Western Wheel

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Commentary

OKOTOKS WESTERN WHEEL



Truthful advertising will do trick



Ted Murphy
Editor

It's no wonder that doctors in Canada are sounding the alarm bells over all the sports betting advertising on TV these days.

Turn on pretty much any sporting event and it won't be long before you're exposed to an onslaught of betting ads. In fact, it's so insidious it's even built into the broadcasts as studio hosts dispense picks and advice during the pre-game and again at halftime or between periods.

A recent editorial in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* calls for sports betting ads to be restricted during sports broadcasts, primarily due to their impact on younger viewers. Although I can see where doctors are coming from, I figure a little truth in advertising might be all that's required.

I've endured a lot of sports betting ads and they pretty much all follow the same script: the game is close but your team ultimately pulls out the win and you celebrate all the way to the bank.

Never have I seen one where the gambler is on the wrong end of that last-minute goal or touchdown, and has decided to turn the remote into a projectile and launch it at the TV or harass the losing players on social media.

The reason sportsbooks offer hundreds of dollars in free bets is because they know you're going to lose with some amount of regularity, but I guess that type of 'reality TV' isn't good for business.

As sports betting became more mainstream, I dabbled in it a number of years ago but soon lost interest. Maybe I'm too old, or I'm just not wired that way, but I cheer on my team because I want it to win, not because I might, or might not, win a few bucks.

Today, my sports betting is limited to a 'futures' ticket on my beloved Toronto Raptors, a single wager that gives me a season's worth of entertainment. Last year, their number was 29.5, which means I needed them to win 30 or more games to cash. After an 8-31 start to the season, it wasn't looking good, but a 22-21 finish did the trick.

This year, their number is 32.5, which I think is easily attainable, but I'll get back to you on that in April.

My only other brush with online gambling, this time with horse racing, provides a glimpse into how sportsbooks operate. It was a few years ago so I can't remember the exact details, but I placed a bet on a horse because I thought it had a good chance at a decent price.

Sure enough, its odds started to drop, which prompted a 'buyout' offer, meaning the book would pay me less than what I stood to win, but I'd get paid before the race ever ran. They were effectively cutting their losses.

Intrigued, I began looking for other horses I thought were undervalued, hoping for similar offers. I did it another handful of times, and was offered a buyout on all but one of them. It was fantastic, I was cashing tickets before the starting gate had ever opened.

That was until they told me they didn't want my business anymore.

EDITORIAL

Hand counting is costly and unnecessary

Nothing screams accuracy, and instills confidence in the process, like bleary-eyed folks hand-counting ballots into the wee hours of the morning.

Monday's municipal election was the first one conducted following the approval of Bill 20, the piece of provincial legislation that, among other things, has banned the use of electronic vote tabulators.

That means many voters went to bed on Monday night not knowing who had been elected in their municipalities because counting was still in progress.

This delay, and the not-so-insignificant additional costs associated with counting ballots by hand, would be justified if there were legitimate concerns about electronic vote tabulators, that they somehow compromise the validity of election results. That's not the case.

Many jurisdictions throughout Alberta, and the world over for that matter, have been using vote counting machines for decades because they provide a reliable and cost-effective way to conduct elections. Their effectiveness hasn't changed.

What has changed – and why that efficiency has been taken away from local governments in Alberta – is because a relatively small number of people who question the tabulators now have the ear of the premier, who has defended this costly move as necessary to ensure all Albertans feel confident in the process.

It would have been prudent for the premier to tell these folks to make that big leap into the late 20th century and accept that vote tabulators are a reliable piece of technology, but instead of doing so, she had the entirety of Alberta take one large, costly and unnecessary step back in time.

Do the majority of Albertans feel the results of this year's election are somehow more valid than previous ones? No, they don't. All they know is it took longer, and it cost more, to find out the winners and losers this time around.