

Gambling big business in Texas

United Press International
The annual football season is at hand, and that means office pools will be organized. Gambling has recruited their runners and police will fight their hopeless battle against gambling.

For police, the war is all but over before it begins. Gambling has gained such popularity and respectability, they say, that all they can do is try to stem the tide, and that tide for Texans alone amounts to \$1.4 billion every year.

Dallas is without a doubt the biggest city in the state when it comes to gambling, the Las Vegas of Texas, police say.

"You've got to remember that Dallas is first and foremost a very sports-minded city," says Dallas police sergeant Jerry M. Curtis, a veteran gambling investigator who has matched wits with bookies for more than 14 years.

"It is a very rich city. We are more or less the hub of the Southwest. Basically, there's just a heck of a lot of money in Dallas."

Behind Dallas in the scope of gambling operations, in the opinion of an executive with the Texas Organized Crime Prevention Council, are, in order: Houston, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Austin, El Paso, Galveston, the Golden Triangle (Beaumont, Orange and Port Arthur), Texarkana, Midland-Odessa, Amarillo and Lubbock.

"El Paso is big," said Victor Solis, program coordinator with the state agency designed to monitor and coordinate efforts against organized crime. "Let me tell you, the reason El Paso is so big is because you've got the races across the border and

you've got Ruidoso (Downs) in New Mexico."

Solis touched on a point that few law enforcement officials have been willing to talk about in public: Police in Texas have a more serious problem than most states because Mexico is building a chain of gambling centers just across the Texas border.

"Let's face it," said one law enforcement official who asked not to be named, "the Mexican government sees a lot of money — one hell of a lot of money — and they'd better believe they're going to get theirs."

Racetracks are being built at Matamoras across from Brownsville, Texas, said Solis, and an already popular racetrack is located at Nuevo Laredo across from Laredo, Texas, and an "open book" gambling parlor is under construction there. The Juarez racetrack, across from El Paso, attracts huge crowds.

A track is also under construction at Villa Acuna across from Del Rio, Texas, and "I believe there is talk of building another one across from McAllen at Reynosa, Mexico," Solis said.

The tracks, where dogs and horses are raced, attract Texans year-round. Lots of them. "Have you ever been around El Paso when the races are on?" asked Solis. "I've been in the grandstands at Juarez and 65-70 percent of the people there were American citizens. What it does is attract organized crime. The profit, the money is there."

Solis said Texas border towns are becoming increasingly attractive to organized crime elements and the situation will only become worse as

Mexican racetrack gambling operations grow in size and number.

"There's organized crime operating at the Juarez and El Paso because of the Juarez race track," said Solis. "Any way you skin the cat, drugs will be related."

"Comparing the profit to the risk of apprehension, gambling is more lucrative (than drugs). It's less dangerous."

Organized crime becomes involved in gambling, said Solis, because vast amounts of cash can be obtained.

"They're in there for the money from gambling," said Solis. "And gambling money provides funds for narcotics trafficking, loan sharking, taking over legitimate businesses so money can be laundered."

A report published by the organized crime council in 1977 was based on a survey by a highly respected national research organization. It concluded that Texans spent \$975 million annually on gambling and 93 percent of the activity involved sports wagering.

Adjusted for inflation, \$1.4 billion is a conservative figure of what Texans will spend on gambling in 1979, said Solis.

Curtis, the Dallas police anti-gambling veteran, said there are at least 250 bookies in Dallas taking daily wagers on sports events.

"Football is the predominant sport," he said. "When football starts, they start coming out of the woodwork."

Dallas' smalltime bookies, he said, take bets as high as \$75 while the "big ones" will take bets as high as \$5,000 on a single game. In Dallas alone, he said, residents spend \$10 million a week in illegal sports wagering — "and that's a very, very conservative figure."

Office pools have gained social acceptance, said Curtis, but are illegal. And, he said, some money from gambling eventually finds its way into the coffers of organized crime.

"During football season, office pools are one of the most popular forms of gambling there is," said Curtis. "But under our state law, this is a lottery and it falls under gambling promotion. It is a felony to conduct one of these things."

"The person that draws up the deal, that collects the money, that holds the money for it, is guilty of

gambling promotion. Each person who participates is guilty of gaming — a Class C misdemeanor."

Persons who coordinate office pools, he said, face up to 10 years in prison and a \$5,000 fine — although he admits police only investigate office gambling activity upon receipt of a formal complaint.

"Gambling cannot be stopped, but we certainly can control it," said Curtis. "That is primarily our objective — and to keep organized crime out of the gambling field in the Dallas area. Dallas is a clean city as far as organized crime."

Curtis admitted he had been criticized for his unceasing action against gambling. It is argued, he said, that gambling is a victimless crime and that anti-gambling laws are so widely disregarded that enforcement of them creates disrespect for the rule of law itself.

But his job is to uphold the law, said Curtis, and the law says gambling is illegal. "Any time you have any large sums of money that will exchange hands, you're going to attract the criminal element," he said. "When there is money to be made, they'll be there and organized crime won't be far behind."

SMU gets hammer thrower

United Press International
DALLAS — Southern Methodist track coach Ted McLaughlin said Wednesday Richard Olsen, a hammer thrower from Norway, had enrolled at SMU and would be eligible for competition in the 1981 track season.

Olsen has a throw of 237-8 to his credit, the third best throw ever by a collegian. He finished second at last year's NCAA championship.

Olsen is a member of the Norwegian national team and will compete for Norway in the 1980 Olympics.

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