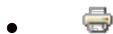


Racetracks seek to expand gambling

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By Ken Camp / Managing Editor

AUSTIN—California Chrome failed to make a lasting mark on horseracing history by winning the Triple Crown, but some Texas tracks want to make their own mark by stretching the definition of pari-mutuel gambling to include “historic racing”—a move gambling opponents consider a violation of state law.

Track operators hope to convince the [Texas Racing Commission](#) they should be permitted to operate and accept wagers on slot-machine-style video terminals that display information about previously run races stripped of identifying markers. And they want to be able to do it without seeking approval by voters or the Texas Legislature.



Les Bernal, director of the national [Stop Predatory Gambling](#), and Rodger Weems, chairman of the organization’s Texas chapter, joined Carey Theil, executive director of Grey2K, a Massachusetts-based organization that opposes greyhound racing, in drafting letter to the Texas Racing Commission. They insisted the commission lacks authority to expand gambling by allowing wagers on historic racing using the video terminals.

Slot machines

“These proposed rules are an obvious attempt to legalize slot machines in Texas using the backdoor to circumvent the legislature. ... This proposal to add slot-like machines to racetracks is nothing but a poke in the eye to the people of Texas and their constitution,” they wrote.

In a Texas Racing Commission public hearing June 10, Weems emphasized the same point.

“Calling a slot machine ‘historic racing’ doesn’t make it any less a slot machine. ... Facts are stubborn things,” he said.

Weems encouraged the commission to seek a ruling from the attorney general about whether the proposal passes muster legally and whether the Texas Racing Commission has authority to expand gambling by changing the definition of pari-mutuel betting.

New technology

Representatives from the [Texas Thoroughbred Association](#) and horseracing tracks insisted their future depends on embracing new technology.

The commission voted to publish the proposed rule changes in the Texas Register for a 30-day period of public review. Ann O’Connell, special counsel in the state comptroller’s office, cast the lone vote in opposition, acting on behalf of Comptroller Susan Combs.

The commission likely will vote on the merits of the proposal as early as August.

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