

Season 2 Episode 5: Quitting Ain't Easy

Christina Cook: I mean, there's, well, there's very different stigma for gambling, right? A lot of what people say about gambling is it's a financial problem or a moral problem. It's bad choices, you know, all these different things. But in reality, it's an emotional problem and it really, really messes with how your brain and I'm not scientific, but there is evidence to this. But the behavior still changes the way that your brain analyzes rational thought, right?

Sara Gras: I'm Sara Gras and this is Episode 5 of Season 2 of Hearsay from the Sidelines, a show about the place where law, sports and culture intersect brought to you by Culture in Sports and Seton Hall Law School's Gaming, Hospitality, Entertainment and Sports Law program. This season is focused on the explosive growth of the online sports betting industry as legalization sweeps across the country and how it's impacting our relationships with our favorite past times.

One issue frequently raised as an objection to sports betting is gambling harms – specifically problem gambling and gambling addiction. This is a very real and undeniable social consequence of creating new opportunities for gambling. Supporters of sports wagering are quick to respond that people have always bet on sports, that black market sites have always existed, and that an addict will find a way to gamble whether it's legal or not. And while none of these statements is actually untrue, they ignore some important realities about high risk behaviors and addiction. The reality is that far more people will engage in a legal activity than an illegal one – it's more available and less stigmatized – particularly when it's portrayed as entertainment. And many people will do so without experiencing any serious negative consequences or developing addictive behaviors. But inevitably, for reasons that are not entirely well-understood, a certain percentage will develop an unhealthy attachment and dependency on the activity.

And this inarguable fact does not mean sports betting or any form of gambling should be illegal. In fact, it's probably far better for it to BE legal if we have any hope of regulating where and how it takes place. But I am not entirely sure that many in the industry are even willing to concede that betting on sports IS a high-risk activity. After a series of interviews with responsible gaming advocates and individuals involved both personally and professionally in the recovery space, I'm convinced that at a minimum, legislators must be far more intentional and mindful of how sports betting is marketed and how the financial burden of researching and treating gambling addiction adequately is allocated. And industry resistance to harm mitigation, which is sometimes framed as impeding legitimate operators to the benefit of the black and grey market, should be viewed with skepticism –

or maybe even called out for what I think it really is which is prioritizing profitability over social responsibility.

For those who have no lived experience with addiction, either their own or someone close to them, I think gambling addiction can be particularly difficult to understand. It's far easier to intellectually grasp the concept of an addiction to a substance that has chemical effects on the body. But what many people don't realize is that the brain can be just as affected by the chemicals it creates in response to activities and experiences. Of course, this doesn't happen to everyone – just like with substances – and research into who will be affected and why does not provide a definitive explanation.

I spoke at length with peer recovery specialist, Jeff Wasserman, who you heard from in Episode 1, and asked him to describe what characterizes problem gambling or gambling addiction, and how these behaviors or patterns of thinking are the same and also different from other types of addiction.

Jeff Wasserman: Like with any, you know, addiction, I would say that, you know, the fundamentals are the same with a gambling disorder or gambling addiction. And that is either the continuing engagement in the behavior of gambling, even though we know that it is causing harm. And also the many unsuccessful attempts to control or stop the addiction on one's own is also a principle of what is involved in a gambling addiction. Getting more specifically, for instance, GA, Gamblers Anonymous, has what's known as the 20 questions.

Someone that typically enters into a GA meeting the first time is presented with those 20 questions that involve their gambling behaviors. And according to that approach, if you answer yes to at least seven of those questions, then you are considered a compulsive gambler. The questions that I think are most telling in terms of a gambling problem is whether or not you when you win you continue to gamble in order to increase the winnings and when you lose whether or not whether you continue to gamble in order to chase your losses. know those two questions in my mind are really important and there are other questions involved that you not only get into the financial harm or the financial issues that people confront with gambling but also the emotional. talks about relationships and job performance or efficiency, whether or not you have a job or whether you're in school, the preoccupation of gambling and how it impacts other areas of one's life. Of course, the two questions that are most difficult for many to answer involve, number one, criminal behavior. Have you ever committed an illegal act to fund your gambling? And then of course the question involving suicidality, as have you ever thought about suicide in terms of your gambling space? So those are obviously the most severe in terms of harm and potential harm. But there are a lot of other questions that are involved.

