

The Lottery Class is no match for “The Patriot Way”

By Les Bernal | July 12, 2009

BEFORE TOM BRADY won a Super Bowl and became a household name in America, he won a parking space.

He won the parking space not because of luck or a gimmick. It went to Brady for being the Most Improved Player at that year’s Patriots football preseason camp, something he achieved through hard work and consistent, high-quality performance.

But beyond his football skills, during that breakthrough season he also displayed a genuine commitment to suppress individual goals for the benefit of the whole, helping to transform a team culture that has since become a standard for professional sports: “The Patriot Way.”

In complete contrast to these values, the ownership of the Patriots recently agreed to allow their brand to be used to sell \$5 lottery scratch tickets, becoming partners in the state-sponsored predatory gambling trade.

According to Lottery Director Mark Cavanagh, partnering with sports teams like the Patriots “brings in new players that don’t play.” The predatory gambling trade constantly needs new players because some will ultimately become extreme lottery users, losing thousands of dollars along the way and replacing other extreme lottery users who finally wiped out their funds.

A national commission report sponsored by Congress and the President showed that the top 5% of lottery users account for 54 % of total sales and the top 20% provide 82% of total sales. That means the casual Lottery player, which makes up four out of every five players, is of little value to the Lottery’s revenue scheme.

Casinos are even more predatory- 90% of their gambling profits come from 10% of the people they target, making nine out of every ten casino visitors irrelevant to the casino business model.

The predatory gambling trade’s bread and butter are addicted or heavily-indebted citizens. They attempt to elude charges of exploitation by pleading it is a “voluntary” act, hiding under the cloak of “freedom.” But by definition, someone who is an addict or someone who is in deep financial debt is not free.

It is likely the Patriots ownership has little understanding of the business model behind scratch tickets. They do not use the product regularly nor do they know many people who do. Because if they did, they would not have pursued a partnership based upon addiction and personal debt.

Predatory gambling is a back door attack on the organizational values the Patriots promote as well as on the significant philanthropic work they do in the region.

The Patriots ownership, like all of us, live in a world where state-sponsored predatory gambling has positioned itself as part of everyday life and Lottery advertising represents the daily voice of government to most citizens.

Promoted in the name of getting someone else to pay our taxes, predatory gambling is one of the key drivers in our debt culture and has split Americans into two classes of people: The Investor Class and The Lottery Class.

The Investor Class has mutual funds and other investment vehicles to save for retirement and their kids' college education. The Lottery Class represents the more than one out of five Americans who, according to the Consumer Federation of America, believe the best way to achieve long-term financial security is to play the Lottery. We have turned people who are small earners with the potential to be small savers into a new class of habitual bettors.

We have a shrinking middle class in America in large part because of predatory institutions and one of the very worst is the State Lottery. It is not possible to have a large Lottery Class and a strong, expanding middle class at the same time. Yet our government spends millions of dollars every year trying to convince citizens to buy large sums of virtually worthless lottery tickets instead of putting their money into wealth building tools.

There will always be people in our society like Bernie Madoff who attempt to profit in "something for nothing" schemes, using financial gimmicks and predatory practices to create the lure of free money. Our state government and our hometown sports teams should not be among them.

Because the way we raise money to pay for government says as much about our democratic principles and values as the way we spend it. And the way we make money as individuals says as much about our personal principles and values as the way we donate it.

Not everyone can win the parking space like Tom Brady. But the real patriot way is about helping every American become a winner.

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