

LAND OF THE FREE?: Betting picks and tips for Week 9

October 26, 2022

Both the pro and con sides in the long debate over legalized sports gambling tell us much about the American zeitgeist. What happened to affirming freedom as the foundational and intrinsic good that it is? My view is that idiots should be free to be idiots — yes, even to make idiotic sports bets — as long as they don't coerce or defraud others and others are free to call them idiots.

It has taken many, many decades, but the pro side, despite opposition that will never waver, clearly has the big mo. According to the American Gaming Association, sports gambling is now legal in some form in 35 states. In September it became not only legal but operational in Kansas, in time for the season of the sport that lures the most action: football.

The mindset of the opposition should be familiar by now. Some argue that gambling of any sort is wrong, for reasons rarely made explicit. As the song goes, “Because, just because.” What about “venture capital”? OK, that's an exception. What about lotteries? Another exception. So what's wrong with sports gambling? People can lose too much money, and some become addicted to it.

How can it not be clear that there is very little you CAN'T say that about?

“Might as well face it, you're addicted to love,” wailed Robert Palmer, an addiction that has landed millions in the prison of monogamy and even marriage itself!

Millions become addicted to alcohol and tobacco, for example, which can cause the loss not only of money but also of a trifle called life.

So why not ban them?

To the derision of the rest of the world, we did outlaw alcohol during the 1919-1933 Prohibition era. It didn't stop drinking. Untold thousands blissed out in speakeasies and on bathtub gin as organized crime harvested bonanzas of moolah and paid off police, politicians and judges while governments not only got no revenue but spent fortunes on snoopounds, snitches and bullies in futile efforts to enforce it. Have we learned anything? See "Drugs, wars on."

Why would anyone care whether an adult bets money on a football game?

Putting aside for now the special interests who profit from bans of gambling and other consensual acts between adults, it stems from the mindset of puritanism, famously described by H.L. Mencken as the haunting fear that someone, somewhere could be happy. "The Puritan hated bear-baiting," said Thomas McCauley, "not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators."

WHY the pleasure of others enrages them has long fascinated me as an amateur socio-pathologist, but now is not the time to delve into that.

What has saddened me about 99 percent of the arguments for legalization that I have seen focus exclusively on its economic effects. Those are important, of course. As much as possible, why not fund government through non-coercive forms of taxation? We're told it's virtuous to work hard, yet the more income we make from hard work, the more we must pay in taxes (unless we can afford the right loophole-sniffing lawyers). In blissful contrast, if we don't want to pay such "sin taxes" as those on alcohol, tobacco and gambling, we can choose not to drink, smoke and gamble. Such a deal!

So by all means keep thumping the revenue tub, but why not also thump the FREEDOM tub?

The pro-choice spirit should extend beyond the abortion issue. Invoke the Ninth Amendment: “The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.” (See the Cato Institute book on it, “The Rights Retained by the People.”) The burden should be on government to justify taking away a right, not on citizens to comb the Constitution for its enumeration.

Because the right to travel, for example, isn’t enumerated should not mean government should have the power to outlaw it. A nation whose government has the power to outlaw anything not enumerated as a citizen’s right could hardly be called free. To enumerate all rights citizens should be presumed to have would require a Constitution the length of the unabridged Oxford English Dictionary.

By all indications the trend toward legalizing sports gambling is driven far more by the lust for revenue than by the spirit of “Live free or die” and “Don’t tread on me.” That spirit is in fast retreat before yearnings to conform and obey the dictates of a nanny state.

The Sage Selections

Injuries and weather can be huge factors at this stage of the season, and as I write Wednesday afternoon it’s hard to pick our game without knowing the injury status of several key players. If those above me on the depth chart can’t go, I may have to take some snaps at QB against the Cowboys. You never know, and that’s why I always prepare as if I was starting. I care nothing about personal stats. I’m all about the team and whatever it takes to get a W. Despite the niggling nattering of critics that has dogged me so unfairly, my leadership qualities can compensate for my deficiencies in throwing, running and ball-handling as well as for my toxic effect on morale.