And I would say, just from, you know, from my standpoint, if somebody has a gambling problem, they know that they have difficulty controlling their gambling, setting limits. They hide their gambling from loved ones, especially. They engage in gambling rather than in healthy activities. It affects one's social life, one's responsibilities. So those, again, those I think are common characteristics of somebody with any addiction, but obviously with gambling, the focus is more on, you know, the behavior as opposed to the use.

Sara Gras: One concern I have is that so much of what we see about sports betting casts it as a positive – a way of getting more “into” the game and the players, a way to up the excitement when watching sports. I asked Jeff whether he felt there was any tension between the positive effects of sports betting that get messaged, like fan engagement and expanded interest in sports, and the harmful behaviors some individuals develop.

Jeff Wasserman: For an individual, if they're going to continue the behavior despite whatever level of harm they're experiencing, yes, it's some sort of appeal that gambling gives them. So for instance, when you talk about positive effects, it may be unhealthy positive effects, but for sports gambling specifically, it's a skill -based form - so it involves the perception, the self -perception of, I have the skills to engage in this activity, which if I'm successful, will reap monetary rewards and also will just make me validate my own skills and my own knowledge of an activity typically people are passionate about. So, you know, those are two things.

In gambling, traditionally there's always been two types of gamblers. And I say that with the understanding that they're not clearly defined, but many of the characteristics overlap. But the two types of gamblers that people usually talk about are number one, the action gamblers. The people that gamble because of the action. Whether it's risk taking, whether it is just the action of the game itself, depending upon the form of gambling they're engaged in, or just the whole, I guess, space of gambling is for some people very, very, you know, exciting and gives them, you know, what we call a dopamine rush. And those are the people that really, you know, will walk into, let's say, a casino or going on online site and really feel pumped because they feel they're winners and they're going to win and they're going to get financial rewards. And again, they're going to get their skill set satisfied in terms of, you know, level of skills that they have. The other type of gambler is typically referred to as an escape gambler that uses gambling to escape from stresses in life because maybe there is something unfulfilled in their life that they want to escape from or, you know, to a large extent to numb themselves.

And sometimes it's hard for people to understand, well, how could you numb yourself? I mean, we usually think about that in terms of a drug or a substance that causes a numbing effect. And with gambling, it's obviously a behavior. But the behavior itself for people that

have a gambling disorder causes that same type of numbing effect. Once you're gambling, you are able to block out everything else that's going on in your life that's causing you stress or pain or anxiety. And while you're gambling, you are hyper-focused on what you're doing. And the gambling takes away during that period of time, you know, the thoughts that people have just in either dealing with life or especially for somebody with a gambling problem, usually most of the stressors relate to.

So it's rather ironic that you're seeking to gamble, you know, the activity that has caused you the stress and the problems, but you're also seeking to do it to take away those feelings. And it's very cyclical, obviously, and a very unhealthy cycle to be engaged in.

Sara Gras: The American Psychiatric Association defines gambling disorder as “a pattern of repeated and ongoing betting and wagering that continues despite creating multiple problems in several areas of an individual’s life.”¹ It’s difficult to know exactly how widespread gambling addiction is for many reasons. First, gambling disorder was not even recognized as a disease in the International Classification of Diseases until 1977 and didn’t appear in the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, until 1980.² Without diagnostic criteria, there would have been no clear standard by which individual behavior could be deemed within the range of normal or not. Second, with limited exceptions, gambling hasn’t really been widely available to large portions of the population until relatively recently. New York legalized betting on horse racing in 1913, and other states followed suit throughout the 40s and 50s. Nevada legalized commercial gaming in 1931, which led to the development of Las Vegas and Reno as gambling-focused tourist destinations. Montana implemented low limit gaming in 1973, and New Jersey legalized gaming in Atlantic City in 1976. The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, commonly known as IGRA, passed in 1988, which established categories of gambling which could be conducted on tribal lands and tribal casinos proliferated. Throughout the 1980’s and 90’s, there was a trickle of riverboat gaming and geographically limited casino gaming approved across the states.³ But only slightly more than a dozen states had legalized casino-style gaming off tribal land by the early 2010’s.⁴ And when an activity is largely not legal, or not legal where a person lives, they will be far less willing and able to seek help for harmful behavior tied to that activity. Stigma and fear

¹ *What is Gambling Disorder?*, AM. PSYCHIATRIC ASS’N, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gambling-disorder/what-is-gambling-disorder>, (last visited August 21, 2025).

