

OPINION

What can be done to limit risks posed by sports betting at colleges?

By Sheldon H. Jacobson

The college football season is set to begin, and with it comes increased interest in sports betting on college campuses.

In the spring, the Illinois legislature extended by one year the law permitting in-person gambling on in-state college sports. Given the need to generate revenue for state coffers, the question is not if, but when, online in-state college sports gambling will become legal.

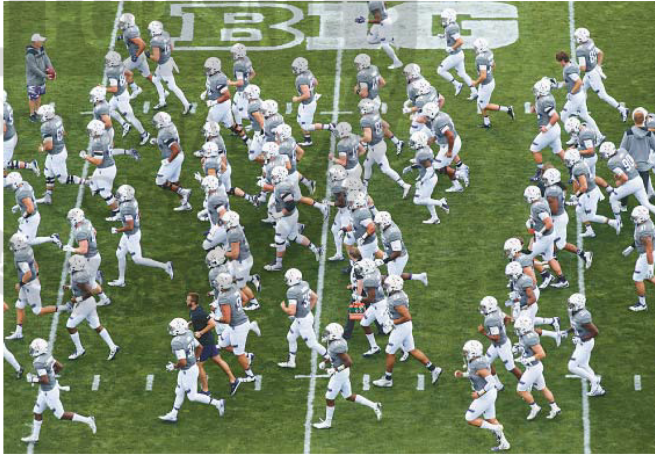
There are numerous states (plus the District of Columbia) that have legalized sports betting. The attraction of drawing new revenue without raising taxes is encouraging such actions. Sports gambling has become so ubiquitous that it is difficult to visit any sports website without an opportunity to place a bet. Penn Entertainment has been rebanded as ESPN Bet, giving ESPN a place at the sports betting table.

Sports gambling on college campuses has been drawn into this fray. Young college-age men are attracted to the excitement associated with having money riding on games, with some believing they can make easy money gambling. The risk is that this excitement can grow into an addiction, bleeding them of their time and money.

Offering sports gambling on college games poses risks for student-athletes and the student body on their campus. When games for which student-athletes are participating can be affected by one shot, or "covering the spread" depends on a free throw being made or missed, student-athletes can be swayed in ways that can influence their performance on the court or playing field. What may seem like an innocent turnover may have been subtly orchestrated with under-the-table payoffs.

The good news is that with so many names, image and likeness funding opportunities available, student-athletes are less susceptible to such nefarious activities. Moreover, most students would not give such actions a second thought. Yet all it takes is one student-athlete to tarnish the reputation of a team, creating veils of uncertainty as to the extent of such shenanigans that can affect all the athletic programs at a university.

For the student body, rooting for the home team may be more than showing school spirit when there is money riding on a game. Wins and losses get translated into real dollars that can raise tempers and



Northwestern players warm up before a game against Duke in 2018 at Ryan Field in Evanston. JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

competition in unhealthy ways.

Gambling companies sell their product as a leisure activity, offering the opportunity to place bets as a form of entertainment. They support responsible gambling and encourage people with a problem to reach out for help at 1-800-GAMBLER, a hotline run by the National Council on Problem Gambling.

There are several problems with such a position.

First, if a person has a problem with gambling, they may not recognize it until it has caused significant troubles in their life. Moreover, if they are addicted to gambling, they may be incapable of making rational decisions when it comes to gambling. Such people would never reach out for help until someone intervenes and they have no choice, often while facing overwhelming financial and legal issues and/or family pressures.

Second, the unspoken truth is that gambling companies need problem gamblers so they can stay in business and remain prof-

itable. Relying on people who gamble only for entertainment would not produce nearly \$10 billion in revenue, as legal sportsbooks saw last year.

Third, states have a vested interest in the status quo. They relish the revenue generated by sports betting. Reining in gambling at this point would be near impossible, given its growing impact on state budgets.

So what can be done to limit the negative influence of sports gambling on college campuses?

We need to recognize that for some, problem gambling is a disease. Providing information on how it can be treated is invaluable. When student-athletes gamble, it can be akin to drinking and driving. Much as smoking on college campuses increased in the 1990s, then leveled off and dropped, similar programs and education to reduce gambling on college campuses are warranted. If a student wishes to participate in athletics, gambling of any sort should be off-limits. Mixing the two, even when different sports

are involved, is risky.

The NCAA has clear policies that prohibit gambling among student-athletes. As sports gambling has become more accessible and ubiquitous, the challenge is uncovering when gambling is occurring and how the situation should be addressed on each campus. A University of Iowa and Iowa State University investigation of sports betting reflects such a challenge, with several current or former athletes criminally charged. The one bright spot was an absence of evidence of game manipulation.

Athletic directors and their coaches play a critical role in communicating zero tolerance policies on gambling and the risks that student-athletes take on for themselves and their team when they gamble, even if they bet infrequently and purely for entertainment.

Unified voices from leadership on campuses and across universities could help reduce the impact of gambling among all student-athletes. University

leaders could provide a measure of safety that would give every student-athlete some protection in what has become the Wild West of gambling on college sports and on college campuses.

Illinois' policy of only in-person gambling on in-state college sports provides light headwinds to strong gales of opportunities to place bets. Permitting online gambling is inevitable.

