



The annual General Managers and Owners Meetings are underway in Orlando, which means baseball's Hot Stove is beginning to heat up. The first big name off the board is Marlon Byrd, who agreed to a [two year, reported \\$16 million deal](#) with the Philadelphia Ruben Amaros (also, I still can't believe I used 'Marlon Byrd' and 'big name' in the same sentence). Even before the dollar figure was announced there was a [wift reaction on twitter](#) to denounce the signing as an overpay. [S](#)

The thing is, nearly every free agent contract is an overpay. That's the way the system is designed. Players are under club control for their first six seasons, a.k.a. their twenties a.k.a. their prime years, meaning those that do make it to free agency are typically already in their thirties before signing a new contract. Now more than ever teams are locking up their young stars to decade-long contracts that prevent them from even sniffing the free agent market. Teams have [more money than ever before](#) to spend on player salaries, yet there are [fewer ways in which they can spend it](#)

. It's simple supply and demand economics; teams have more money to spend on filling holes in their rosters, yet there are fewer and fewer players available to fill those holes.

Nowadays, if a team has a hole that they want to fill in free agency, they usually have no choice but to overpay a player to fill it. The Philadelphia Ruben Amaros need a right-handed bat with some pop. If signing Marlon Byrd for two years, \$16 million is too steep, then what exactly are they supposed to do? Sign Mike Napoli and create a logjam for playing time at first base? Sign a 33-year-old Nelson Cruz to a contract even more onerous than the Byrd one while surrendering a first round pick? Trade a couple of quality pitching prospects that they don't really have for the out machine that is Mark Trumbo? Use the money to buy a hotdog for [each of the three million fans that walk through the ballpark gates](#)

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Ultimately, whichever way the Ruben Amaros tried to go, they would invariably end up overpaying, be it overpaying in prospects or overpaying in free agent dollars.

Only complicating matters is that, as much as we like to think we know how much each player should be paid, we don't know which contracts are overpays and which are bargains until after the fact. Gil Meche receiving five years and \$55 million was considered [ridiculous](#) at the time until he posted back-to-back seasons of over 4 WAR (and subsequently [injured his shoulder through little fault of his own](#) ). Boston giving three years and \$38 million to a [seemingly declining Shane Victorino is an overpay](#) until he becomes a [key cog in a World Series winner](#)

This isn't an issue of analytics versus traditional scouting. Every team would love to sign Mike Napoli to a one-year deal due to a [chronic hip condition](#) and have him post a 4.1 WAR. Every team would love to pluck Scott Kazmir off the scrap heap for the veteran minimum and have him post his best season since 2009.

Unfortunately, it's not always that easy. If every team could fulfill all their needs with players on one-year deals and non-roster invitees, they would. But for every Ryan Raburn there's an [Austin Kearns](#), and even contracts that seem reasonable at the time, such as the [two-year, \\$15 million deal the Diamondbacks gave Brandon McCarthy last offseason](#) (\$), can come back to bite teams in the ass.

It's crucial to remember that free agent contracts don't exist in a vacuum. Is two years, \$16 million for a guy who [barely played in 2012](#) due in part to a PED suspension excessive? Probably.

But the Marlon Byrd contract isn't an overpay because *every* contract for a free agent coming off a half-decent season is an overpay. As it stands, the Ruben Amaros added a right-handed hitting outfielder coming off a .847 OPS (138 OPS+) season that fits into their left-handed heavy lineup. They managed to add this player without giving up a draft pick or tying up salary space

far into the future.

Irrespective of the dollar amount, the Ruben Amaros identified a team need, evaluated the alternatives, and signed the player that represented (to them) the best combination of affordability and production that was available in the market. Time will tell if the Marlon Byrd contract is as bad an overpay as the [intelligentsia](#) seems to think it is, but for now the Ruben Amaros are a better team today than they were a week ago, a fact that is easily lost in the shuffle of [making fun of the Ruben Amaros on twitter](#).

*Jeremy Klein is an unabashed Cleveland Sports fan who thinks that if Scott Kazmir is so set on [signing a multi-year contract](#), that's just another reason why the Indians should have extended him a [qualifying offer](#). You can follow him on Twitter [@PapaBearJere](#)*

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