² Heather Wardel et al., *The Lancet Public Health Commission on Gambling*, 9(11) LANCET PUB. HEALTH e950 (2024), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2468266724001671>.

³ George G. Fenich, *A Chronology of (Legal) Gaming in the U.S.*, 3 UNLV GAMING RSCH & REV. J. 65 (1996).

⁴ Marie-Cecile O. Tidwell et al., *Gambling Modes and State Gambling Laws: Changes from 1999 to 2011 and Beyond*, 19(1) Gaming L. Rev. Econ. 13 (2015), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5012365/> [<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/ggre.2014.1914>].

of criminal consequences is part of that reluctance. But lack of resources or awareness of those resources is another factor.

Today, commercial casino gambling is legal in 27 states and sports betting is legal in 40 states.⁵ And while I hear the argument that people have always gambled, regardless of legality, activities that can be done above-board by anyone of legal age are less risky, thus more commercially viable, and will inevitably become more available. This has also led to the generation of more data. In 2024, The Lancet Public Health Commission published a review and meta-analysis of gambling research from across the world that included 299 studies looking at specific gambling activities.⁶ Based on this review, the authors estimated that as many as 80 million adults worldwide experience gambling disorder.⁷

However, research into the impact of legal sports betting on public health is really in its infancy. Cole Wogoman, Director of Public Relations at NCPG, shared some of the interesting insights that their organizational research and advocacy has uncovered over the last few years.

Cole Wogoman: Sure, so I can speak a little bit about that, but I'll start with this, which is there's probably a lot less research than what you think. The federal government doesn't give a dime to prime gambling research or treatment or anything like that. And so we fund as the National Council, our own research to the extent that we can. We had a major study in 2018 and 2021, and then we have it coming out again at the end probably end of October 2024. So every three years that's called the NGAGE study, which stands for National Gambling Attitudes and Gambling Experiences. So I just wanted to set the floor there so you understand that it's not like we're have reams and reams of data. There's not really people, know, people have only just started looking into this with sports betting. It's not like we are looking at 30 years of sports betting data and all that.

So with that, with that said, our NGAGE study, the last one that came out was 2021, showed a 30% increase in risk for people developing a problem. And it's really focused, the risk seems to be concentrated on young men, which is a change from the past necessarily. So before sports betting was legalized, I don't have the exact rate, but it wasn't the case where was young men who were necessarily developing gambling problem. It was usually older, middle-aged. We don't only know that from our study, but we operate 1-800 - GAMBLER, the National Gambling Helpline, and our state chapters operate their own state helplines, and they can look and see the demographics of who's calling. And it has gotten

⁵ State of Play Map, AM. GAMING ASS'N., <https://www.americangaming.org/research/state-of-play-map/> (last visited Aug. 15, 2025).

⁶ Wardel et al., *supra* note 2.

⁷ *Id.* at e951.

younger, and it's male. So that's one thing that's interesting, is not just that we think there's more risk, but that the people at risk have shifted.

Sara Gras: The Lancet Commission report highlights the impact of technology on gambling as an industry, specifically how it has made gaming accessible in more locations and in more formats – the report cites prop bets as an example of this.⁸ But digital marketing is also highlighted as a factor that has transformed the gaming industry – notable especially because of the outsized impact advertising appears to have on the propensity of young people to gamble, particularly sports fans.⁹ Marketing, specifically to the youth market, was another topic that Cole and I discussed.

Cole Wogoman: I think it goes, there's what you said, which is now it's on your mobile phone in 30 states or whatever. can access gambling very easily, not just sports betting, but also seven states have legalized high casino. So that's going to skew younger people who are, you know, know how to function with their iPhone and how to access it. But as I think you were getting at with sports betting, it kind of goes hand in hand with the college experience. I went to Notre Dame for undergrad, so that's a big college football school. Sports betting wasn't legal when I was there, but now it is legal in Indiana. It is legal on a mobile phone. And so if you're a big sports fan, you're going to be drawn towards that. A, there's a bunch of advertising during games. I'm not calling out college, but NFL and MLB, all those leagues have sponsorships with these. And so as a young man, you'd be bombarded if you're watching sports. But also, you might think that you can beat the system, so to speak. I let's just say I watch Notre Dame football every weekend and I feel I know the players and I know what the coach likes to call. And so then when I get drawn to betting on it because I think I know more than what the operators know or the bookies know, whatever you want to call them, the line setters know. And so there is that.

