

Lay Your Money Down: Court Says States Can OK Sports Betting

Experts say Americans already wager about \$150 billion on sports each year, but new ruling could 'open floodgates' for legal gambling businesses

By Jessica Gresko and Wayne Parry
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court cleared the way Monday for states coast to coast to legalize betting on sports, breaking a longtime ban and creating a potential financial boon for states and the gambling industry. The first bets could be placed within weeks.

Despite opposition from the major sports leagues and the Trump administration, the high court struck down a federal law that had barred betting on football, basketball, baseball and other sports in most states. States that want to take advantage of the ruling now will generally have to pass legislation to allow sports books to open. Some, including New Jersey, which brought the case to the Supreme Court, have a head start.

Sports leagues had expressed concerns about any expansion of sports gambling. Their huge businesses could be badly harmed if people thought the outcome of games could be altered by someone who had wagered money on a certain result.

However, the ruling

also could be seen as merely bringing an activity out of the shadows that many people already see as a mainstream hobby. Americans wager about \$150 billion on sports each year illegally, according to the American Gaming Association. The law the justices struck down forbade state-authorized sports gambling with some exceptions and made Nevada the only state where a person could wager on the results of a single game.

“The legalization of sports gambling requires an important policy choice, but the choice is not ours to make

Stock prices for casino operators and equipment makers surged after the ruling was announced.

Gambling on sports could quickly become widely available, with

one research firm estimating that 32 states would likely offer sports betting within five years.

The ruling “opens up the floodgates” for sports gambling in any state that wants to have it, said Daniel Wallach, a sports law expert in Florida.

The decision had been eagerly anticipated by gamblers and also states that hope their cut of legalized sports betting can help solve budget problems. States that have already laid the legal groundwork include New Jersey, where one racetrack said it would begin taking bets within two weeks. Mississippi and West Virginia have also been preparing for sports betting, and gamblers there could be placing bets as early as this summer and certainly before the NFL season starts in September.

Delaware, too, could quickly expand beyond certain bets currently offered at its casinos. Pennsylvania and New York have also made moves to begin sports gambling. However, other states that want to allow sports betting could still see several Super Bowls come and go before people there can place a legal bet close to home.

The Trump administration had urged the high court to uphold the law, surprising perhaps because the president



Monmouth Park racetrack is seen from a box in Oceanport, N.J., Monday, May 14, 2018. The Supreme Court on Monday gave its go-ahead for states to allow gambling on sports across the nation, striking down a federal law that barred betting on football, basketball, baseball and other sports in most states. Monmouth Park has already set up a sports book operation and has previously estimated it could take bets within two weeks of a favorable Supreme Court ruling.

is the former owner of a New Jersey casino, the Trump Taj Mahal, now being remade into a Hard Rock casino resort. All four major U.S. professional sports leagues and the NCAA also had urged the court to uphold the federal law, saying a gambling expansion would hurt the integrity of their games. They also said that with legal sports betting in the United States, they'd have to spend a lot more money monitoring betting patterns and investigating suspicious activity.

Sports gambling proponents argued that the leagues already do that work and that legal

sports betting will make enforcement easier than it is now, when most bets in the U.S. are made illegally. They say state regulators are capable of monitoring suspicious bets, as is done in Nevada.

On Monday, NBA commissioner Adam Silver and Major League Baseball issued statements saying the “integrity” of their games would remain a priority. Representatives of the National Hockey League, National Football League and NCAA said they were reviewing the court's decision.

Some saw other concerns, including for

some gamblers. The ruling “will likely increase gambling participation and gambling problems unless steps are taken to minimize harm,” said Marlene Warner, the president of the National Council on Problem Gambling's board of directors. The council said any government body or sports league that receives a direct percentage or portion of sports betting revenue should dedicate some of it to treat gambling problems.

The law the justices struck down was passed by Congress in 1992 and called the Professional

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ICE's acting director, pledged to increase workplace enforcement by “four or five times,” opening a new front in an immigration crackdown that includes a 40 percent increase in deportation arrests and initial funding for a border wall with Mexico. In April, ICE agents made 97 arrests at a meatpacking plant in rural Tennessee with a helicopter flying above, reminiscent of the high-profile shows of force that were common during President George W. Bush's administration.

Benner said the agency will focus both on criminal cases against employers as well deporting employees who in the country illegally. Illegal hiring creates unfair advantages for companies, encourages people to come to the U.S. illegally, results in document and identity fraud and exposes workers to potentially dangerous conditions without overtime pay or health insurance, he said.

It remains to be seen whether immigration authorities can perform enough audits to compel a similar degree of compliance that the Internal Revenue Service does on personal and corporate tax returns. One measure may be the number of employees who voluntarily enroll in the federal government's E-Verify system to electronically confirm if a person is authorized to work in the U.S.

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies and an advocate for an employer crackdown, said the numbers show that the administration is following through on its pledge to scrutinize businesses but that it could take a while for a “culture of compliance” to take hold.

“My hope is we're going to see some employers perp-walked, but that's harder than it sounds,” he said. “It's hard to get the suits at a company ... They will have told lower-level managers what to do with a wink and a nod and there's no record of it.”

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