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Bill Russell Threatened to Retire Unless He Made 1 More Dollar Than His Arch-Rival Wilt Chamberlain

by [Tim van Straten](#)  | [More Articles: NBA](#)

Published on November 14, 2021

Long before the days of Magic versus Bird, there was Chamberlain versus Russell. [Wilt Chamberlain](#), the larger-than-life big man with multiple scoring titles, met his match with [Bill Russell](#), the defensive genius with a reputation as the [NBA](#)'s greatest winner. The two centers [wound up becoming good friends](#), but that doesn't lessen the rivalry between them. Especially when it came down to something as petty as who was making the most money.

Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell were opposite types of players



On this day in 1959... 75th Anniversary Team members and NBA legends Bill Russell and Wilt Chamberlain competed against one another for the first time.

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Much like Magic and Bird, Wilt the Stilt and Bill the Hill approached the game in different ways. For Chamberlain, that meant [eclipsing scoring records](#). For Russell, that meant [doing whatever it took to win](#).

Wilt led off his career with six straight scoring titles, including a 1961-62 season in which he averaged 50.4 points per game. In his 14-year career, Chamberlain averaged 30.1 points and 22.9 rebounds. On the other hand, Bill never averaged more than 18.9 points in a season. But he nearly matched Chamberlain with 22.5 rebounds and, most importantly, won 11 championships in 13 seasons.

Even with two different styles, the skyscrapers were neck and neck in terms of individual accolades. The two combined for nine MVP awards, with Bill holding the edge five to four. Russell has 11 All-NBA selections to Chamberlain's 10, but Wilt has a 13 to 12 advantage in All-Star appearances.

Russell demanded \$1 more than Chamberlain

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On this date, Bill Russell signed a contract worth \$1 more than Wilt Chamberlain's deal on.si.com/1SNa10d



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In 1965, Chamberlain had six scoring titles and four rebounding titles on his resume. Although he was still empty-handed when it came to championships, the Philadelphia 76ers signed him to a three-year deal worth \$100,000. That contract made Wilt the highest-paid player in basketball.

While Chamberlain was inking his deal, Russell was negotiating a contract with the Boston Celtics. Bill had finished leading Boston to yet another title, his eighth overall and seventh in a row. But all the Celtics were willing to offer their star center was \$75,000. [This forced Russell to threaten to retire](#) unless he was paid more than his rival Wilt. But it didn't need to be much more — just one single dollar's worth.

Finally, [on August 25, 1965](#), Russell re-signed with the Celtics and became the NBA's highest-paid player with a contract worth \$100,001.

Bill Russell vs. Wilt Chamberlain head to head



It's easy to look at their individual statistics, accolades, and contracts. [Even how quickly they traveled](#) across the United States. But what happened whenever Wilt and Bill met

up on the court?

Russell not only surpassed Chamberlain's landmark contract; he surpassed him more often than not when going head to head. In 94 regular-season meetings, Russ won 57 games to Wilt's 37. However, it's not as if the legendary defender clamped Wilt down. The Stilt averaged 29.9 points and 28.1 rebounds in those 94 games.

In 49 playoff matchups, the two were actually closer than expected. Russell once again had the upper hand, but with only nine more victories than Chamberlain. However, in their eight head-to-head playoff series, the Celtics great eliminated Wilt's Warriors, Sixers, or Lakers a whopping seven times. The one time Chamberlain sent Russell packing was in 1966-67, which later ended in Wilt claiming his first championship.

In that particular instance, Russell could take solace in knowing he was at least making one more dollar than his foe.

All statistics courtesy of [Basketball Reference](#).

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