

Canada's Gambling Watch Network

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The Poker Craze

Some weeks, we gather so much news that it's almost impossible to cover all of it in our Newsletter. That occurred more than once in the month of May. The 5/9 Vancouver Sun wrote: 'Gaming firm to target children as young as 10 - Kids Poker Tour promoted as a way to learn math'. In that article we were told that a Vancouver-based company wants to teach poker to **children as young as 10**, marketing the game as a sophisticated way to learn math and sportsmanship skills. That company, Nevada North Entertainment – we'd never heard of it until then – had sent advertising around on a two-day tour for children of 10-18 to be taught the correct way to play Texas Hold 'Em by professional poker players from Las Vegas. On May 26, the Penticton Western had an article from free-lance author Allan Markin that was very critical not only of that idea but also of our society's present dependence on gambling revenues to fund essential services. About poker, he asked this: how do you teach effective communications through a game based on secrecy, bluff and deception? Isn't it high time that our media recruit more critical writers like that?

On April 10, we reported that The Manitoba Gam(b)ling Control Commission is allowing charitable organizations to play a part in the poker craze by having tournaments in which real money is used. Saskatchewan is following that example, The 6/1 Leader-Post reports in 'Charities benefit from new rules'. 'The relaxation of gaming rules is part of a new two-part provincial strategy to help charitable organizations who have struggled in recent years because of declines in gaming-related revenues, the minister responsible for the Liquor and Gaming Authority, Deb Higgins, said', the paper writes. It is a sad fact of life that charities have played an important part in training citizens in the habit of not giving unless they are given the **chance** to gain more than they donated, and that short-sighted governments have encouraged that trend by legalizing all sorts of lotteries.

British Columbia

'The Las Vegas company looking to take over Vancouver's struggling Edgewater Casino may back out of the deal if the city doesn't extend that casino's licence by 5 years', writes the 5/29 VANCOUVER 24 HOURS. The current permit is set to expire in 2008. Paragon Gaming wants the license extended to 2013. The article says that the city's staff suggests councillors extend the license, while anti-gambling advocate Bill Chu argues that the city already relies too much on gambling 'revenues'. Our friend Chu said: "It's not just people that are addicted to gambling. If governments are addicted to money from gambling that means they don't have any will or power to overcome their own addiction."

The Vancouver Courier of that date writes that Paragon Gaming says it will build a large bingo facility that was promised to charities in July 2003 by the current owners. A letter from Paragon to Mount Pleasant Starship Community Charitable Organization explains that the company needs that organization's support to extend the casino's development permit and it requests that the support of charities be communicated to city council.

Newlands Golf and Country Club had intended to bring three new television screens and wagering machines so it could have a live horse betting system installed in its upstairs lounge, but its application was turned down by city council, says the 5/31 Langley Times. Council members said they remember the application of a few years ago to have a casino, and the club's neighbours were outraged and packed public meetings on the matter.

One school trustee is hoping to encourage others to take a stand against a potential casino in Maple Ridge, writes the 5/31 MR News. "I think the biggest concern is, what kind of impact is it going to have on the young people?" she said. On 6/2 the MR Times reports that the school board won't reject a casino, but it will write a letter to the District of MR expressing a concern about the effect of expanded gambling on youth in the community.

In reaction to last week's news that the owner of View Royal's casino has applied for a license to serve liquor on the gambling floor, an excellent letter appeared in the 6/1 Times Colonist. We'd love to see more letters saying that 'Gambling, alcohol are a bad mix'.

'Winner questions lottery accuracy' is an article in the 6/3 Vancouver Sun showing that computer generated lottery results are not always correct. Isn't that just one more reason to stay away from lotteries?

An article headed with the words: 'Richmond Mounties need the public's aid in locating a missing Vancouver woman' in the 6/4 Province makes us think of the close relationships that often develop between casinos and crime. We'll keep our eyes open for more news.

