

NEWS

Live odds booted out

Sports restrict gambling promotion.



PUNTING AWAY: Sports take a step back on gambling promotions

Australia's major sporting codes have moved to restrict the display of live odds during games in response to criticism of the level of gambling advertising in sport.

Live odds will no longer be displayed at sporting venues and will be restricted during broadcasts of major sporting events.

The Australian Football League's integrity manager Brett Clothier said legitimate concerns have been raised by fans and the general public about the extent of gambling advertising in sportsgrounds and during broadcasts.

"The live odds that have appeared on the scoreboard from time to time which have updated odds as the game is being played, giving the odds for the two teams to win, will no longer be permitted on the scoreboard during the game," Mr Clothier told a parliamentary committee inquiring into gambling advertising in sport.

"There will be no promotion of live odds by commentators in a sports broadcast at any time – so that is by the commentators. There will be no promotion of live odds during play in a sports broadcast or live stream of a sports event. That will be in place for the 2013 season."

However members of the committee and critics questioned whether the moves go far enough, given other forms of gambling advertising will not be restricted and live odds will still be delivered through paid sponsorship segments.

A sponsorship arrangement between bookmaker Tom Waterhouse and Channel 9 to promote live odds during National Rugby League broadcasts sparked particular concern, after the bookmaker joined the commentary panel during the opening games of the season.

Shane Matiske, the NRL's general manager for strategic projects, admitted there were issues with Mr Waterhouse's initial role and that changes had been made.

"I think it's plain that in the first round of the competition, the line was a bit blurred," Mr Matiske told the committee.

"What you'll see in the most recent round, and moving forward, is a clear separation when someone is talking about sports odds and when the commentary team is talking about the match itself."

However committee member Josh Frydenberg (Kooyong, Vic) said gambling advertising in sport has become "invidious" and is normalising gambling behaviour, particularly for younger fans.

"Children, obviously, are going to be a large number of the people who turn up to a game and they see the sporting advertising on the back of the football jumpers of the St Kilda players or they see it on the fencing signage, they are going to be exposed to it," Mr Frydenberg said. "They turn on the Brownlow, and every ad break is a lady coming on and telling you, 'Go and take a bet on the Brownlow'."

Gambling expert Dr Charles Livingstone said gambling in sport has become so pervasive that it often supersedes the actual sporting event as the main story.

"Gambling organisations are extremely good at generating free publicity and, unfortunately, the media have, like sports, become somewhat dependent on this stuff for some of their stories," Dr Livingstone said.

"So it is not uncommon now to see a story, particularly in the sporting pages, which consists entirely of a report about the odds of such and such an event occurring. And that is the whole story."

Mr Clothier said the AFL regards gambling as a legitimate activity, but is "acutely aware" of the need to ensure responsible gambling messages are seen and understood in the community.

However he said blanket prohibition of gambling advertising and sports gambling would lead to bigger problems, pushing gamblers into unregulated markets overseas.

"As an integrity manager my biggest fear is gambling that occurs offshore," Mr Clothier said. "I would prefer for us to have a healthy and vibrant wagering industry that can advertise responsibly and ethically, with the right balance."

But Dr Livingstone said more needs to be done on gambling now to prevent the sort of severe public health consequences caused by alcohol and tobacco.

"The reality is that, unfortunately, we knew for 50 years that tobacco was harmful. But it took us an awfully long time to act on that," he said. "We have the opportunity with gambling in sport to act in a precautionary way."

"I agree that there is little evidence at the moment about the relationship between sports promotion and gambling activities amongst young people, but we know enough to know that there is a very strong indication that saturation advertising, which is occurring at the moment, is likely to have an impact on people's subsequent behaviour."

"I think it would be fair, in summing up the evidence, to say that there are a lot of alarm bells ringing around that." •

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