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You May Soon Be Able to Bet On Races That Have Already Happened at Lone Star Park

By Stephen Young, Dallas Observer

June 11, 2014

Commissioners began considering whether to allow the installation of so-called historical racing terminals at Texas horse tracks at a Tuesdayafternoon meeting of the Texas Racing Commission in Austin.

The machines, which allow bettors to rapidly wager on replays of past races that have scrubbed of all identifying information, are described by supporters as a simple extension of something that is already legal, pari-mutuel betting. Anti-gambling advocates say that the machines are effectively slot machines, which are illegal in Texas.

The machines feature lights, buttons and, often, spinning reels to mimic the look a feel of slot machine. The race itself is featured on small screen somewhere on the terminal. Bettors can fast-forward to the end of a race as quickly as they wish, and models with reels display the outcomes of a given race using symbols. On older models gamblers were made to pick winners using a generic racing form listing trends and attributes for the unidentified horses. This is still possible on some newer terminals, but the machine quickly making choices for the bettor is the more common method of operation.

Recently, the machines have been legalized in Arkansas and Kentucky -- although they are still subject to a [legal challenge in the Bluegrass State](#) -- buoying track revenues and race purses in the states.

Nothing in the [Texas statute](#) allowing pari-mutuel bets says that the race being bet on must be live. So, track owners believe they only need the commission's approval, rather than the state constitutional amendment required to make new types of gambling legal in Texas.

Opponents of gambling expansion cite the eventual outlawing of the machines in Wyoming, in a [letter sent to the commission](#) in advance of the meeting. The [Wyoming Supreme Court ruled](#) in 2006 that the machines are not "a mere accoutrement of pari-mutuel wagering," and are, instead, "a slot machine that attempts to mimic traditional pari-mutuel wagering."

The commission is not expected to issue a decision on historical wagering until this fall.

