

Do Christian athletes seek big-dollar contracts like everyone else?

by [Tim Townsend](#) in the [March 22, 2011](#) issue

As contract talks broke down between Albert Pujols and the Cardinals, St. Louis baseball fans began nervously asking themselves a host of questions. He's a Cardinal for life, right? He wouldn't go to Wrigley Field because he likes winning too much, right?

But a particular group of Cardinals fans—those who share his evangelical Christian faith—were asking a different kind of question: What does holding out for the largest contract in the history of baseball say about Pujols's Christian testimony?

Pujols and his wife, Deidre, are evangelical Christians. They describe their charity, the Pujols Family Foundation, as "a faith-based nonprofit organization," and they participate in Christian events around the city.

So as Pujols began looking to many like a typical megawealthy superstar athlete angling for a record payday, some observers wondered if he was tarnishing his image.

Team officials have declined to describe the details of their offer to Pujols, but it's widely believed to have been worth about \$200 million.

Darrin Patrick, pastor of The Journey, a church in St. Louis that counts a number of professional athletes as members, said Jesus warned against greed.

"Nobody really confesses to that sin," Patrick said. "Lust, anxiety—sure. But very few people

say, 'I'm greedy,' and I absolutely think that [Pujols] should be on guard for that. A verse from 1 Timothy says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."

That's

the fear of many people who love Pujols, both as fans and as Christians. They fear, as the author of Matthew's Gospel wrote, that no one can serve two masters. "For a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other," the Gospel says. "You cannot serve God and wealth."

Sean Michael

Lucas, a former professor at Covenant Seminary in Creve Coeur, Missouri, and currently pastor of a Presbyterian church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, describes himself on his Twitter page as, among other things, "Cardinals fan, lover of Jesus."

At the end of January,

Lucas tweeted, "How is AP's testimony affected if he holds the Cards hostage for \$30m/10yrs? @ what pt does 1 Tim 6:10 apply here?" In another tweet, Lucas wrote, "Unless there is a big part of this contract that goes to Pujols Foundation (\$30-50m) he's open 2 the question. Legitimately."

Baptist pastor Scott Lamb, the coauthor (with Tim Ellsworth) of a new biography called *Pujols: More Than the Game*

that focuses on the first baseman's faith, said the contract talks have opened up an interesting debate in Christian circles that goes beyond baseball to the uncomfortable intersection of the New Testament and capitalism.

"Consumption mentality is very American, but it's not very biblical," Lamb said. "People are asking whether [Pujols] should grab all he can get, and what his moral responsibilities are in terms of what to do with that money."

Some pastors say the more important point for Pujols is not how many millions he makes but how he spends

them. "What you do with your money is a factor," said Patrick. Pujols "has a track record of generosity that is without question. God does use money to help people, and I see God doing that with Pujols."

In 2009, Pujols visited The Crossing, a church in Chesterfield, Missouri, that claims some professional athletes as members, to help the congregation launch its Advent Conspiracy program, which encourages people "to celebrate Christmas in a different way by serving those in need," according to Tony Biaggne, the church's director of creative communications.

"I've never met anyone with more passion for serving, and serving the poor, than Albert," Biaggne said.

Ultimately, many Christian Cardinals fans and others who benefit from the Pujolses' largesse are praying for a big payday for No. 5 and for his generosity to continue—and even grow.

"I reject any idea that a person's Christianity should cause them to step away from what the market would demand for them," said Lamb. "Albert will go down in history as one of the great ones—someone who grabbed the money and gave it away at the same time."

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*/RNS