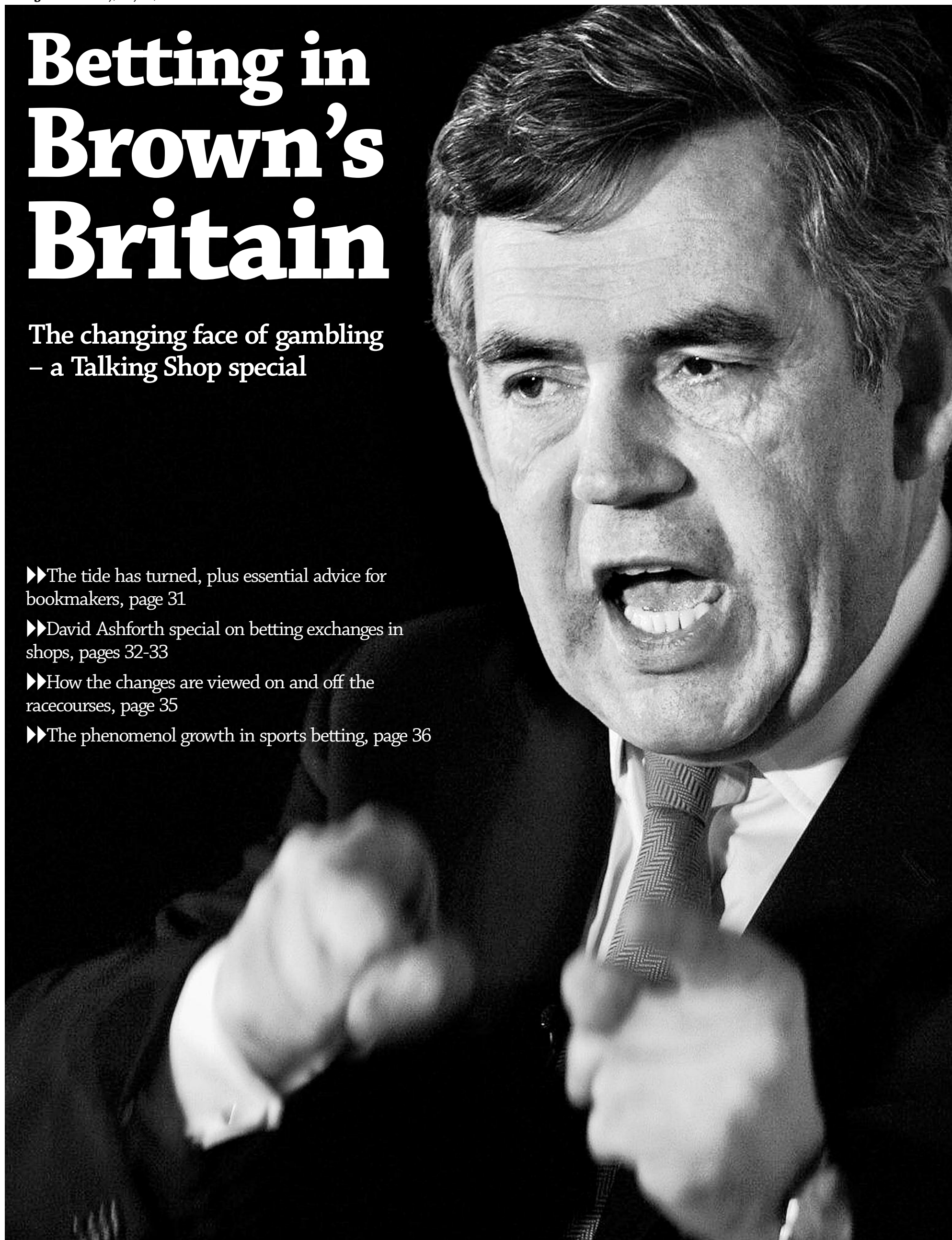


Betting in Brown's Britain

The changing face of gambling – a Talking Shop special

- ▶▶ The tide has turned, plus essential advice for bookmakers, page 31
- ▶▶ David Ashforth special on betting exchanges in shops, pages 32-33
- ▶▶ How the changes are viewed on and off the racecourses, page 35
- ▶▶ The phenomenal growth in sports betting, page 36



Are you betting blind?

