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## Archives

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## When the chips are down ...online gambling - Good or Bad?

By **NATHANIEL WEST, Staff Writer**

This Sunday, Super Bowl XL won't be just the most-watched television program in America according to online betting officials.

"It is truly the biggest gambling event of the year," said Peter Epstein, spokesman for a relations firm representing www.YouWager.com.

In general, he said the online sports gambling industry alone pulls in \$450 million annually.

But while officials like Epstein tout the benefits of Internet gambling, others blame the online casinos for new woes, especially among young people.

"Online is horrible," said Brenda Sprague, co-owner and addictions counselor at Walter Counseling Services in Charleston.

She said gambling addictions — online or otherwise — can lead to white collar crimes, and embezzle money to pay for their habits.

"And a lot of people don't realize those (online casinos) are not necessarily American," said, noting that Taiwan in particular hosts numerous online casinos. "They will take even more."

"I have talked to a lot of families who deal with compulsive Internet gambling."

Still, it's tough to argue with the economic boon generated by online gambling. According to a magazine, worldwide Internet gambling revenues reached \$10 billion in 2005.

"Fueled by a poker craze, the growth of broadband, and television coverage, online gambling is quickly moving to the mainstream," said eMarketer analyst Ben Macklin in Forbes.

Not that all online betting requires participants to play with their hard-earned money. AbsolutePoker.com sponsors free Internet poker tournaments for college students, the winners of which earn scholarships.

For example, Naperville native and Carnegie Mellon University student Jeremy Olisar re-enters the online casino's "Win Your Tuition" tournament. It was his first foray into a college-sports-themed Internet poker tournament.

"This tournament was an engaging and free way for college students to have fun and could be an alternative way to pay for tuition," said Michael Edwards, business development manager for AbsolutePoker.com.

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AbsolutePoker.com.

According to the University of Pennsylvania's 2005 National Annenberg Risk Survey of \ people who bet on card games are more likely to gamble on Internet sites.

The rates of young men betting weekly on the Internet rose from 1.1 percent in 2004 t percent in 2005. The rate for young women, 0.7 percent, did not change. On a monthly percent of young men reported gambling online, according to the survey.

According to the International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Beha Canada reported that the thrill of it, not the money, is the primary motivation for gamb young people.

"Our research and clinical work suggests that ... money is used as a vehicle to enable ii continue playing," according to the center. "When playing, adolescents with serious gar problems report that nothing else matters, and that they are able to forget about their

Sprague said the motivation behind an online gambling addiction is similar to that whic Internet pornography addicts.

"It's not necessarily the act, it's the conquest," said Sprague. "Addiction is addiction. R the activity, it's still stimulating the same part of your brain."

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