

SEMINOLE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO

Internet Gamblers to Skirt Illegality

BY CARON CONWAY

The World Wide Web, a seemingly endless source of information, also offers entertainment options, not the least of which is gambling.

There are literally thousands of online gaming sites, ranging from video poker and slots to bingo, backgammon, blackjack, roulette and craps, all expected to continue to thrive despite new legislation to outlaw their availability.

PLAYERS CAN enter tournaments in online poker rooms, try their luck at a variety of lotteries or compete for cash and prizes on "skill game sites" that offer sport games and card games such as mahjong and rummy. Betting exchanges, sportsbooks and racebooks round out the extensive list of Internet gambling offerings.

Earlier this year, online gambling reached an all-time low with thousands of bettors nationwide wagering on hurricanes in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina's devastation in Louisiana and Mississippi.

While betting, for the most part, has centered on relatively benign predictions such as how many named storms and hurricanes would form in the 2006 season and whether a Category 5 storm would make landfall in the U.S., some people nonetheless find wagering on hurricanes a tasteless and offensive pastime.

But we're talking about an Internet activity that a 2002 study ranked as the fifth most addictive, behind such online pursuits as shopping and pornography.

FIVE YEARS ago, the number of people worldwide who had wagered over the Internet already exceeded 50 million. In 1994, online gambling was a mere \$30 million industry with some 30 sites. Today, annual revenue generated by 2,000-plus sites is estimated at \$12 billion, with more than half of that amount thought to come from American gamblers.

But the times, they are a-changin'.

American online gamblers were dealt a tough hand Oct. 13, when Congress passed legislation forcing U.S. banks and credit card companies to block electronic transactions to Internet gambling businesses.

WHILE THE law does not make it illegal for someone to gamble online, finding a site that will accept U.S. bets just got more difficult. In the wake of the law's passage, at least 400 publicly held English-languages gaming sites already have restricted U.S. players, including powerhouses Casino On Net, the world's largest online casino, and PartyPoker, the world's largest online poker network.

The newly-passed law, the first federal measure to explicitly address Internet gambling, demonstrates the government's intent to treat it as an illegal activity.

"Gambling is a serious addiction that undermines the family, dashes dreams, and frays the fabric of society," said Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), who negotiated the passage of the bill by attaching it to an unrelated Safe Ports bill just before Congress went on recess.

"CONGRESS has grappled with this issue for 10 years, and during that time we've watched this shadow industry explode. For me as majority leader, the bottom line is simple: Internet gambling is illegal. Although we can't monitor every online gambler or regulate offshore gambling, we can police the financial institutions that disregard our laws."

Given its convenience, accessibility, untaxed nature (unlike casinos) and absence of a tangible form of currency, online gambling's addictive lure is no big surprise. And industry insiders say savvy online gamblers will still find ways to pay for gambling services despite the new law, which some say also will be difficult to enforce.



1 Seminole Way, Hollywood 33314

Tel. (954) 327-7625

www.seminolehardrockhollywood.com

Operated and managed by the Seminole Tribe of FL

Address: 6300 Stirling Road, Hollywood 33024

Tel.: (954) 966-6300

Email: tribune@semtribe.com

Website: www.seminoletribe.com

Administration: James Allen, CEO

SEMINOLE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO



Casino/Gaming

The 130,000-sq. ft. Casino open 24 hours year-around features more than 2,100 gaming machines (including Video Poker, Double Diamond, Wheel of Fortune, Five Times Pay, and Red, White & Blue); 50 poker tables offer everything from Seven-Card Stud and Texas Hold'em to Omaha. Daily poker tournaments; varied buy-in amounts. Free poker lessons weekdays, 9-10 a.m. Average daily payout: \$8.5 million. Patrons must be 18 years or older to gamble.

Entertainment: September

Hard Rock Live is a state-of-the-art arena seating 5,500 for music, sports and conventions, featuring headline concerts, world-championship boxing, etc. Reserved-seat pricing. Doors open one hour prior to start of event.

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Mon., Nov. 20 INXS; 8 p.m. (\$90, \$70, \$50)

Tues., Nov. 21 Ricardo Arjona; 8 p.m. (\$100, \$80, \$60)

Wed., Nov. 29 & Thurs., Nov. 30 Larry The Cable Guy; 8 p.m. (\$100, \$80, \$60)

Tues., Dec. 5 Disturbed – Music As a Weapon Tour, featuring Stone Sour, Flyleaf & Nonpoint; 7 p.m. (\$39.50; general admission \$37.50)

Wed., Dec. 6 & Thurs., Dec. 7 Tony Bennett; 8 p.m. (\$100, \$80, \$60)

For information: Broward 954-523-3309

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Tickets available at the Hard Rock Live Box Office, 5747 Seminole Way in Hollywood, or online through Ticketmaster:

www.seminolehardrock.com/entertainment.

Directions/Parking

On-site self-parking, free (garage and surface lots); valet: \$7 for single day; \$15 overnight. From I-95: Exit Stirling Road west to US 441/SR 7, turn right, entrance on left. **From Turnpike:** Exit Griffin Road east to US 441/SR 7, turn right, entrance on right.