TURF TV is the only betting shop channel showing ALL the races from Ascot, Bangor Chester, Goodwood, Newbury & York.

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TURF TV

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▶▶ Talking Shop special

It's too late Mr Brown, the gambling tide has turned



Alex Hankin
on the changing face
of gambling in
Brown's Britain

I'M A problem gambler. The problem is I'm not gambling enough, and somewhere in Britain there's a community action group, an Olympic hopeful, a hospital ward, that is feeling the pinch of my level-headedness.

I know I'm not pulling my weight. I don't stake high enough, or often enough. Worst of all I pick and choose, so that my contributions are minimal to the great pool of free money that governments have been wallowing in since the Tories launched the gambling boom with the National Lottery in 1994.

My gambling's a problem, because in a public spending budget shored up by regressive taxation of various shades of inequity – VAT, council tax, duties on alcohol, tobacco, petrol – the punting 'tax' is a very special plum.

The highest rate of income tax is 40 per cent. The Lottery 'taxes' its players 50p in the £1, whether they're a Beckham or on benefits. Yet people will literally queue out the door to pay their whack, with those least able to af-

ford it among the keenest to cough up. The state's 'slice' from the rest of the £50billion domestic gambling industry is less obviously gluttonous, but it's a big old cake, getting bigger all the time. We've already been taxed on the stake money once, and we're still loving it!

No wonder the 2005 Gambling Act sought to keep Britain punting happily, and hard. Get the whole world doing their betting over here, too. We'll be able to afford schools and all sorts. Everybody's smiling, aren't they?

Well, not quite everybody. Uncle Gordon's not amused.

Admittedly, it's hard to tell what will be the practical upshot of the anti-gambling vibe emanating from the new PM. In politics, even the most explicit statement of intent is considered to be about as binding as a tent-pole marriage proposal on a stag night in Tiger Bay. But last week's announcement on super casinos gave us a reminder that there was once thought to be a social and moral dimension to such things. The recollection came like a slap round the chops with a wet dodo.

Once upon a time, gamblers were disreputable types drawn largely from the highest and lowest ranks, while the mass of decent folk busied themselves with honest work and tutting. Gambling, homosexuality, bra-lessness – all knew their place, beyond the pale.

Now the morality of gambling seems as dead a topic as . . . what, sex before marriage? Taking a sickie? Padding an insurance claim? All those results were in

years back, folks. Me-first took its ball and went home.

What happened to the dissenting voices on gambling? The official arbiter of right and wrong, the state-sponsored Church, chucked out taking hard lines on matters of personal morality for a start. Too off-putting for the punters. Hard to keep a straight face, too, when the Bishop's declared himself "open-minded" about the literal Resurrection, and takes a chauffeur-driven Daimler to bless the troops.

As to changing society? Thankfully, despite isolated explosions of evidence to the contrary, belief in the afterlife has typically rather mellowed a chap on that front. The upshot: God the friendly cloud of gas says 'Go for it!'

The would-be social engineers – that peculiar mob of know-besters drawn from Right and Left – have simply been busying themselves elsewhere, putting warning signs on bananas and trying to get us to pack in the fags. Even the loudest anti-gambling public voices of recent years – *The Daily Mail* and *Mail On Sunday* newspapers – are not sufficiently outraged to miss the trick of running their own gambling websites.

And, really, what's the big deal? Gambling brings misery into some lives, a hell made ever more convenient and accessible by the day, but it is just a drop in the barrel of tears borne of, say, the consumer culture. Will the government be blocking the building of shopping centres, as well as super casinos? Banning M & S from advertising its beguiling puds? Killing the Teletubbies? Arrest-



Britain is now a nation of punters since the introduction of the National Lottery in 1994

ing Lawrence Llewellyn Bowen for incitement to decorate?

Probably not. But I'd argue that as far as gambling is concerned it really is going to take something of that stamp, a wholesale cultural revolution, to turn the tide. Nothing less than a complete overhaul of our value system will suit, because we are now, top to toe, a nation of committed gamblers.

The idea of taking a punt, landing the big win, is utterly ingrained, and Middle England leads the way.

Thanks to a post-war cultural and economic shift relating to home ownership, whole generations of decent working folk copped for massive 33-1 shots on the houses they bought in the 60s and 70s, and they've got a taste for it now. Money for nothing. More money than most of them earned working in the same period.

