time, the school's annual financial filings with the NCAA show that its spending on football assistants' salaries rose 32%.

In the four years that USA TODAY has studied head coaches' salaries, from 2006 to 2009, Pinkel's climbed 131%.

The overall spending picture looks much the same. University expenditures at Missouri essentially stayed flat from fiscal 2004-05 to 2007-08, falling a little less than one-half of 1%, according to the NCAA filings. Overall athletics spending climbed almost 12%.

"I think, if you have a level of sensitivity and compassion, those types of issues are difficult," Alden says.

"At the end of the day, is it still concerning for people to see expenses continue to go like this (he gestures upward)? Absolutely. But at least it's being done in an open and transparent environment and with a lot of input."

Pinkel also is part of a growing movement among those coaches to take financial care of their assistants, writing salary, bonus and other stipulations into their head coaching contracts. The minimum allocation for Pinkel's staff has gone from \$885,000 under his original agreement to \$2.1 million (the first covering 10 people, the latter nine excluding the director of football operations). Their incentives, like Pinkel's, also are much more lucrative. Consequently, Pinkel kept his staff virtually intact for nine years.

Virginia Tech's Frank Beamer has long led the way in that regard. Hokies defensive coordinator Bud Foster, making \$402,000 this year, is one of 13 assistants in USA TODAY's study who are guaranteed at least \$400,000. All nine Tech assistants have the security of multiyear agreements.

So do the entire staffs at Alabama, Auburn and Tennessee. Tennessee's nine assistants earn a nation-high average of \$369,444, more than the guarantees for 18 major-college head coaches for whom USA TODAY was able to determine compensation.

While the NCAA caps coaching numbers at a head coach and nine assistants, there are no limits on administrative and support staff. And there lies more fuel for the spending spiral.

Alabama's overall athletics staff runs more than 230 deep, including eight full-time strength and conditioning coaches and directors, four video services employees and two pilots, an aircraft technician and a flight operations manager. The roll in Missouri's athletics department: 16 executive associate, senior associate, associate and assistant ADs beneath Alden and some 190 other athletics personnel ranging from coaches to directors of sports nutrition and video operations.

Mizzou's overall athletics profit nonetheless has climbed nearly tenfold in the last four years, from a modest \$461,000 to a little more than \$4.5 million in 2008-09. That has much to do with football, which netted more than \$11 million last year and helps to keep the school's array of non-revenue-producing sports afloat.

An annual \$2.25 million subsidy from the university also helps, though Deaton and Alden say it will be phased out in the next four years in deference to the economy.

Beyond taking care of its marquee coaches, Deaton says Missouri has adjusted compensation packages for key faculty and researchers on campus and "I don't sense any big battle on campus at all about this. I think all the faculty are committed to using, in a sense, the athletic success for the overall success of the university."

Indeed, Leona Rubin, an associate professor in MU's college of veterinary medicine and chairwoman of the faculty council, points to athletics' intrinsic value, to the exposure, branding and campuswide energy a winning team can lend. Some faculty, she says, connect football's success to Missouri's record, 5,800-strong freshman enrollment a year ago and near-record again this year.

She says she heard no grumbling about the redo of Pinkel's contract. No e-mails. No phone calls. "I think everyone is pleased with what athletics is doing," Rubin says.

That appears to include most folks down the road in Jefferson City.

"We all know that when Mizzou is winning, the whole state feels better. So ... you do whatever it takes to keep your program at the upper echelon," says Rucker, who saw an older son, Mike, star at Nebraska and play with the NFL's [Carolina Panthers](#).

"The bottom line is it costs to be the boss."

Pinkel's deals: By the numbers

University of Missouri football coach Gary Pinkel's guaranteed annual compensation has increased 331% during his eight-plus years at the school. Under the terms of his contracts, the school's outlays for his assistant coaches and other football-specific personnel also have increased. The collective guaranteed salaries of his assistant coaches alone have gone up by more than 130% and their possible incentive bonuses have grown from one month's salary to more than seven. Even with those increases, the school's net revenue from football also has grown.

