

Online gambling commercials underscore change in how Canadians watch sports



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Published Aug. 2, 2022 6:07 p.m. ADT

In the television and digital sports viewing universe, an increasing number of commercials are now promoting online sports gambling platforms.

There are lots of gambling ads, often featuring big names in pro sports. Some even appear during the actual games and not just the commercial breaks.

Hockey analyst Craig Eagles suggests it is an example of how sports, television and fan interaction have changed.

"Growing up we would always have the friendly wager on our favourite hockey clubs and our favourite baseball teams," said Eagles. "That has certainly changed. It has changed the landscape of the sport."

When the federal government's ban on single-game sports betting was lifted last year, not only did it open up new ways for Canadians to gamble, it also allowed television networks and some social channels to capture new big money revenue streams from the actual gambling companies.

Eagles said the commercial spots are likely massive money-makers for television networks. He added, some ads on national TV promote gambling platforms that are not yet available in the Maritimes, but he expects the gambling market to soon open up even more.

"You can't bet on individual plays or that kind of thing here in Atlanta Canada," said Eagles. "You can do that in Ontario and there is a niche market here that the Maritime governments could look at expanding if they choose to do so."

Psychologist Simon Sherry said these ads are usually effective when it comes to attracting would-be gamblers.

“Gambling ads work,” said Sherry. “Exposure to gambling ads change attitudes, change intentions and ultimately change behaviours. In other words, there is a dose-response relationship between your exposure to gambling ads and actually gambling yourself.”

The gambling ads also help raise the subject of addiction and unhealthy recreational activities.

Could the proliferation of these commercials and online betting platforms bring about an increase in gambling addicts?

“Part of problem gambling is driven by availability,” said Sherry. “If you make gambling more available to a population, more people will gamble problematically.”

Sherry said, going forward, Canadians will need to decide how available they want to make sports gambling, given the risks.