So one thing that's interesting is with almost every form of gambling, the lower income and less educated you are, the more likely you are to develop a problem or be gambling. Sports betting in the United States is actually the opposite. Higher income, more educated people gamble more on it. And we think that's, just to reiterate what I said, two reasons. One, you're more educated and you think I can outsmart this system. I know how to come up with my own algorithm or whatever. But two, I went to university where sports is big. And so I watched sports. So that's a really interesting fact because it's different, not just from other forms of gambling, but internationally. So if you go to the UK, you're not going to find

⁸ *Id.* at e953.

⁹ *Id.* at e954.

higher rates of sports betters based on the level of education or income like you do in the United States.

Sara Gras: I want to emphasize that the harmful impact of gambling disorder on the lives of the individuals who experience it goes way beyond financial loss. Economic harm is certainly a part of the picture and is undeniably serious. But impacted individuals may find themselves in financial situations so dire that their employment and housing stability is impacted, as well as plans for retirement in the future.¹⁰ But problem gambling is also linked to suicidality, substance use disorders, and breakdowns of familial relationships, as well as family and intimate partner violence,¹¹ making it as much of a public health issues as other forms of addiction.

The challenge is that, while gambling addiction can have the same devastating impact, it can't necessarily be treated the same way as other substance use disorders. As Jeff mentioned, there are similarities, but there are also some differences. And accessing specialized treatment often requires resources – something that many people struggling with this particular addiction don't have.

I was fortunate to connect with Christina Cook, a recovery advocate and founder of The Broke Girl Society podcast, and co-host of The Bet Free Life. Christina's work focuses on breaking the stigma of gambling harm and spreading awareness of hope and help to those who are struggling – particularly women.

Christina Cook: Yeah, I think, you know, there's this blanket thing where like addiction is addiction is addiction, right? We can all connect on kind of that loss of power over ourselves, right? When we're addicted to something, whether it's substance, alcohol, gambling, sex, whatever spending, whatever, you know, people can become addicted to, like there's that whole, that compulsion, that loss of kind of control, those types of things that really, we all, anybody who struggled with addiction of any type can connect on. But I think there is a very different outlook. I mean, there's, well, there's very different stigma for gambling, right? A lot of what people say about gambling is it's a financial problem or a moral problem. It's bad choices, you know, all these different things. But in reality, it's an emotional problem and it really, really messes with how your brain and I'm not scientific, but there is evidence to this. But the behavior still changes the way that your brain analyzes rational thought, right? So it does do, you know, changes us mentally when we struggle with addiction in any capacity, right?

¹⁰ *Id.* at e972.

¹¹ *Id.* at e973.

But gambling addiction is very specific in the fact that there's challenges that we have to kind of overcome that maybe somebody dealing with alcohol or substance abuse doesn't necessarily need to really focus on. And I'm not saying they don't, and I'm not trying to generalize, but for gambling, you know, you've got, you've got the emotional work, right? The internal issues that kind of contribute to the behavior. And then you've got the financial aspect, right? Because money for me, and I can only speak to my own experience, but money for me almost became monopoly money, right? I lost all sense of value, respect for gambling money. Normal, expenditure money was considered gambling money. So I would gamble my money and borrow to, to cover just my basic necessities so that I could continue living, you know, those kinds of things. So it's really one of those things where the treatment looks different, you know, because you're having to maybe touch on different parts that you don't necessarily have to in alcohol or substance abuse. And, you know, and they have their own specific things that need to be worked on. I think any addiction is core, at core, emotional or internal. And then you build out and you...you correct the patterns and things that had changed in that.

