



Photo: John Locher, Associated Press

Odds of sports betting affecting high school sports are slim, but there may be ways to wager

25
SHARES

By: **Jim Halley, USA TODAY High School Sports** and **Cam Smith, USA Today High School Sports** | May 29, 2018

The odds are slim that the Supreme Court's recent decision to allow states to offer legal sports betting will impact high school sports.

Nevada, for now, is the only state that allows single-game sports betting, but the state's gaming laws specifically prohibit its sportsbooks from permitting bets on high school sports. That's the model most other states would likely follow.



least a draft of a bill regarding legalized sports betting.

Off-shore bookies already offer lines on Texas high school football games and high school games that are televised nationally, so it's not crazy to think legal sports betting could include high school events.

Yet as currently constituted, the very possibility of in-person wagering on high school sports doesn't sit well with **the most established sportsbook** in Las Vegas.

"We don't take bets on any amateur events outside of college events, and that would include high school sports. I don't see the need," said Jay Kornegay, vice president of race and sports operations for the Westgate Las Vegas Sportsbook. "You would have to first change the regulations in the state of Nevada, because they don't allow those wagers to be placed. I don't think anyone is going to pursue it. We have plenty of events at the collegiate and pro level.

"We know high school football is really big in the South and other areas of the country, but I don't see any need to set lines on those games."

Though the threat of wagering on high school sports isn't immediate, many officials are taking a wait-and-see approach. There are concerns that gambling could affect the integrity of high school sports events, that the athletes, coaches or officials could be vulnerable to payments to shave points or throw games. Unlike pro or college sports, there are no mechanized controls to prevent tampering with a result.

“I am concerned with this court decision and where it may lead,” Bob Gardner, the executive director of the National Federation of High School Associations (NFHS), said in a statement. “Our past contains instances of wagering on high school games illegally. If that now becomes legal, does the pressure on our coaches and student-athletes grow?”

“Maintaining the integrity of all sports is critical to the system at every level. If we think the high schools are immune to this, we are not seeing clearly. We ask that states do not include wagering on high school athletic contests in any sport as part of any legislation going forward.”

A spokesperson for ESPN, which televises national high school events in several sports, said only “it’s a bit early, but we’re actively monitoring it on the sports betting issue.”



“If a sportsbook has something to bet, people will bet on it, whether it’s crocodile racing or something else,” Sanchez said. “If it was up there, people would bet on it. Would there be any interest to get it up there, with all the other sports? I don’t know. I don’t think they would ever allow it.”

That it could be a possibility is concerning to the men who set the official lines on The Strip across town from Bishop Gorman.

“There are a lot of eyes on the collegiate game and pro game,” said Kornegay. “There are certain let’s say, ‘protective measures’ in place at both levels that monitor the collegiate and pro games that you wouldn’t have at the high school level.

“There would be some concerning thoughts with integrity, namely the limited amounts of protective measures that might be associated with high school competition. You have certain programs at the collegiate level and you have a lot of information that surrounds the college game compared to the high school game. I don’t think high school programs are funded for those type of protective measures.”

When Kornegay speaks of protective measures, he’s referring to oversight that ensures collegiate and professional athletes aren’t actively taking an interest in a contest.

It was the possibility of such a threat that initially bred alarm when the Costa Rican-based betting house 5Dimes began setting betting lines on prominent high school games in 2011.

Tony Williams, founder of **5Dimes**, has spoken about why he offers high school football odds. For a gambling entrepreneur, the decision was predicated on simple supply and demand, considered alongside a more global perspective on the state of youth and scholastic sport.

“The customers who bet the games don’t have a problem with morality. If the customers are happy, I am happy,” **Williams told the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review in 2011.** “Walk to any street corner in the United Kingdom. You can bet on under 16-year-old soccer events, boys or girls. Any match, just about any amount.

“The youth World Cup events are shown globally on television. What is the difference (between) betting on 15- and 16-year-old girls playing soccer or 17- and 18-year-old boys playing American football?”



not significant enough to register for a global sports gambling site. Williams likened the action on high school football games to one-fifth of what is spent on LPGA golf, one of the more lightly bet sports available.

Still, there are at least enough bettors placing wagers to impact the lines once they’ve been set, sometimes significantly so. One 2016 Texas high school state championship game – the Class 4A Division II faceoff between West Orange-Stark and Sweetwater – **had a line move from a 16 to 21.5 to 27.5-point spread in a single day.** West Orange Stark **emerged with a 24-6 victory.**

Yet if those lines are used by local illegal bookies to take wagers on high school games, why shouldn’t states allow official betting houses accept them and thereby implement some measure of discipline and regulation? There might even be a revenue share to be had for the state governing bodies (and potentially schools themselves via the state organizations).

For now, that doesn’t appear to be a serious consideration. The rush to add sports betting is led by Delaware, Mississippi and New Jersey, which expects to have a bill in both state houses by June 7.

Despite former **New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley’s concerns that sports betting would be unregulated and allow betting on high school sports,** the draft for New Jersey’s bill, still in its early stages, has a ban on betting on college and high school sports.

RELATED: Five questions on New Jersey sports betting

“We stand with the NFHS and ask that states not include wagering on high school athletic contests in any sport as part of any legislation going forward,” Larry White, the new executive director of the New Jersey State Interscholastic Activities Association, said in a statement.

SHARE THIS

25
SHARES



→ **21 shares** | 5w ago

How the Red Sox and Rangers decided a Texas baseball playoff series' home field advantage

→ **96 shares** | 21hr ago

Seven Super 25 teams will play in the GEICO ESPN High School Kickoff

| 4w ago

ALL-USA Watch: Anthony Seigler leads Cartersville to state title series

LATEST

VIDEO: This high school softball umpire doing Y-M-C-A is a summer spirit animal

ESPN to grant ESPY awards to three coaches killed in Parkland shooting

11
shares

John McLean steps down at hockey dynasty Malden Catholic (Mass.)

15
shares

The Sharife Cooper Blog: Peach Jam prep, Lil Baby, Fortnite and



12
shares

Texans host special guests from Santa Fe High football team at minicamp

Texas baseball teams get a Super 25 bump with state titles

Michigan lacrosse parents: Coach 'knows nothing about' sport, killing morale

26
shares

Football co-captains found dead within hours of one another

1.4k
shares

Recruiting Column: Questions you should (and shouldn't) ask college coaches

17
shares

Report: Could wealthy parent be behind wrestling coaching change in Bay Area?

< MORE USA TODAY HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

