

Pro sports go all-in on gambling, but at what cost?

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NASHVILLE (BP)—The only thing matched by the pomp and festivities of the NFL Draft, held April 25 in Detroit, may be the level at which gambling has become entwined with the league.

NFL partners include the Caesar's Sportsbook Stage, BetMGM, DraftKings and FanDuel, not to mention Genius Sports, the league's exclusive sports betting data provider.

The concern spreads to all sports. When the interpreter and best friend of baseball's biggest star becomes embroiled in a \$41 million betting scandal, [some begin to wonder](#) about gambling's ultimate payout.

"We want to show that the detriments are more than the benefits," said Mike Griffin, public affairs representative for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. "Gambling supporters point to the tax revenue and how it can help fund education."

He specifically targets predatory gambling such as sports betting, pari-mutuel horse racing and video poker machines. There is a definite grooming aspect to draw people, even minors, into participating, he noted.

"We've seen the data on how addictive gambling can be and that up to one-third of [compulsive] gamblers will attempt suicide," he said. "It's going to end up costing you."

Legal sports betting in 38 states

A 2018 Supreme Court decision took out a federal ban on state authorization for sports betting that had exempted Nevada. Other states jumped at the opportunity practically overnight, and today [38 offer legal sports gambling](#).

The [Texas Constitution prohibits gambling](#) in most instances but permits pari-mutuel betting on horses and greyhounds, charitable bingo and raffles within certain parameters and three Indian casinos. Online sports betting remains illegal in Texas.

All of the professional sports franchises in Texas—as well as betting platforms—are partners in the [Texas Sports Betting Alliance](#), a well-funded group seeking to legalize sports betting in the state.



John Litzler

“Texas Baptists’ Christian Life Commission has long opposed the efforts of groups like the Texas Sports Betting Alliance to amend the Texas Constitution to expand gambling in Texas. We’ve seen that the societal harms exacerbated in jurisdictions that have legalized gambling far outweigh any financial benefit a percentage of gambling profits can provide,” said John Litzler, public policy director for the CLC.

“We anticipate opposing similar gambling legislation in 2025 as we work to inform legislators about the immense cost exacted on residents by legalized gambling.”

Russ Coleman, chair of Texans Against Gambling, noted his organization also will continue to resist gambling expansion in the state.

Politically, there is little connecting California and Georgia. But they are rare examples of states where sports gambling legislation has been defeated outright. A 2022 rejection by California voters has set up a massive showdown over the issue.

Research shows harm gambling causes

As sports betting has gathered steam, many are beginning to wonder if it is out of control. Studies show how it [rewires the brain](#). A late three-pointer can affect the point spread and bring [death threats](#), as one Purdue basketball player experienced this year.

Andrew Hurley is a senior walk-on for the national champion University of Connecticut. Occasionally his coach and dad, Dan, would put him in at the end of Huskies blowouts, and the younger Hurley would hear chants to shoot the ball. He would wonder later if money was riding on those shots.

“It’s scary at the end of games,” he told the [Boston Globe](#). “I don’t fully understand how much of [sports betting] works. ... During the game I’m not thinking about that, but in the locker room after the game I’m thinking, ‘I hope nobody is out there jumping me for what I did in the game.’”

The NFL previously never broached the idea of having anything to do with Las Vegas due to its gambling background, and yet, the city hosted the Super Bowl in February. The result was a record \$185.6 million in [wagers on the game](#) by Nevada’s sportsbooks.

States are noticing an [alarming rise in calls to gambling hotlines](#), with numbers more than doubling. It's costing homes and relationships and skewing toward men in their 20s and 30s.

"We believe, nationwide, the rate and severity of gambling problems have increased across the United States since 2018," said Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling which operates a helpline at 1-800-GAMBLER, in an NBC News report.

Griffin is in his 11th year as Georgia Baptists' public policy representative. His predecessor, the late Ray Newman, also was pushing back on attempted sports betting legislation as early as 2010.

This year there were at least 12 gambling bills, which Griffin shared in detail in a column for Georgia Baptists' state news journal, [The Christian Index](#). He knows he'll have to suit up for battle again next year against gambling proponents.

"It won't stop trying until Jesus comes back," he said.

"They are misled into thinking that they can fix a problem by regulating it. ... If you regulate it too well, though, there won't be as much money to make. You need the problem gamblers. You need to increase the opportunities to gamble and entice more people to do it.

"The house has to win."

With additional reporting by Managing Editor Ken Camp.