As far as like treatment, you know, providers and things like that, there's amazing services. There's a website called gamblersandrecovery.com and they have meetings 24 -7 all over the world. So you can get into a meeting at any time almost, you know, and then to kind of pare back to your question of what happens when you call like 1 -800 -GAMBLER or the GA hotline or your state's hotline, you're gonna get somebody who's gonna be trained in how to talk to you. In most cases, my GA experience wasn't as great, but in a lot of the state hotlines and of course Win 800 Gambler, you're gonna have trained people who are trained to navigate you to the best resources available. And that's gonna really look different state to state because there is no federal funding for treatment.

And that really messes with the programs. So everything is dictated on a state level. So there's a lot of great states who like New York before sports betting came on, they really put a lot of resources and things in place to gear up for what they knew was gonna happen. And that's where the volume of the call lines were going to increase. And so you've got really great states like Minnesota, Louisiana, New York, a lot of Massachusetts, you've got a lot of great states who really fund problem gambling resources and you can usually get free therapy. You can get, they usually do group sessions or retreats or peer programs. You know, they have all these fantastic programs like Minnesota and Louisiana both have inpatient treatment for gambling at no cost to their state residents. And that's amazing.

But then you have states that have tremendous gambling, like Oklahoma, the state that I live in. We have 143 to 146, I don't know where they're all at building -wise, but that's how many casinos we have in this state. And we have very limited resources. We do offer free

therapy for the state if you don't have commercial insurance. So it's like they're gonna go off your commercial insurance first and then offer treatment if you don't have that option. And then we have kind of a dwindling GA program. We have a decent one in Tulsa and then kind of, I think everything is kind of rebuilding from the pandemic. So I don't want to be too hard on that, but you've got like Chicagoland area, East coast areas, they have tremendous GA programs with intergroups and all these different things. And I think when you hear the GAs like go to GA, but a lot of states don't have that kind of buildup in their programs. And so it's really trying to find out what resources are available in your state. The NCPG website, you can find it through the 1-800-GAMBLER website as well. They have a pretty good list of state affiliates that will connect you to resources in those states. But, you know, it's pretty spread out and it's not fairly laid out for sure.

Sara Gras: As Christina points out, addiction treatment is a bit of a mixed bag, often dependent on where you live, as well as your financial and professional situation. And when compared to treatment options for substance use disorders, resources for treatment of problem gambling are lacking. Medicaid currently covers a significant portion of substance use disorder treatments for eligible individuals, including inpatient and outpatient treatment, therapy, and medication.¹² While \$2 billion in federal grant money was available to the states for treatment of substance use disorder through SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, there is currently no federal funding allocated to treatment of problem gambling. The National Association of Administrators for Disordered Gambling Services (NAADGS) did a survey of publicly funded problem gambling services in the US in 2021 and published an update to those numbers in 2024. Across all states, there was \$134 million allocated for problem gambling services in 2023 – which is up significantly from the prior year's number of \$105 million, and significantly more than the \$44 million allocated in 2006.¹³ But this number is a little skewed by the more than \$22 million allocated by Massachusetts, a state with slightly more than 7 million people. In contrast, the state of Oklahoma, where Christina lives, allocated only \$1 million for their population of 4 million.¹⁴ So its not a surprise really that much of what individuals seeking treatment find is limited to support groups and perhaps a small number of peer recovery counselors.

¹² Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy Center for Children and Families, *How Medicaid Helps People with Substance Use Disorders*, <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2025/02/19/how-medicaid-helps-people-with-substance-use-disorders/>, (last visited Aug. 21, 2025).

¹³ Problem Gambling Solutions, *2023 Budget Update of Publicly Funded Problem Gambling Services in the United States*, <https://naadgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2023-Budget-Update-of-Publicly-Funded-Problem-Gambling-Services-USA.pdf>, (last visited Aug. 21, 2025).

¹⁴ *Id.*

I have a very close family member who is in recovery so I'm very familiar with the peer support model that Gamblers Anonymous, which is based on the model of Alcoholics Anonymous, offers. As someone who has been to both AA and Al-Anon meetings, I have my own observations and opinions about why, despite being helpful for many, these meetings aren't a great experience for others. I was curious why Christina felt GA was not a good fit for her.

Christina Cook: Yeah, so the GA program was really helpful for me in the beginning because it gave me some understanding of what was going on with me. It gave me some validation that I wasn't alone in this, but my first meeting was a room full of men and who were maybe 20, 30 years older than me who had recovery, you know, 10 plus years of recovery. A few of them had less recovery time, but it was still a room full of men and though they were welcoming and warm, I was struggling with so much more than just the addiction, right? I was struggling with the aftermath or the consequences of the addiction. And so like I would, I would just be a crying mess in this meeting and a woman would come in occasionally, but it was never like this consistent thing.

