



Young Bettors and March Madness Participants Face High Gambling Risks

TORONTO, March 20, 2025 – The Responsible Gambling Council’s (RGC) Big Games sports betting survey reveals the vast majority of Ontarians (89 per cent) plan to watch at least one major sporting event this year. Over three quarters (77 per cent) will place a wager on a Big Game like March Madness, as well as the Stanley Cup Playoffs, MLB World Series, Asia Cricket World Cup, FIFA World Cup and/or the Super Bowl. However, two in five bettors (41 per cent) report having wagered more than they can afford to lose in the past year. 39 per cent say gambling has led to stress, anxiety or concerns about problem gambling with these risk factors being higher among younger and March Madness bettors.

For people who plan to bet on a Big Game, the decision to gamble is driven primarily by the desire to win money (47 per cent) and enhancing game excitement (44 per cent). Additionally, one in 10 (9 per cent) bet in an attempt to recover previous losses, a gambling motivation which is more common among younger and lower-income bettors. Among those wagering on high-profile tournaments like March Madness (51 per cent) and Asia Cricket World Cup (69 per cent), reports of betting beyond one’s means are even more pronounced.

Beyond mental health concerns, over a third say gambling has caused financial problems for them or their household (35 per cent). These trends are all highest among younger male bettors and those betting on March Madness and Asia Cricket World Cup.

Over half of those who will bet on a Big Game will place their bets while consuming substances, which are associated with the additional risks of impaired judgement and decision-making (52 per cent). The majority plan to consume alcohol while betting (86 per cent). Cannabis use is higher among those betting on March Madness (60 per cent) and Asia Cricket World Cup (65 per cent).

March Madness appeals to younger and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) bettors, with higher average bets of \$323, while last month’s Super Bowl LIX was popular among older and white Ontarians, with average bets of \$190.

Key survey highlights

The Super Bowl (48 per cent) is the most popular event for betting, followed by the Stanley Cup playoffs (41 per cent) and the FIFA Club World Cup (35 per cent). March Madness (23 per cent) and the Asia Cricket World Cup (17 per cent) also attract a strong betting audience. While online sportsbooks (57 per cent) are now the most common way to place sports bets, many Ontarians bet informally with friends (40 per cent) or purchase sports-based lottery tickets (35 per cent).

Gambling risk factors

Most Big Game bettors believe their sports knowledge gives them an edge in predicting outcomes (72 per cent), particularly those watching March Madness, the Stanley Cup Playoffs, or the MLB World Series (77 per cent). Yet, while knowledge and skill does inform a bet, it doesn't guarantee a win.

“Most Ontarians bet to have fun but the biggest gambling risk is the illusion of control – the misconception that an outcome can be predicted, which can lead to over confidence that skill and knowledge of sports gives an advantage in winning,” says Sarah McCarthy, CEO, Responsible Gambling Council. “Regardless of sports knowledge and expertise, gambling is random – but a plan to manage risk shouldn’t be.”

Also influential, online and TV gambling advertisements have prompted two fifths of major sports event bettors to place a wager (39 per cent); more so among populations at-risk for problem gambling, including younger bettors (42 per cent) and BIPOC individuals (44 per cent).

Reducing risk

Of those planning to bet on Big Games, the most common strategies to manage gambling risk are deciding on a pre-set betting limit (36 per cent), betting to have fun and not to make money (30 per cent), not betting more to recoup losses (25 per cent), and avoiding increasing bets on previous wins (23 per cent). Among those who plan to bet online, 70 per cent will use at least one of the responsible gambling features available on regulated sportsbook websites, such as reading information about the odds of winning and how certain games work (28 per cent) or using money limit-setting tools (23 per cent). A fifth use personalized spending reports or take a cooling off period (20 per cent). Use of these online tools is highest among those planning to bet on March Madness (81 per cent) and Asia Cricket World Cup (94 per cent).

Paying attention to mood and state of mind are also important to help reduce gambling risk. A quarter of Big Game bettors will avoid betting when feeling emotionally distressed (24 per cent) and a fifth will refrain from betting while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (19 per cent). These rates are slightly higher among those betting on March Madness (27 per cent; 23 per cent).

RGC tips for safer sports betting

- Be mindful of the illusion of control. Remember that even with sports expertise a win is not guaranteed and understanding the game, players or stats won't boost your chances of predicting a random outcome
- Be aware that time spent, and knowledge gained won't help you “beat the odds”
- Plan before you play – pre-set betting limits and stay within your budget
- Only gamble with money you can afford to lose – never borrow money or use money intended for necessities, like rent/mortgage or food
- Never chase losses by trying to win back what you've lost
- Limit your alcohol, cannabis, and/or other substance intake
- Don't bet if you are upset or stressed
- View sports betting as entertainment, not a way to make money

As part of its ongoing commitment to reduce gambling risk, RGC provides responsible gambling education and programming to priority populations who are at particularly high risk, including younger males, student athletes, and BIPOC communities. Early responsible gambling education helps reduce risk and builds capacities to succeed both on and off the field.

To learn how to keep sports betting safer visit GamblingisRandom.ca.

Methodology

An online survey of 1,147 Ontario residents aged 18+ was completed between November 22 - December 6, 2024, using Leger's online panel. A probability sample of the same size would yield a margin of error of +/-2.9%, 19 times out of 20.

About RGC

The Responsible Gambling Council (RGC) is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to problem gambling prevention. RGC works to reduce gambling risks by creating and delivering innovative awareness and information programs, for a wide range of different groups including youth, young adults and the general public. If you or someone you know is struggling with gambling, there are resources to support you. Visit ResponsibleGambling.org to learn more.

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