

Gambling is enshrined in our lives

by MARK PAVILONS

It's been said that everything's a gamble in life.

All the best gamblers quit when they're ahead.

It's funny, this obsession of ours with gambling, playing the odds and the rush of winning.

Does gambling imitate life?

New data has revealed that Canada has the highest number of gamblers, with 48.6% of the adult population projected to have gambled online by the end of 2024.

The UK ranks second, with 27.9%, and Australia is third, with 21.2%.

The U.S. is a distant 6th with 17%

The research analyzed online gambling data for 61 countries.

The second most gambling-obsessed country is the United Kingdom, with 27.9% of the population estimated to have gambled online by the end of 2024. The UK is projected to make revenue of \$13.78 billion in 2024 from online gambling.

Third in the ranking is Australia, with 21.1% of the population taking part in online gambling in 2024. \$10.14 billion is projected to be made in revenue in 2024.

Emiko Matsuda, Editor-in-Chief Statista, Japanese Online Casino Guide, noted "the surge in online gambling can be attributed to a variety of factors such as the pandemic, which meant many bettors transitioned from wagering on sports to online gambling, and the data suggests that this shift is permanent."

Gambling has been part of humankind's makeup for literally thousands of years. Dice go back to ancient China, to the 10th century BC. A pair of dice were found in an Egyptian tomb from 3,000 BC and they were common in ancient Greece and Rome.

Some experts date playing cards to China in 900 AD, but they became popular in Europe in the 1300s.

It took hundreds of years before the 52-card deck we know today became standard. Hats off to our American neighbours for introducing the Joker in the mid-1800s, when euchre was also introduced.

It can be argued that all card and dice games are a form of gambling "it's the thrill of winning, whether it's luck or skill.

In fact, that's the basis of almost every "game," whether it's cornhole, golf, hockey, tennis, baseball, football, archery and the gamut of competitions at the Olympics. The Games, that originated in ancient Greece more than 3,000 years ago, award the top finishers with gold, silver and bronze.

Okay, competitions based on skill and athletic prowess are one thing. Tempting fate is another.

Almost every reality TV show has an element of gambling. Courtroom dramas are glorified bluffing games. Trivia shows reward knowledge.

We are lured by the 'luck of the draw' or the 'roll of the dice.' We like to defy the odds, and 'bet the farm.'

I agree that it's not always about winning, but the chance, the anticipation, the fun.

We teach our kids at young age to play typical card games like Go Fish and Crazy 8s, but it's not long before they graduate into more exciting games of skill.

I enjoy euchre and my parents were fanatical bridge players. My dad and I also spent countless nights playing chess.

We often hosted poker nights when we lived in rural Caledon, which were quite lively affairs. The quarters quickly turned into dollars, but the biggest pots back then were \$20.

The races at nearby Woodbine have drawn enthusiasts for literally decades. I took my dad there one day for Father's Day and a combination of skill, luck and a 'boxed triactor,' netted him a very tidy sum. One of the best days ever.

Horse races are a great way to spend the day with friends and family. I'd recommend hitting the restaurant, sharing some laughs and trying your luck with the ponies.

The horses are smart enough not to bet on humans, but most of us watch a race right down to the wire.

I remember my first trip to Vegas when I was in college. I also remember my dad saying it was a waste of time and money. He changed his tune when he and my mom visited Atlantic City for the first time.

Of course, the odds favour the casinos, but they are a must-visit in one's lifetime. They're exciting places, complete with glitz and glamour, along with loss and heartbreak.

And what of lotteries? We've had government sanctioned lotteries for nearly half a century. They're a cash cow and the OLG has generated an estimated \$59 billion since 1975, averaging \$2.4 billion per year.

I remember, when I turned of age, playing Wintario in this province. The hosts 'red Davis and Faye Dance' travelled the countryside, holding these popular televised draws. I think the biggest jackpot back then was \$100,000 and that was considered a king's ransom.

Lotteries are, as Roger Jones put it, a tax on those who can't do math.

I am a regular lottery player and while I realize I have a greater chance of getting hit by lightning than winning a jackpot, I still make a weekly donation. My take on is that someone wins, so why not me? In the case of 'guaranteed prizes,' I have as good a chance as anyone.

South of the border, there was a recent Power Ball jackpot of over \$1-billion. That's just crazy. And yes, the U.S. taxes lottery winnings, unlike our country.

Striking it rich seems to be a priority for people and gambling will remain part of our society as long as money is a 'thing.'

Maybe one day, money will disappear from the human equation. We will all live together in harmony and we will have solved hunger, poverty, sickness and disease. I really hope that one day Earth will become Eden again.

But until that time come comes, we illogical humans will continue to 'feel lucky, play our cards right, up the ante' until 'all bets are off.'