And so of course they were just like, they're there, you know, like I was, I was making them uncomfortable, I think, because I was just really struggling. My marriage was really falling apart. I was just trying to understand all the emotions that I was feeling because that's the thing when we enter recovery, we have to feel the feels, we can't just ignore them. And so I was doing my best to be stoic and, you know, but this meeting was a great mile marker for me, as far as like giving me something to commit to, give me understanding. But I knew that I needed more. I wanted to talk to another woman who had experienced what I was experiencing and to let me know that it was going to be okay, that, you know, all these things were going wrong, but there's going to be a way forward. And though those guys were great, they weren't that type of nurturer. Like I needed to know I was going to be okay. And there, you know, we were in 45 minute meeting and 30 minutes of that was the yellow book. There was nothing outside of that. And so it was like, I knew I needed connection. I needed something more. So I started looking on social media and I wasn't finding women talking about this.

Sara Gras: Christina's experience closely mirrors my own observations about the peer support recovery model. This is why I get so frustrated when people say, there's help for people suffering from addiction, but can only give those who reach out a list of free recovery meetings. I have been present for a loved one's long and hard-fought journey from rock bottom to sustained recovery – and there's no way it would have happened with only the support of other individuals in recovery. These meetings are run by volunteers with no designated leader or system of accountability. Meeting format and overall tone vary wildly,

depending on where and when they take place, as well as who happens to be in the room. There's likely no awareness of anyone's co-occurring conditions or extenuating circumstances, at least not by the group, and there's no way to really gauge progress – other than abstinence from the problem behavior. So while I can appreciate peer support as a piece of the treatment protocol, there has to be so much more for most people to stay in recovery long-term.

Addiction is simultaneously a widely experienced, but also deeply individual condition. Those who are seeking help may need and benefit from many of the same interventions, but healing doesn't look the same for everyone. Whether it's because of differences in gender, age, class, cultural or racial identity, or simply lived experience, successful treatment options are rarely one-size-fits-all.

Christina Cook: I think finding more and more women specific resources would be helpful. There's not a lot of us out there doing this work and I always encourage anybody if somebody reaches out to me, they're like, I'm thinking of starting a podcast. I'm like, do it. I'll help you, whatever. I think the problem is that Gambler's Anonymous is such a well-known treatment for this. With therapy, the most common thing that, that people get told go to a GA meeting. And there's, like I said, there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. GA has been a program that's been in since the 50s and it's helped thousands of people. And if it's a program that works for you, great. But here's the thing, a woman who's been harmed at the hands of a man or has real trauma in that space, to say that the only other place for you to get help or resources is a room full of men, like, we're not doing that person any type of service, right? We're just saying the only other option is this. So now not only are they trying to work through the trauma of their past, the trauma of their gambling, the trauma of all this stuff, they're now saying, well, if this is the only thing, now this is a whole nother trauma I've got to work through and do this. And so I think that that's a piece of it.

The fact that women, I'm not going to be somebody that says men and women gamble for different reasons, but they do a lot of times. There's different like men are a lot of times action about action or, you know, that kind of emotion where a lot of women are more about escapism. And so there's a little bit of difference there and, you know, acknowledging that, but not only that, you've got mothers, you've got wives, you've got, you know, women that care for their elderly parents. You know, you've got caretakers of the home. You've got women who have different responsibilities a lot of times. And I think that those needs need to be met as well as the one thing that nobody ever talks about with women in this space. We have hormones and that really can impact what recovery looks like for us. You know, one week we might be like, man, I got this. I'm, I'm, you know, figuring this out. I've got this. And the next week it's like, your emotions are a little bit different

depending on where you are in your cycle and you're like, I can't do this anymore, you know, and so I hear women who are like, I can get two weeks or three weeks and then it just crashes and I'm like, well, are you tracking your cycle? And this is for women who are within that cycle range, you know, and it may look different for like empty nesters or women and menopause, like that's a whole other trigger as well.

