

SPORTS

Smith gets 8-year \$20.25 million extension

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) — Tubby Smith signed an eight-year contract extension Friday that would pay him \$20.25 million if he coaches Kentucky through the 2010-11 season.

His base salary will be \$200,000 a year, but bonuses, apparel endorsement and television and radio deals add millions. And if the Wildcats reach the Final Four during the rest of his tenure, the contract will be extended by two years at an additional \$5 million.

Smith led Kentucky to the 1998 NCAA championship.

"We wanted to stay in the forefront and stay ahead in college basketball," Smith said. "We have the No. 1 program in college basketball, and we want to keep it that way."

Smith will get \$1.55 million for endorsements and appearances in the first year of



Kentucky coach Tubby Smith smiles during a news conference where he was announced as the Associated Press coach of the year earlier this month in New Orleans.

the contract. That figure will gradually rise to \$2.175 million for 2010-11.

After four years, Smith would receive a bonus of \$1.5 million, and after eight years, he would receive a similar bonus of \$2.5 million.

The contract's incentives include bonus pay for on-court and academic excellence by his players. The contract does not include a buyout clause, Kentucky athletic director Mitch Barnhart said.

"There are basketball programs struggling with issues of integrity," Barnhart said. "The reputation of our program rests on the shoulders of a man who has great integrity."

He is honest and truthful and says he wants to be here. I have a trust level with him. His word is good."

The 51-year-old Smith is 164-47 in six seasons at Kentucky. Adolph Rupp and Rick Pitino had higher winning

percentages, but Smith reached 100 victories faster than any Kentucky coach in history.

Smith swept every annual national coaching honor this season for leading the Wildcats to a 32-4 record. Kentucky didn't lose a game in Southeastern Conference regular-season play or the league tournament, going an unprecedented 19-0.

The Wildcats, who entered the NCAA tournament ranked No. 1, had a 26-game winning streak ended when they lost to Marquette in the Midwest Regional final.

As the Wildcats gained momentum, there was speculation that Smith was considering leaving for the NBA or one of the high-profile college jobs that opened recently.

His previous contract netted him \$1.5 million a year and ran through the 2006-07 season.

How early is too early for professional sports?

By Marvin Wamble

Special to Sentinel-Voice

If I ever want a rousing conversation with my wife, I only need to mention athletes who leave college early to become professionals. If I want to turn up the heat a little, I espouse the values of high school athletes going directly to the professional ranks. The very idea of not seeking an education is repulsive to her, simply unthinkable. Even after I present all the options, including million-dollar salaries, the option of returning to school and inevitable promise that the athlete will purchase a new home for Mom, my wife is not amused. "They need to go to school and get an education," she says.

Imagine the robust conversation that ensued after revealing the tale of Freddy Adu, the 13-year-old soccer prodigy who currently plays for the U.S. National Team. Freddy is to soccer what Tiger Woods is to golf. He is the second coming of Pele. He has very serious kicks. In fact, two years ago Inter Milan, an Italian soccer powerhouse, presented Freddy a six-figure offer to play for its team. That's right, he was 11 years old. Freddy and his family turned down the cash to the cheers of many (and a standing ovation from my wife). Currently, Freddy is in the residency program with the U.S. under-17 national

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soccer team in Florida.

Freddy was born in Ghana and moved to the United States in 1997. He had to live in this country for five years before becoming an American citizen and be allowed to play on the U.S. national team. He is now enrolled in an accelerated academic program and could graduate from high school in 2004. After that, chances are he will immediately turn professional and rake in a seven-figure salary. Sounds like a plan to me, but my wife isn't buying it. The number of commas and zeros on a contract don't mean a thing to her. The key number for her is the age of the participant. She insists that she is not alone in her thinking.

I must admit that signing a professional sports contract at age 11 is a little overboard, even 14 or 15 is pushing it. No matter what kind of talent the young person possesses, you still need to experience growing up. Plus, getting a full-time job at 13 takes a lot of fun out of life. How many of you would skip the good times you had between the ages of 13 and 18 to earn a few hundred-thousand dol-

lars? Think carefully before you answer. Most of us have memories of the wonder years of adolescents that we simply could not buy. Of course others would jump at the chance to purchase a few bright and shiny memories.

While early teens is too young to pursue the American athletic dream, I have absolutely no problem with an 18-year-old athlete becoming a professional. I believe that once all the pros and cons are laid out, a young person has the right to make a choice. Of course, in our society the determining factor is almost always the money. We have so devalued education that when a talented athlete decides to attend college or stay for four years, people react with shock and dismay.

An athletic double standard hovers around this issue. If this talented athlete was simply a below-average student with no college aspirations, no one would have a problem with this person getting a job after high school. But a debate immediately blossoms when an athlete decides to make a similar decision. Is it the money?

The real question is why

we seek an education. If we spend two, four or six years in college only to get a job, then bypassing a college education is an easy choice for an athlete who will have a well-paying (if not short-term) job without a college education. But there has to be a greater value to education. Most people grow, evolve and mature in a learning environment. The things we read and are forced to study while in college help shape our existence and change the way we look at life. I'm not saying that becoming a professional in basketball or soccer at 17 or 18 limits one's maturity, but it certainly limits one's view of life. I can tell you from experience that you don't have too many intellectually stimulating conversations with 20-year-old professional athletes.

So what's the answer? I believe the NFL is close to getting it right. An athlete must be three years removed from high school graduation to become eligible for the NFL draft. Let's give our young people a chance to grow physically and mentally before thrusting them into the world of high-level competition and a lifestyle change that many mature adults have trouble handling.

Marvin Wamble has covered sports in California, Texas and Washington, D.C., and has hosted several Dallas sports radio talk shows.



Floyd Mayweather posted a unanimous 12-round decision over Victoriano Sosa of the Dominican Republic to retain his WBC lightweight world title.

Floyd Mayweather Jr. keeps lightweight crown

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — Floyd Mayweather Jr. successfully defended his WBC lightweight title with a lively unanimous decision over Victoriano Sosa on Saturday night.

Mayweather (30-0) fought another tactically sound 12-round bout against an aggressive challenge from Sosa (35-3-2), the cousin of Chicago Cubs slugger Sammy Sosa and a native of the Dominican Republic.

With constant counterpunches against Sosa's flurries, Mayweather won a much more entertaining fight than the last defense of his title against Jose Luis Castillo last December. Mayweather was criticized for his conservative approach to two fights against Castillo last year.

Sosa apparently injured Mayweather's shoulder with a series of power blows in the fifth, and he picked on the injury in the ensuing rounds. Mayweather's left-handed jabs were affected, but he quickly recovered his form and peppered Sosa with elegant combinations and counterpunches.

Mayweather wants to fight Oscar De La Hoya soon, but the matchup would require him to move up two weight classes. De La Hoya is trained by Mayweather's father, who is estranged from his son.

The fight was the first world championship bout ever held at Fresno's Selland Arena, where the crowd stood and cheered the final round.

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