

In-play betting ads ‘encourages children to gamble’

June 21, 2012

(UK) - As England reach the knockout stages of Euro 2012, audiences can't fail to notice the betting ads crammed between the halves and top and tailing the commercial programming.

The latest innovation pushed heavily during this championship is 'in-play betting' where the odds shift as the game goes on. For example, during the half-time break of this week's England-Ukraine match you could have got 8/1 odds on Wayne Rooney as the first goal scorer, odds that would have paid off just three minutes into the second half. Celebrities such as Ray Winstone endorse these adverts, and William Hill suggest we should "back our boys", making it seem like a national duty.

The Evangelical Alliance is concerned that these adverts, shown well before the watershed appeal to children and could encourage them to gamble. Recent decisions by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) have reprimanded various gambling bodies for irresponsible advertising. In the [most recent adjudication](#) they found Fabulous magazine's advert for Fabulous Bingo linked gambling to seduction and physical attraction.

Gambling advertising on radio or TV is regulated by the [Broadcasting Code of Advertising Practice](#) (BCAP), and the [ASA](#) rules on whether this code has been broken. One would have thought it was a fairly simple matter to see if the adverts all over our screens breached the code and, if they didn't, whether the code needs changing, because surely we shouldn't be encouraging children to gamble?

If only things were that simple. The [code lists](#) a variety of products and services including those for gambling which "may not be advertised in or adjacent to programmes commissioned for, principally directed at or likely to appeal particularly to audiences below the age of 18". While perhaps hard to prove, it is not difficult to imagine that popular football matches, some of which began at 5pm, would appeal particularly to young people and children. This would appear to suggest that the adverts potentially break the rules and should not be shown because they risk encouraging children to gamble.

However, partly because of the difficulty in working out which programmes appealed to children, and to prevent the government from bringing in tighter rules governing advertising, the gambling industry produced a code in 2007 which set out various voluntary measures that should be kept to. Alongside agreeing to carry the www.gambleware.co.uk address on adverts the code agreed to a 9pm watershed before which gambling adverts would not be shown (apart from those already allowed for products such as bingo). An exception was agreed to in return for this simple restriction, that gambling adverts should be allowed, regardless of the time of day if it is for sports betting around televised sporting events. That's why the current adverts are allowed.

The code which the advertisers must abide by, which prohibits adverts during programmes particularly appealing to children, and the voluntary agreement with the gambling industry, which provides an exemption, appear to conflict. But the voluntary agreement contains an important condition: “This code is designed to supplement, rather than repeat or supersede those rules [from BCAP].”

Therefore, the requirement for gambling adverts to not be shown during programmes appealing to young people stands even in cases of sports broadcasts. It is our contention that the ASA should consider whether the many adverts shown during commercial breaks are breaking the code, regardless of the exception in the voluntary agreement. To this end we will be submitting a series of complaints to the ASA against companies broadcasting adverts early in the evening during popular matches. If you wish to make your own complaint about adverts for gambling that are likely to appeal to children, you can find out how on the [ASA website](#)