And so it's like really having that understanding of that we are emotional creatures. This is emotional disorder and having to navigate that when a lot of times you're in a space full of men, there's not room to talk about those type of things. It's uncomfortable for them. And for me to really heal and really create this life, I have to be able to feel safe in the space. I have to be able to understand my emotions, talk about my emotions and be around people who can help me navigate that in a very comfortable environment. To me, that's a big key in how we stay connected with recovery.

Sara Gras: There is still so much researchers and clinicians don't know about gambling addiction, that even those who have experienced it don't necessarily know because there are so many variables. Sports betting is a different experience than sitting down at a slot machine or poker table – and those who struggle with addiction will face challenges and unknowns in their recovery that others who also identify as gambling addicts may not. I asked Jeff whether he thought the increasing ubiquity of betting on an activity that so many teens and young adults today have grown up doing, may have a negative effect on how younger generations feel about sports and being a fan. And he had a really interesting take on it - he shared some insights I hadn't considered, like the fact that younger people in recovery have to deal with the reality that abstinence, which is a traditional approach to addiction treatment, can isolate them from their social group, creating new issues.

Jeff Wasserman: Absolutely, that's again a really good point. you know, you know, I guess what I'm going to share is based upon what I have seen in my support group that as I said is attended by a lot of younger sports betters. So for instance, if you have an, if somebody is going to adopt an abstinent, abstinence -based approach to recovery, then they know that they can't gamble. Now, for somebody that has a gambling addiction that's sports betting focused, many of them now are faced with another hurdle, and that is not being able to watch sports, because for some, just watching sports is triggering and that will greatly impair their abstinence. And sports, especially, again, I don't want to put in categories, but obviously a lot of young males and females alike, but I'm looking at young males that I see, their whole lives in that stage in life is revolved sports and their friends and their friend circle. And their friend circle are typically have the same interests as them. They're sports fans. They're passionate. Some, I would say most, and I've spoken to some that say they all gamble. Some have a problem, some don't.

But if they're serious about committing to an abstinence -based recovery approach, then they're saying, well, now I can't watch sports. can't gamble. I can't even be in my friend's chat room because they're all talking about sports. I can't hang out with my friends because they're all talking about sports and gambling. And now I came into this recovery space, you know, a significant reason is because I felt isolated. I felt like all I wanted to do is gamble. So my social life took a backseat and I wasn't connecting with my friends because I was gambling. And when I was connecting with my friends, it was just about gambling. And now they're faced with, wow, I'm going to be isolated again. And that's a really, again, a difficult road to navigate.

Now, what I share with them is, know, there are, first of all, there's, there's a group of people in recovery from a gambling addiction that, that was sports betting focused that have gotten or are getting reintroduced to being a fan again. And they're not triggered. In fact, it's helping them gain their self -worth and their passion that they had for pure sports, for the game. And that's great. But for those who are triggered by watching sports or reading or listening to sports radio, I would say, well, don't look at it the same way you look at not being able to gamble. Recovery is fluid. It's a process. And what you feel today, you might not feel next week or next month, and certainly you're not going to feel it next year. So try it. Give up watching games for 30 days. Whatever you think you're able to do, see how you feel after the 30 days. Then maybe introduce it slowly, watching sports again, and see how you do. You may be surprised, it may not be as triggering. If it is, give it another 30 days, take it in increments. It's much more palatable to approach it that way than to say, you can't watch sports anymore. Because that could trigger a whole new set of mental health issues.

Sara Gras: So as Jeff says, addressing addictive behavior does not necessarily mean cutting out sports forever. But maybe for a while, depending on the person. And how many young sports fans go into sports betting thinking, this could take me to a place where my relationship with watching sports, going to sporting events, even talking about sports, could be changed in some significant way forever? I certainly don't have the expertise or time to fully address gambling addiction, even if I narrowed it just to sports betting, over the course of this season, but I'm going to stick with this issue for just one more episode. In Episode 6, I will be going deeper into the concept of Responsible Gaming – specifically how those working in that space envision it, how it has been operationalized by the gaming industry, and how individuals in recovery perceive those measures.

Hearsay from the Sidelines is a collaboration of Seton Hall Law School and Culture in Sports; research and writing by Sara Gras with the help of my amazing research assistants, Emily Raedisch and Lauren Vuolo; music by my son, Robert; produced by Sara Gras and

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