

Increase In Visitation Key To Success Of Mississippi Sports Betting

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The first legal sports bets were made Wednesday at Beau Rivage Resort & Casino in Biloxi and the Gold Strike Casino in Tunica as Mississippi became the fourth state since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the federal ban to allow sports betting.

However, although gaming regulators anticipate a boost in state tax revenue, the real value from sports betting will be from the increased number of visitors to the state's casinos.

"What we expect is to bring more visitors. We want to drive visitation," Larry Gregory, executive director of the Mississippi Gaming and Hospitality Association (MGHA) told GamblingCompliance.

Legal sports betting launched 26 years to the day after Isle of Capri in Biloxi became the first casino in the state.

"We had no idea what commercial gaming would do to Mississippi back then and it has treated us extremely well," Gregory said.

Gregory joined several retired athletes, including Miami Hurricanes running back Willis McGahee and Robert Royal, a former tight end with Louisiana State, who placed the first wagers on Wednesday.

Following the repeal of the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA) of 1992 on May 14, states moved quickly to pass laws to regulate and tax legalized sports betting.

Mississippi, however, did not need to pass new legislation following the [Supreme Court's decision](#), as lawmakers made a small change to the state's gaming statutes last year.

Sports betting in Mississippi will initially be limited to land-based casinos, although regulations are in place to allow for mobile wagers within a casino.

[GamblingCompliance research](#) estimates Mississippi could generate \$56.1m in gross gaming revenue (GGR) from sports betting.

Tommy Shepherd, an attorney with Jones Walker in Jackson, Mississippi, said even with the excitement surrounding sports betting, he does not expect the same amount of early wagering they saw in Delaware.

Within the first 20 days of legal sports betting in [Delaware](#), the state's three casinos accepted more than 69,000 wagers.

"The population base closer to Delaware is pretty significant," Shepherd said. "Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., those are some really densely populated areas."

Eventually, Shepherd said, the difference will be that Mississippi has more licensed casinos and more capacity in the market. Mississippi is home to 28 commercial casinos.

According to Gregory, along with both MGM Resorts International properties, the next two casinos expected to begin accepting wagers are IP Casino in Biloxi and Sam's Town in Tunica, both owned by Boyd Gaming.

David Strow, vice president of corporate communications for Boyd Gaming, told GamblingCompliance the company is expected to make an official announcement regarding sports betting in the coming weeks.

"This is such a rolling ball full steam ahead but we are planning on everyone to open up by football season," Gregory said. "That's the goal all 28 properties."

Under state law, casinos will pay state and local taxes worth 12 percent of wagers minus payouts, with 8 percent going to the state and 4 percent going to local governments.

Shepherd expects the state to generate roughly \$75m in gross gaming revenue (GGR).

"There will be a strong interest in Southeastern Conference (SEC) football," Shepherd said.

With the state's proximity to Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana and Tennessee, none of which passed sports betting bills this year, Mississippi will be poised to capitalize on an untapped market.

So far this year, the state's gaming industry has generated more than \$1bn in casino GGR and \$67.8m in tax revenue, with local governments receiving \$42.5m, according to the Mississippi Department of Revenue.

"We know sports betting is not a cure all," Gregory said. "But with commercial casinos and sports betting, we are going to have a polished product."

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