Contract 1 (Dec. 1, 2000)	Contract 2 (Jan. 1, 2004)	Contract 3 (Jan. 1, 2007)	Contract 4 (Jan. 1, 2009)
Pinkel salary	Pinkel salary	Pinkel salary	Pinkel salary
\$585,000 a year guaranteed.	\$1.090 million a year guaranteed.	\$1.32 million a year guaranteed.	\$2.525 million a year guaranteed, plus guaranteed annual increases of at least \$50,000 a year.
\$50,000 buyout to Toledo covered.	\$462,500 incentive maximum.	\$523,750 incentive maximum, plus the possibility of adding \$50,000 a year to the guaranteed amount for the remaining years of the deal.	\$850,000 incentive maximum.
\$400,000 incentive maximum.			
Assistants	Assistants	Assistants	Assistants
Minimum of \$885,000 a year for nine assistants and director of football operations.	Minimum of \$1.3 million a year for nine assistant coaches, director of football operations and weight/strength training director.	Minimum of \$1.62 million a year for nine assistant coaches, director of football operations and weight/strength training director.	Minimum of \$2.101 million a year for nine assistants. (Salaries of assistant athletics director for football operations, assistant athletics director for athletic performance and coordinator of on-campus recruiting explicitly will be paid under athletics department budget.)
1 month salary per assistant incentive maximum	1 month salary per assistant bonus maximum.	2 months' salary per assistant bonus maximum.	Offensive coordinator and defensive coordinator will have 2-year contracts, running July 1-June 30.
2001 season record: 4-7 overall (3-5 Big 12, T-4th North Division)	2004 season record: 5-6 (3-5, T-3rd North) Football revenue: \$15,907,400 (\$7,322,627 from home game tickets) Football expenses: \$6,814,760 Fiscal year 2005 athletics overall: \$460,707 surplus	Extra compensation for additional staff to perform additional work related to a bowl shall be determined and approved by the athletics director.	Other assistants' contracts will be 1 year, running July 1-June 30.
2002 season record: 5-7 (2-6, 5th North)	2005 season record: 7-5 (4-4, T-2nd North), Independence Bowl win Football revenue: \$14,977,244 (\$7,322,627 from home game tickets) Football expenses: \$7,135,461 2006 athletics overall: \$5,561,733 deficit	2007 season record: 12-2 (7-1, T-1st North, Big 12 title game loss as No. 2-ranked team in nation), Cotton Bowl win, No. 5 final ranking Football revenue: \$21,200,528 (\$11,424,709 from home game tickets*) Football expenses: \$10,608,910 2008 athletics overall: \$3,787,255 surplus	Maximum of \$65,000 paid into pool, based on Big 12 division or overall championships, for the 12 staffers covered under contract.
2003 season record: 8-5 (4-4, 3rd North), Independence Bowl loss	2006 season record: 8-5 (4-4, T-2nd North), Sun Bowl loss Football revenue: \$16,432,173 (\$8,573,559 from home game tickets) Football expenses: \$9,329,395	2008 season record: 10-4 (5-3, T-1st North, Big 12 title game loss), Alamo Bowl win, No. 16 final ranking Football revenue** \$24,484,859 (\$13,182,272 from home game tickets*)	Additional bonus of 7 months' salary per each of the nine assistants

2007 athletics overall: \$805,732 deficit

Football expenses** \$13,228,116 2009 athletics overall** \$4,529,230 surplus

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Extra compensation for additional staff to perform additional work related to a bowl game shall be determined and approved by athletics director.

2009 season record: 5-4 (1-4, T-last North)

Football revenue***: \$24,400,000 (\$12,558,965 from home game tickets*)

Football expenses***: \$13,200,000

2010 athletics overall***: Even

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Does it concern you that schools continue to increase spending for college football in light of the economic downturn? Share your comments below.

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