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Description of the Process of Becoming a Major League Baseball Free Agent

Kids and adults alike often have the dream of being a professional baseball player. Besides the glamour of being famous and being watched, admired, and followed by tens of millions of people across the globe, one of the main reasons why people have this dream is because of the exorbitant amounts of money that they see players making. This is not as simple as it seems though, as unlikely as it even is to become a baseball player there are still many more steps before the ability to earn all this money. The step where players finally earn these huge sums of money is called Free agency, which is the process that will be described.

The first step towards becoming a major league baseball free agent is to be signed by a major league team. There are two ways to be eligible to be signed by a team, and they are dependent on the location where a player lives. If a player is considered an international free agent, which includes players from any country other than the United States, Canada or Puerto Rico they can sign with a team from the age of sixteen and on. The second and more common way is by being selected in the annual Major League Baseball draft which has more than 1000 players selected each year. In order to be eligible for the draft, a player has to fall into one of three categories. The first category is someone who has completed high school but not yet attended college. The second category are players who are currently attending Junior colleges, and the final category are players in college that are either finishing their Junior or Senior years of college. If selected the player has the option to sign with the team, or to go to college and re-enter the draft when they are next eligible.

When the player decides to sign with the team, the next step is to play in the minor leagues. While being a minor leaguer the next step is to proceed through each level of the minor leagues, where the players salaries range from 1000 to 10,000 a month based off the level they are at, many times not even making close to minimum wage since they are exempt from federal wage laws. This stage is completed when the team promotes the player to the Major Leagues.

Once a player has reached the major leagues, his first three seasons are considered pre-arbitration seasons in which the player receives around the league minimum salary. Each season is defined by how long the player was on the major league roster, in order to be considered a full year the player must be on the roster for about 170 days of the 185 day season, if the player was sent down to the minor leagues or placed on the Disabled List due to injuries these days do not count towards the years. The exception to the three years rule is called Super twos which are players who have been in the league for between two and three years, and the top 22 percent of these players based off time on the active roster become arbitration eligible early.

The next step is proceeding through the arbitration years, in which the player gets their first chance to negotiate their contract, but still has their rights owned by the team. When a player is arbitration eligible, they try to work out an agreement with the team for a salary based off what the players with comparable stats have earned through arbitration in recent years. If by mid-January an agreement has not yet been reached, the player and team then exchange salary amounts for what they want for the upcoming year. The player and team then have a month to work out a deal between each other before the case is brought before a group of arbitrators that have nothing to do with baseball. At this point both the player and team try to use stats convince the group of arbitrators that their salary offer is more logical. After hearing the arguments, the arbitrators do not work out a settlement between the team and player but rather they choose one of the two figures. This process repeats itself following the players third, fourth and fifth seasons in which the players’ salaries usually gradually increase each year. Following the players sixth full season in the major leagues the team has the right to offer the player a qualifying offer. The qualifying offer is a one-year contract that has the mean value of the average annual salary of the top 125 paid players in the sport. At this point the player has ten days to decide whether to accept this deal. If the player declines this offer or the team chooses not to make this offer to the player, the player has finally reached the desired step of Free Agency.