Alberta

'Betting on a bee? What are the odds?' is the heading of a 5/22 Calgary Herald item that shows how far today's gambling craze goes. One sentence of that article is enough to see the silliness of the gambling 'industry': 'Will the winner be wearing glasses? Will it be a boy or girl? Will the final word have an "e" in it?'

Last December Bishop Fred Henry wrote a letter to the Calgary Catholic School District Board outlining his concerns on the issue of raising funds through gambling, a practice he called morally problematic, and during the last month trustees have consulted with school councils on the issue. The district is facing a possible budget shortfall of more than \$9M, and casino and bingo revenues have helped to buy instruments for the marching band at a High School and would go toward a trip to the U.S. at the end of June, says the 5/31 CBC News. The next day's CBC News says that the trustees have voted to allow schools to get money from bingos and casinos, but that they must give some of the revenue to gambling addiction treatment and education for students about the risk of gambling. Four trustees voted for the compromise, two voted against. That day's Sun carries the same news.

Business groups in Calgary's east end expect the Stampede's \$500M expansion to pump new life into its area, a Calgary Sun 6/1 article reports. Typical of Alberta - a new casino at the corner of 12th and Macleod Tr. is part of the project.

Saskatchewan

In 'Gaming exhibit pays off', a 5/30 Leader-Post article, we read that The Saskatchewan Science Centre won the Best Onsite Program award for its "What are the Odds?" exhibit at the Canadian Association of Science Centres' fourth annual awards dinner. What drew our attention is that the exhibit is aimed at providing young people with information on the difference between games of chance and games of skill. See The Poker Craze Section.

Manitoba

'Mounties in northern Manitoba are exploring whether criminal charges should be laid for alleged hijinx during a weekly bingo game' is a sentence in the 6/2 Winnipeg Sun. Police

believe one of five winning loonie pot game cards to be stolen - possibly after the draw - meaning the holder is not entitled to a share of a \$282,437 jackpot. Doesn't the size of the jackpot show that bingos no longer are a friendly community game? No one was arrested so far, but we'll try to keep informed.

Ontario

Let's begin with the Windsor Star this time. The 5/29, Star writes that several visitors from Cleveland have said they won't come to the casino again once the smoking ban is in place. 'Smokers are gamblers,' said one of them between puffs. 'My wife is a smoker; she can't do without it.' Gamblers like that are to become Casino Windsor's worst nightmare, the paper writes. 'The Ohio pair was typical of smokers visiting the casino, bingo halls and bars on the weekend, angry enough over the looming smoking ban to say their visits to Windsor's entertainment venues are over' it added.

'Rumours that Casino Windsor is planning layoffs because of the smoking ban are untrue, says a spokeswoman', writes the next day's Star. 'Laying people off before knowing what effects the ban will have would be premature', she added. The union local's president said the same thing, adding that the casino has told him they are going to feel it out for a four- or five- week period, then decide.

'Mayor Eddie Francis confirmed Tuesday the city received a new offer from the raceway, renewing its interest in building an arena on land next to its track. A new partner has been added to the raceway proposal to help pick up the funding shortfall that caused the deal to fall through a few months ago' is a paragraph in the 5/31 Windsor Star. The proposal for a 6,500 seats project includes a \$15M contribution by the city plus \$3M accumulated in the museum fund. The article gives much more information but we expect getting even more news once city council has made its decision.

Turning now to Niagara, we see a 6/1 item in the Falls Review saying that some gamblers are fuming over the no-smoking law. Marilyn Gardiner and her husband have made at the least three trips a year to Niagara Falls since 'gaming' came to town in 1996. But this trip to Niagara Falls, the Cleveland, Ohio resident said Wednesday, will be their last. In their county, a law like the Ontario smoking ban lasted about six weeks before it was repealed, "because everybody went crazy." They think that will happen here, too.

