

Revisiting Sports at Southern Miss, Expensive and REALLY Bad Contracts

Does anyone remember the [Ellis Johnson](#) contract? The contract that former head football coach Ellis Johnson inked with USM before the 2012 season, a season in which USM finished 0-12 and resulting in Johnson being terminated. [USM owes Johnson](#) the remainder of his contract, or \$2.1 million, even though Johnson secured employment, and at \$800,000 per year – more than he was making as head coach at USM -- as the defensive coordinator at Auburn University. It is generally standard, when a termination occurs, to subtract a coach's current salary from what he or she is owed from a prior employer. But that's not how it worked at USM.

The Farm

News Briefs from Southern Miss

7-January-2013

Lucas Not Taking any Blame for Bad Deal

As Tim Doherty's 5-Jan-2013 [story for](#) *The Hattiesburg American* points out, interim USM president Aubrey Lucas is not taking any blame for the contract USM executed in Aug-2012 with former head football coach Ellis Johnson. Johnson first signed a "letter of intent" with USM officials, including former president Martha Saunders, now the provost at the University of West Florida, back in Dec-2011 that specified that he would be paid his base salary of \$700,000 in the event he was terminated without cause. That payment would occur, according to the letter of intent, even if Johnson secured employment elsewhere. As the story played out, Johnson was terminated in Nov-2012 after the first year of his four-year deal, thus obligating USM to provide him with \$2.1 million over the next three years. Johnson secured employment as defensive coordinator at Auburn University in Dec-2012, a position paying \$800,000 per year. As such, Johnson could earn \$1.5 million per year over the next few years.

Lucas Spills Contract Info to Faculty Senate

Former USM President Blamed for More Problems

USM interim president Aubrey Lucas addressed the USM faculty senate on 7-Dec-2012 about the financial problems facing the institution's athletics department. According to *The Hattiesburg American's* higher education reporter Ed Kemp, [part of that discussion](#) centered on the contract that former head football coach Ellis Johnson inked with USM before the 2012 season, a season in which USM finished 0-12 and resulting in Johnson being terminated. According to Kemp's report, USM owes Johnson the remainder of his contract, or \$2.1 million, even though Johnson recently secured employment, and at \$800,000 per year, as the defensive coordinator at Auburn University. It is generally standard, when a termination occurs, to subtract a coach's current salary from what he or she is owed from a prior employer.