Big bucks for Bird

New deal to pay Celtics' All-Star $4.2M per year

By HOWARD ULMAN
AP Sports Writer

BOSTON — The rumblings began in last season's playoffs when Larry Bird noted that lesser players were making more money than him.

They continued in this season's training camp when he expressed impatience with the pace of negotiations toward a contract extension.

They ended Monday when he and the Boston Celtics announced an agreement on a two-year extension running through the 1991-1992 NBA season that will pay the perennial All-Star a reported $4.2 million a year.

"I'm real happy with everything," said Bird, who treated several Celtics' rookies to dinner Monday night. "The Celtics were very fair with me and now I'm going to work hard to help bring another championship to Boston."

He has four years left to do that — the two remaining on a five-year deal and the two added Monday. Bob Woolf, his attorney, said Bird, now 31, will retire after that.

"Salaries have escalated so much, and the only way I was going to get more money was to give them more years," Bird said.

"After David Robinson got his, and Michael (Jordan) got his and they redid Magic (Johnson), I wondered if anyone would ever say anything to me. It made me think, 'What's my place in all this?' When the Celtics said in the paper last spring they were willing to sit down and talk to me, I said 'Great.'"

Bird's immediate concerns are a trip to Spain for two exhibition games and the last two years on his original contract, which pays him $1.8 million per year.

Woolf said the 6-9 forward, an All-Star in each of his nine NBA seasons, will honor those terms.

The Celtics were scheduled to leave today for Madrid, where they will play against European squads in the McDonald's Open that starts Friday.

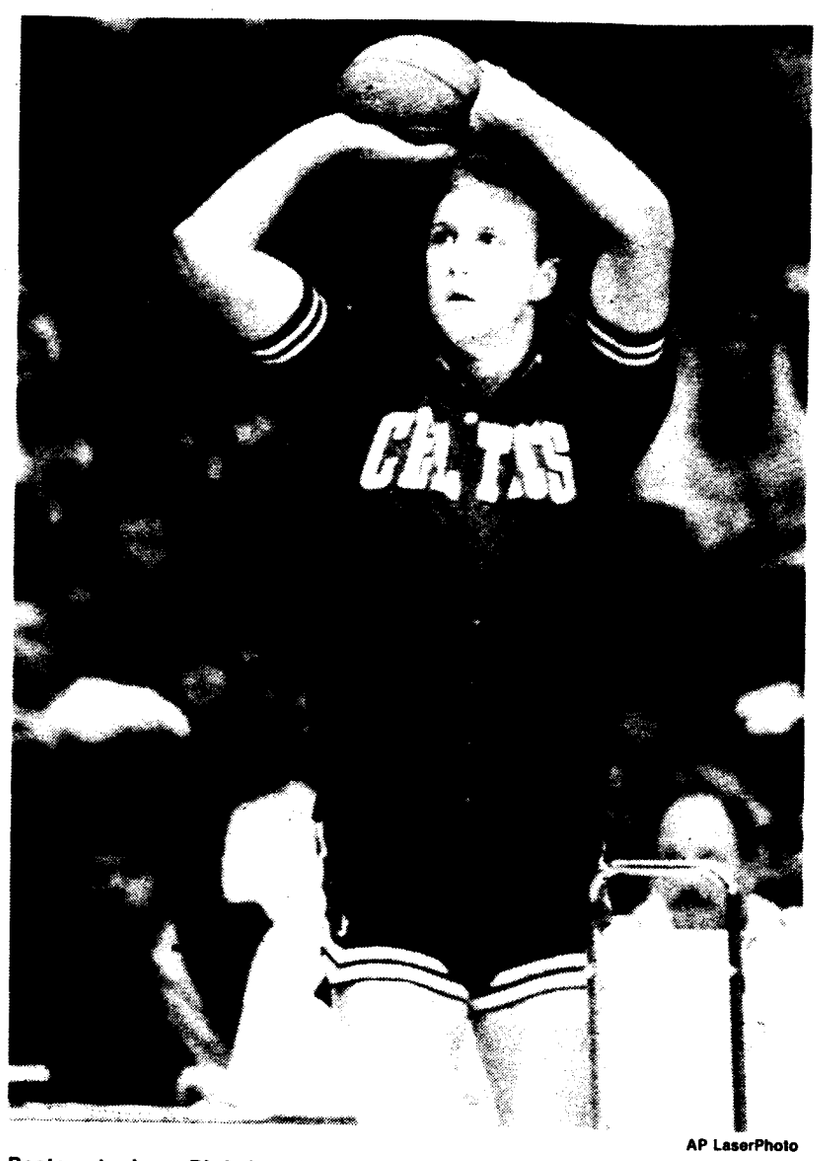
"I believed what I said all along," said teammate Dennis Johnson. "I thought they were going to do something for Larry sooner or later. Larry is the one who is probably most relieved."

The $1.8 million Bird will receive in each of the next two seasons is less than what less accomplished players receive, a point he raised publicly during the playoffs. Woolf said the new deal would make Bird one of the five highest paid players in the league.

According to reliable estimates, Bird will receive $8.4 million for the 1990 and 1991 seasons. Woolf said the extension is "well in excess of $4 million (per year) for the final two years of his contract."

There were indications that the full four-year package is worth more than $12 million.

Chicago Bulls Michael Jordan recently signed an eight-year contract that would pay him $2.7 million in each of the first four years and $3.25 million in each of the last four years. Magic Johnson of the Los Angeles Lakers and Isiah Thomas of Detroit have deals worth a reported $2 million per year.



AP LaserPhoto

Boston star Larry Bird signed a contract extension Monday that will reportedly pay him $8.4 million for the 1990-91 seasons.

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