



THE DEBATE CLUB

Sports Betting Erodes the Integrity of Sports

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In determining whether government should start promoting sports betting alongside its already massive gambling program of casinos and lotteries, let us start inside a federal courthouse in the District of Columbia.

Jurors at this moment are deliberating the government's charges that star professional baseball pitcher Roger Clemens lied to Congress in 2008 when he denied ever having taken performance-enhancing drugs. Why did the issue draw the attention of Congress in the first place? Because the use of these drugs is considered cheating and cheating threatens the integrity of sports, the government has said.

Yet today, some government officials are considering partnering with gambling operators in what is a far greater threat to the integrity of sports than performance-enhancing drugs: legalized sports betting. It is why the NFL has joined with the NBA, MLB, NHL, and the NCAA to oppose such efforts.

Some gambling lobbyists promote the false notion that legalized sports betting will reduce illegal gambling. No jurisdiction has ever documented a decline in illegal gambling following the introduction of legalized gambling. In fact, illegal gambling tends to increase for a number of reasons. Untaxed illegal operators can offer better odds, bigger payoffs, and loans that legal operations cannot. Once gamblers start betting legally, they become less averse to gambling in unlicensed establishments, and law enforcement in gambling states see illegal gambling as a state revenue issue rather than a criminal activity, making enforcement less of a priority. And, when

commercial interests gained control of the gambling business from organized crime, they obtained the ability and the license to legally abuse and destroy customers to an extent that was not possible when gambling operations were run by criminals.

Most proponents also evade the question whether legalized sports betting is a good thing for the athletes themselves. NBA Hall of Famer and former U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley has been a consistent opponent of sports betting. He helped pass the Professional Amateur Sports Protection Act of 1992 which banned the practice nationally, with a few exceptions. Bradley told *The Bergen Record* in 2011 it was an incident in his professional basketball career that helped shape his view: "We were ahead by five points or so, the opponent hit a basket to cut the lead to three points, and I heard cheering," Bradley said of the seemingly meaningless basket as the game was ending. "I asked why, and someone said they were cheering because [the other team] covered the point spread ... I know that when I was a player, I certainly didn't like the idea of being a roulette chip."

Congress must put the same level of scrutiny on the integrity of government's gambling program of state lotteries and casinos as it has on the integrity of sports. They will no longer be able to ignore the reality that government-sponsored gambling has led to higher taxes, more personal debt, worsened state budget deficits, and turned millions of citizens into gambling addicts. It is time to stop betting against ourselves.