

The Rock tops Hollywood pay list as Netflix splurges on A-listers

Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson has been named Hollywood’s top-paid actor for a second year running, heading a list dominated by lucrative Netflix contracts. The former professional wrestler banked \$87.5 million in the year ending June 2020, according to Forbes’ annual ranking. That figure—slightly down from last year’s \$89.4 million haul, but comfortably ahead of second-placed Ryan Reynolds (\$71.5 million)—was boosted by Johnson’s \$23.5 million fee for upcoming Netflix action flick “Red Notice,” as well as endorsements. Netflix shelled out more than a quarter of all the paychecks collected by this year’s top 10.

Others benefiting from the streaming giant’s \$140 million A-lister splurge included Reynolds (“Six Underground” and “Red Notice”), third-placed Mark Wahlberg (“Spenser Confidential”) and fourth-placed Ben Affleck (“The Last Thing He Wanted.”) “Hamilton” creator Lin-Manuel Miranda made his debut on the list after Disney paid \$75 million for the movie rights to the smash hit Broadway production, which soared on Disney+ streaming last month. Perennials such as Bollywood megastar



In this file photo actor Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson attends the Premiere Of Warner Bros Pictures’ “San Andreas” at TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. —AFP

Akshay Kumar and martial arts legend Jackie Chan returned to the top 10, as did Will Smith and Adam Sandler. Largely absent this year were the cast of Marvel’s “Avengers” films—who dominated last year—with the record-breaking franchise taking an extended break from the big screen. But Vin Diesel, lynchpin of the ever-popular “Fast & Furious” franchise, returned at number five with \$54 million. The ranking does not include actresses, who will be featured in a separate list next month.

The top 10:

1. Dwayne Johnson (\$87.5 million)
2. Ryan Reynolds (\$71.5 million)
3. Mark Wahlberg (\$58 million)
4. Ben Affleck (\$55 million)
5. Vin Diesel (\$54 million)
6. Akshay Kumar (\$48.5 million)
7. Lin-Manuel Miranda (\$45.5 million)
8. Will Smith (\$44.5 million)
9. Adam Sandler (\$41 million)
10. Jackie Chan (\$40 million). —AFP

After soap opera career, media mogul Sumner Redstone dead at 97

Sumner Redstone, who rose from modest beginnings to lead one of the most powerful Hollywood and television empires and became enmeshed in battles worthy of a TV soap opera, has died at age 97 after years of declining health. Statements from ViacomCBS and his National Amusements holding company which holds a controlling stake in the media-entertainment group announced that Redstone died late Tuesday. Redstone built his empire from a movie theater chain into a media-entertainment powerhouse, maintaining leadership of the enterprise and prominence in the industry well into his 80s.

In the 1980s, Redstone engineered a hostile takeover of Viacom, a spinoff of the CBS network that had become a major player in cable television and included the popular MTV music channel and the children’s channel Nickelodeon. He later acquired Paramount Pictures, one of the major Hollywood studios, Blockbuster Entertainment and then led a merger with CBS. In 2006, Viacom spun off CBS, separating the faster-growing cinema operations from the more sluggish broadcast assets, but Redstone remained in control of both through his holding company. The two firms reunited last year to become ViacomCBS.

In recent years, Redstone had been involved in drawn-out litigation over his health and mental competency—amid a bitter family feud that often reached soap opera levels of drama. His daughter Shari Redstone effectively controlled the empire with her father in seclusion, but other family members alleged he was manipulated by his daughter. His granddaughter Keryn Redstone allied herself with the billionaire’s ex-girlfriend Manuela Herzer, who had been waging a battle to have the ailing mogul declared incompetent. At 92, Redstone stepped back from an operational role and became chairman emeritus at both CBS and Viacom amid a court battle over his mental fitness.

Beginnings in Boston

He was born in 1923 as Sumner Murray Rothstein to a Jewish family in Boston where his father worked as a linoleum salesman. The family name was changed in 1940 to Redstone—a literal translation from Yiddish to English—amid anti-Semitism in the era. In his 2001 autobiography, “A Passion to Win,” Redstone recounted selling hot dogs at the snack bar of a drive-in movie theater his father had acquired, calling it “my introduction to the high-powered world of media and entertainment.”

He enrolled at Harvard University but left before graduating in

1943 to join the US army in World War II, working as a code-breaker. In his book, he writes that his knowledge of Japanese had helped him to crack codes, contributing to the war effort. After the war, he was awarded a degree from Harvard and later earned a law degree. He then joined his father’s company, which at that time managed a chain of cinema houses. He renamed the group National Amusements and turned it into one of the largest movie house operators in the country, popularizing the “multiplex” concept. Redstone was severely burned in a 1979 hotel fire in Boston. He underwent some 60 hours of operations including skin grafts and was hospitalized several months before being able to walk again.

Late-life drama

After resuming his business, Redstone led a 1987 hostile takeover of Viacom that pushed him into the national spotlight. He later won a bidding war for CBS. In recent years, his mental competency was in the background amid battles for control of the two media giants, amid concerns the companies were losing ground in an industry shifting to online streaming services from Netflix, Amazon and others. Viacom’s management, led by then-CEO Philippe Dauman, alleged in court Shari Redstone unfairly controlled her ailing father’s empire. —AFP



In this file photo billionaire and former media mogul Sumner Redstone arrives at the premiere of CBS Films “Extraordinary Measures” at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles January 19, 2010. —AFP



In this file photo illustration taken in Washington, DC, shows YouTube’s Sarah Cooper Comedy channel on a computer screen and a sketch of US author and comedian Sarah Cooper on a mobile phone. —AFP photos

Viral Trump impersonator Sarah Cooper gets Netflix show

Sarah Cooper, the US comedian whose uncanny lip-synch impersonations of President Donald Trump have gained millions of fans worldwide, will star in her own Netflix special, the streaming giant said Wednesday. “Sarah Cooper: Everything’s Fine” will be released this fall and feature a variety of satirical political sketches and other vignettes as well as famous guests. It will be executive produced by Maya Rudolph, whose own Emmy-nominated impressions of Kamala Harris on “Saturday Night Live” have been widely shared since Harris was confirmed Tuesday as the Democrats’ vice-presidential candidate. Cooper, a former Google employee, shot to fame during the pandemic by lampooning some of Trump’s most infamous outbursts—including his suggestion that injecting disinfectant could help fight the coronavirus.

That 49-second clip—entitled “How to medical”—saw Cooper lip-synch along to Trump’s proposal that bringing “light inside the body” might help combat the disease, while emulating the president’s power-posturing body language. It has been viewed over 22 million times on Twitter alone. The 40-something Jamaican-born comedian calls Trump her “head writer,” and has gained over two million Twitter followers as well as celebrity fans such as former president Barack Obama, comedians Steve Martin and Jerry Seinfeld, and “Hamilton” creator Lin-Manuel Miranda. Cooper is also the author of best-selling books “100 Tricks to Appear Smart in Meetings” and “How to be Successful Without Hurting Men’s Feelings.” The variety special will be directed by “Russian Doll” star Natasha Lyonne. —AFP