

Gambling permeates our society as sure as the air we breathe. The bright lights of “pokies open” seem inescapable as I journey the streets, with TAB’s in every area, a central casino for good measure and my nemesis, online sports betting, is as accessible as the internet which harbors it. The ship of online sports betting was unpleasant for me to board, its journey dark and hazardous, its storms unrelenting, with the hope of alighting seemingly slim as the sports betting ship rode into the doom and gloom of despair that encapsulates the essence of gambling.

Given the last decade’s surge in pokie machines, it is unsurprising that my first exposure to gambling was at the hand of these machines. I was 18, and oblivious to the subtle introduction to what evolved as my worst nightmare; gambling. Though pokies were an introduction, they were trivial to my gambling problem. I would play a trifling \$20 here and there with nothing more coming of it. Shortly after my exposure to pokies, I visited the casino, driven by curiosity more than anything else. Although I learnt the nature of casino games, my occasional recreational visits to the casino caused me no associated grief.

In 2008, at the age of 24, my previously innocent dealings with the face of gambling changed dramatically. I became acquainted with online sports betting. At this time I had entered full time employment with access to my wages, some liquid savings and unsecured borrowing potential. Having conducted some research on the basic principles of sports betting and motivated by the challenges and rewards, I devised betting strategies and systems which I thereafter employed.

I undertook an intense gambling stint, which for a period of approximately 18 months, utilized the most part of my wages and what subjectively was an exorbitant amount of unsecured loans from financial institutions. This period of time had an extreme and largely adverse impact on my life.

Although the betting systems I utilized bore me success at times, I lacked discipline and patience. My compulsiveness and urge to reclaim losses when the vicissitudes of luck disfavoured my systems, led me to lose substantially more than I won.

Online sports betting caused me extreme financial hardship. I was constantly short of money. I found myself in circumstances where I was unable to purchase things I wanted but did not necessarily need, such as extra clothes, electrical devices, accessories etc. I was also unable to do such things as go on holidays, go out recreationally, and generally would think twice or thrice before doing anything that required money, as gambling left me with such a small amount of funds that at times only the essential necessities such as food were accounted for. There was no going out to restaurants, attending social events, buying gifts etc. When, as often was the case, the financial losses of gambling hit hard, I entered a state of survival mode. I felt like I existed, but not that I was in fact living.

Financial hardship intrinsically caused feelings of low self-esteem and depression. Gambling effectively affected my emotional wellbeing. As enthralling an impact as the highs of winning caused, the feelings of devastation, distress and misery when losing were of equal or even greater impact. Online sports betting caused me to feel helpless and despondent. This consequentially affected my social interaction with friends, family and my partner. I was disinterested in participating in sporting events and outings, my flame of motivation extinguished by lack of funds, lack of time, by gambling.

And time was one of the most precious gifts of which online sports betting stripped me. I would gamble for many hours. I would gamble at work. I would gamble at home, from 6pm to as late as 4am. I would

gamble on weekends. I would gamble no matter where I was or what I was doing. As long as there was a computer nearby, or a telephone to use, I could and would gamble. And when all is said and done, I retrospectively reflect and realize just how much of my time gambling undiscerningly robbed me of. So absorbed was I in my gambling, I did not realize the time sacrificed, ultimately aimlessly. And had I realized the time I spent, I would not at the time have cared; sports betting didn't allow me to care, because when I was in its grasp it was unwilling to let me go.

The effects of online sports betting complimented each other. Lack of money led to lack of motivation which caused lack of social interaction which all contributed to poor work ethic and which were all related to massive gambling time wastage.

Online sports betting caused me hit after hit and blow after blow. In the sense of winning, it was not a foe I could overcome. It proved to be formidable and insurmountable. In nearly all aspects of my life it brought me to my knees and then some. It was only bruised and battered by the effects of online sports betting, having reached the edge of financial despair, the edge of emotional anguish, that I realized the only way to beat this foe was to turn my back and walk away from it. And that's just what I did. It took 18 months of tragedy, losing everything financially and losing in so many other ways, before I finally ended my gambling days

I heard it said once a man learns from others' mistakes, a fool only from their own. I boarded my gambling ship without notice, without warning – I hope no one does the same.