

NEW CONTRACT -

People asked me about my contract for weeks after it was signed. Did the Braves do the right thing in signing me? Did I think I was worth the money? Could I explain my salary when teachers, doctors and medical researchers were getting paid so very much less? Athletes and entertainers get these types of questions constantly. They are not real easy questions to answer, because so many people have such different (and sometimes adamant) feelings on the subject. I have decided to address these questions on the site in hopes of letting everyone in on my thoughts.

I love the game of baseball. Always have, always will. It is a game that I grew up playing purely for the fun. Now, it is my job. I don't love the game any less, I just realize that it is how I must earn my keep for the next 8 or 10 years, God willing. After that, age will probably get the best of me. I have always strived to be absolutely the best player that I can. In terms of salary, I feel like I work hard enough to be paid at the top of my profession. This doesn't answer the question of "whether I deserve this money," but I have to first justify to myself that I perform and work at a level that entitles me to be paid with the best in the game. I certainly hope that is true.

Next, the tough question - what entitles me to this money when teachers and doctors make so much less. I suppose it is the same in movies, where some movie stars make \$20 million/picture. It is seen by us as a fun thing, but the movie companies are making lots of money and so the actors do, too. As with sports, the money is passed along. Can I say that one player is "worth" \$15 million per year or \$20 million per year? I'm quite certain that no one can say for sure either way. The standard answers you hear are (i) that you are only worth what someone will pay, and (ii) because the owners are making so much money, that they should pass it along to the athletes who are responsible for the results. The true thing that everyone needs to understand is that the fans make this game what it is. I will always remember that. I know this doesn't address the fact that teachers make \$30,000 per year or that doctors average far less than \$1 million per year, much less millions per year. All I can say from my heart, with the utmost truth, is that I took far less than I could have gotten on the free agent market. I did that for myself, my family, my teammates and the city of Atlanta. I recognize that we get paid to play a game and get paid an extraordinary amount of money to do it. I am thankful for that every day of my life. I also recognize that the game of baseball has turned from "just a game" into a game run by businessmen, and played by businessmen. This is my job, I work extremely hard to be the best I can be, and I hope to go out and earn the fan's and the game's respect everyday. In today's world, I think that is about all I can do.

This may not answer the questions very well in some people's eyes. I understand the frustration. As I said at my press conference, I was initially embarrassed to be making the money that I do. But, I try to justify it to myself by working harder than anyone in the game. I owe the fans, the Braves, my family and myself that, at the very least. Again, make no mistake about this - we play a game. We make a lot of money to play that game. But, I love that game with all of my heart, and I can't

imagine doing anything else. The money is secondary to that love, because those millions don't help me hit a fastball or earn the respect of my teammates and fans. Only I can do that and I work at it everyday. Thanks to the fans who make baseball the best sport on Earth, and who have allowed me to play this game for them.