The next day's Review has two items on the smoking issue. 'Business as usual' at casinos after smoking ban' is a report from the OLG that said that it had been indeed "business as usual" at Niagara's two casinos the day before, while Casino Rama reported a marginal increase, and Windsor figures were unavailable. The other article reports that the Smoke Free Ontario Act aims to save lives, but could end up killing charities. 'More than 80 not-for-profit organizations in Niagara Falls rely heavily on the \$1.4 million that patrons, 70 per cent of whom are smokers, spend at the Delta Monte Carlo Bingo Hall', is a sentence in that item, adding that workers there are scared of the effect the ban is bound to have.

Three articles in the Toronto Star drew our attention. Its 5/31 item says that Woodbine is set to install the relatively new and, they're sure, safer racing surface known as Polytrack at a cost of \$10M. We quote: 'The track needs to be completely replaced with the mixture of wax-coated polypropylene fibres, sand and recycled rubber bits laid over a firm but free-draining base.' If we understand correctly, the horses will spend the summer at the Mohawk Raceway. The job will take about a month, and Woodbine will run its fall races on the new surface.

The 6/2 item deals with the trial of a murder that took place in 1985. One sentence caused us to read the article. That sentence says: The brother of a man allegedly shot by Rodney Cain two decades ago says the rollicking world they moved in during the mid-1980s was full of drugs, pimping and gambling, describing the Toronto underworld of twenty years back. We wonder: has the legalizing of gambling caused a real change in that world, or is the only difference that today the government makes lots of money from the gambling?

A 6/3 Star item takes us back to Niagara. The article, written by Susan Pigg, is called: 'Niagara's wheel of fortune' and the words of it's subtitle point to problems we've heard of again and again during the last few weeks in news about our border cities 'Gas prices, U.S. passport law threaten to end winning streak', and we could add the non-smoking threat to this short list. Isn't all we can do: wait and see?

One other Ontario city asked for our attention in this past week: it was Brantford. The 6/1 Expositor wrote that a group of natives waved warrior flags this Wednesday at the city's charity casino as a reminder that Six Nations considers that gambling hall to be on its land. The two-hour information protest was polite and clear: the casino is on native land, according to the protesters. Negotiators Barbara McDougall, for the federal government, and Jane Stewart, for the province, were back at the negotiating table on that day, along with representatives of protesters, the Six Nations Confederacy and the band council, plus other interested parties.

New Brunswick

'Will Saint John get a racino?' is a 'reader forum' item in the 5/29 Telegraph-Journal that blames the government for the delay in the approval of Saint John's racino. To the author the racino with its VLTs is the window of opportunity to save the harness racing industry that 'is teetering on the edge of extinction'. It might amaze him that we see horseracing as an obviously outmoded hobby and that to us it's socially irresponsible to keep it going by the losses of gamblers to highly addictive machines.

Nova Scotia

When we wrote our 5/29 Newsletter, we assumed that VLTs were already an issue on the agenda of the coming provincial election, but a 6/1 CBC News item made it clear that the parties involved are so far only talking of their policies that predate the election call. Now in 'Anti-gambling activists call for VLT ban' we read 'A coalition of religious groups and anti-gambling activists wants to make the elimination of VLTs an issue in the election.' It is our hope that the province will finally ban the machines and that other provinces will do the same thing. It's a shame that our governments for so long have used them to raise money despite the fact that they were causing so much destructive social damage.

An article in the 6/2 Halifax Herald writes about the improvements that are being made to the Halifax casino. It starts by saying that it has 720 VLTs, an eight-table poker room and a new restaurant. Later we read that many of those VLTs are new, have a "ticket in and ticket out" technology, and that some penny and two-cent machines have been added. We are quite interested in the facial recognition technology that's being installed; it CAN be used to identify those who have self-excluded themselves, the article says, but we wonder if it WILL be used for excluding addicts from the place. We've read more than once that the main use of that technology has been to exclude and oust cheaters!

Please contact us if you want more information on items in this letter or on their sources.