What is most disturbing is that with any addiction, there is a long-term cost of squandered human capital. This is a price that states appear willing to pay for the revenues they are collecting. Indeed, recouping such human capital will be far costlier in the long term than the revenue gained in the short term.

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VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Chicagoans and the WNBA

This is an exciting time in the WNBA. Game attendance and viewership for nationally televised games are up. Dwyane Wade, new part owner of the Chicago Sky, was recently quoted by ESPN as saying, "Growth is going to happen, and so I want to be a part of the growth of this league."

The WNBA has two powerhouse teams, the New York Liberty and the Las Vegas Aces, with some of the best players in the league, if not all-time. One of those players, Courtney Vandersloot, is a world-class point guard who helped take the Chicago Sky to the promised land two years ago. This season, she is an assist machine in New York, feeding the ball to Sabrina Ionescu, a phenom who now holds the 3-point shooting contest record across the NBA and WNBA.

Adding to this, the WNBA is one season away from getting Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese. Clark and Reese will automatically make two other WNBA teams top contenders.

For as good as they are now, WNBA players have enormous potential to improve their stamina, body control, hand-eye coordination and decision-making — if they had the same easy access to high-level training and equipment as their male counterparts.

This is not the current reality. Last year, the NBA's Orlando Magic trained at a new \$70 million facility while the WNBA's Chicago Sky practiced at a public recreation center in Deerfield.

As a proud Chicago Sky season ticket holder, I believe that I am in on one of the best-kept secrets, getting high-value sports for bargain prices. Still, I would much rather see how great women's basketball can become with increased demand and the revenue that comes with it.

Chicagoans can help bring about a golden age for the WNBA. This Sunday, the Liberty are coming to town, while the Minnesota Lynx and MVP center Lynne Collier bring their talents to the Windy City the following Friday for the Sky's final home game this season. Lower-level seats in the \$100 to \$200 range are available for both games, and there is nothing like watching great basketball up close and personal.

The Sky might be having a dud of a season, but they also have KaiLash "KFC" Copper cutting through defenses



Chicago Sky guard KaiLash Copper drives to the hoop in the Sky's home opener against the Washington Mystics at Wintrust Arena in Chicago on May 26. CHRIS SWEDA/TRIBUNE

and powering through players to the basket. KFC alone is worth the price of admission.

So is a well-funded WNBA.

— Mike Belle, Oak Park

Error in discouraging EVs

Regarding the Las Vegas Review-Journal editorial excerpt published in the Tribune, "About electric cars and natural gas" (Aug. 28): What's with the direct pipeline from the climate-skeptic editorial board of the Las Vegas Review-Journal to the pages of the Tribune? Once again, this board is given ink to promote the fossil fuel industry's efforts to further drag their feet on addressing the crisis of our times.

The board suggests that California has erred in legislating the sale of electric vehicles by 2035 since cars are charged at night when natural gas is used to supply electricity. So for the next 10 years, nobody should embrace new technology on their own dime, nor should our various levels of government encourage innovation?

Fossil fuel model is obsolete

Regarding the Las Vegas Review-Journal editorial excerpt "About electric cars and natural gas": The climate issue is critical to the well-being of all living things inlab-

oring the earth. I'm profoundly disturbed by the Las Vegas Review-Journal Editorial Board's viewpoint: that is, that new green tech is ahead of its time when, in fact, energy producers are behind the times.

Fossil fuel companies' current model is obsolete. They will not change, go green, until incentivized to do so.

Viable green technologies exist today. Public pressure is needed to light a fire under the boards of directors to get off their comfy cushions of old-school status-quo business models. The news media have a social responsibility to provide carefully considered points of view. The public deserves quality information to make informed decisions.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal board's editorial not only misses the mark but also is blatantly harmful to the future of all life as we know it.

— John Guenther, Chicago

Action, not rhetoric, is needed

In response to questions about the alarming number of deaths due to the opioid epidemic, Mayor Brandon Johnson correctly stated it should be confronted as a public health issue. The great irony here is that in the same month, he unceremoniously fired the extraordinarily competent and experienced director of the Chicago Department of Public Health, Dr. Allison Arwady, in a sickening display of acquiescence to the Chicago Teachers Union, delivering a gut punch to that agency.

Johnson said he would find a replacement with deliberate speed. The mayor's defenders point out that it is early in his term in office, but he was elected on April 4, and the opioid epidemic has been going on for years. This is far from the only issue in which the city is awaiting for something besides rhetoric.

Benjamin Franklin's words seem to be a prophecy: "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

— Elliot Weisenberg, Chicago

Swim club should be celebrated

On July 4, 1950, hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans graced our lakefront. It is a testament to the power of the lake as a place for all of Chicago to commune and an unfortunate reminder of how removed we've become from the most spectacular and unique feature of our great city.

Chicago was born from Lake Michigan, and the city's future survival will hinge upon our ability to cherish and protect it. So let's applaud and support Friday Morning Swim Club in its efforts to convince so many Chicagoans to jump in the lake, to bathe in its majesty and to understand the power of our great lake.

— David McDermott, Chicago

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