



STATE OF WASHINGTON
GAMBLING COMMISSION

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December 9, 2004

LaCenter Bookmaking Case (Cs. # 2004-00904)

At 6 AM Wednesday, December 8, 2004, Washington State Gambling Commission (WSGC) agents began serving search warrants on several residences in Clark County, Washington. This was done with assistance from the Clark County Sheriff's office, Vancouver Police Dept. and the Clark County Prosecutor's office.

This is the culmination of an investigation into a bookmaking operation which involves numerous card room employees in the New Phoenix and Last Frontier restaurants and was primarily centered in the card rooms. There are five key persons that the agents are investigating and may be arrested and charged with Professional Gambling 1st degree, a felony. The investigation also revealed numerous other persons involved in betting with the operators of the bookmaking operation. Persons who bet with bookmakers can also be charged with Professional Gambling. Agents will be interviewing "bettors" to determine the extent of their involvement.

Card Room Employees (CREs) place their gambling licenses in jeopardy when they participate in illegal gambling or observe it and do not report it.

This case started in 2003 when investigators noted that there appeared to be some type of sports betting going on in the casinos. One agent, working undercover, posing as a regular patron of the casino, was able to place approximately 76 wagers totaling \$17,400. Arrests were not made at the time as there was indication that there was a larger organization running the betting. Other agents were brought in and wagers were made on NBA and NFL games throughout the year.

Surveillance revealed to the agents where the principals lived and with whom they associated. During last year's NBA season, other agents were able to bet 64 times, exceeding \$11,000. The agents were charged a commission called "vigorish or vig" on their bets. That is the major distinction between betting that is allowed between persons and what makes it illegal. According to the law, if a person is charged for making the bets, it is professional gambling and is illegal in Washington State.

Agents worked on the case during the summer months to gather additional information about the organization and the bookmaking operation. When the NFL season began in September, agents again began betting and wagered about \$35,000 in which they had to pay "vig" on their losses.

Many of the bets and money exchanges were done in the casinos. Others occurred in various locations throughout the Vancouver area. During this time agents were accumulating information on other casino employees and bettors. As this investigation continues, additional charges could possibly be filed on upwards of 29 or 30 additional persons.

Agents will continue to investigate financial records of the major players and civil seizures of monies or properties could result. They will also continue to analyze telephone records of those involved, noting that they have over 20,000 phone calls that fit the patterns of sports betting, being short in duration and within a few minutes prior to the start of a sporting event.

In addition, WSGC agents became involved in a parallel investigation being conducted by Immigration, Customs and Enforcement (ICE) and have worked cooperatively with that federal organization since employees and patrons of the same casinos were subjects in their investigation. It is believed that some people were involved in the bookmaking operation and the illegal immigrations that ICE is investigating. ICE executed their own search warrants and will bring federal charges separate from WSGC.