Now you can't move for 'housing ladder' propaganda, and it's all about buying short, selling

long, the amorality of markets and landing a succession of life-changing punts.

Punting promises to deliver where Technology failed us. We were all supposed to be working smarter, not harder. So far we've traded in job security and got longer hours and wi-fi enabled tumours in return. So now we're all banking on 'working luckier'.

Thatcherism began the celebration of entrepreneurship as the must-have quality, for individuals and society – the greedy hero, the gambler, for whom 'an honest day's pay for an honest day's work' is the worst sort of defeatist twaddle. Morality and society don't register here. It doesn't matter what you do – as long as you get away with it and your personal payout is massively disproportionate to those around you. Then you've won.

And the winning's the thing. Look at the winners in our society. Either skilled gamblers or

lucky mugs who somehow hit the jackpot – hedge-fund managers, entrepreneurs, footballers, celebrities, royalty – without a moral qualm in their heads regarding the almighty touch they've landed.

With hard work in itself stripped of its virtue and its rewards, and most off us staring up from the wrong end of some unscaleable pyramid or other, is it any wonder that the nation's thoughts turn to having a tickle?

"It could be you . . . but let's face facts, it won't be, so why not buy a scratchcard?"

Deal Or No Deal, the fruities, *Bar-gain Hunt*, Euro Millions rollover, prize draws in every packet of crisps, the postcode lottery, the parking space lottery, the seat on the train lottery, the genetic lottery . . . we're punting and we can't stop, millions of us trusting to luck, and one more or less casino won't change that.

Unless you really have got a better idea, Gordon?

There's no time to delay if you want to carry on bookmaking

Howard Wright
with a message to
bookmakers from the
Gambling Commission

TIME is fast running out before the new Gambling Act 2005 comes into force on September 1, and the Gambling Commission is anxious to give everyone a fair chance to continue trading.

The main message is clear: if you have not yet applied for an operating or personal licence, get your application in as soon as

possible. Applications submitted later have less chance of being determined by the deadline date.

Other general points the Commission is making are:

▶▶ Existing operators will also need to make advance applications for premises licence before July 30 to the appropriate local licensing authority to ensure 'grandfather' rights.

▶▶ Anyone not licensed by September 1 or not having continuation rights will have to close their business while an application is determined, and can only start when a licence is granted.

▶▶ Although the licence application pack looks involved, most applicants have found the forms relatively straightforward, once they start compiling the information required. It is mainly a matter of setting aside the time to answer the questions.

▶▶ Bookmakers operating at point-to-point races should apply for a new operating licence at least two months in advance of running a betting business again after September 1, 2007.

▶▶ Anyone who provides gambling facilities and is unsure about the need for a new licence should

contact the Gambling Commission inquiry team on 0121 230 6666.

The Commission makes the point that unless a bookmaker is classed as a small-scale operator, a personal licence is required by the business. A small-scale operator is generally one with three or fewer people in a qualifying position as named on the operating licence application.

Those requiring a personal licence might include: chief executive officer, managing director, executive chairman, chief operating officer, operations director,

sectoral MD, finance director, marketing director, commercial development director, compliance director, IT director, and director or trustee responsible for lotteries.

The Commission's website, gamblingcommission.gov.uk, contains all relevant updated information.

The Association of British Bookmakers, which has recorded an increase in members as the deadline approaches, makes a similar plea – don't delay: this is a serious situation, and those whose applications have not been lodged

with the Gambling Commission by the deadline could be in serious difficulty on September 1.

Assistance is available on the association's website abb.uk.com.

Further information can be gleaned from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport website, culture.gov.uk.

Policy documents for premises licences applications can be found on the appropriate local authority website.

▶▶ **Off-course and on-course views on the Gambling Act, page 35**

▶▶ Talking Shop special



David Ashforth
reports on betting
exchanges in shops

Backing and laying fast becoming the high street fashion

BETTING exchanges have revolutionised Britain's betting market. Through their influence on starting prices, they have affected every betting shop in Britain and Ireland, yet most betting shop customers have never used an exchange.

Do betting exchanges have a future in Britain and Ireland's 9,500 betting shops? Or will they remain a largely online operation, their customers seated at home in front of their computers?

Henry Spurway believed that exchanges could thrive on the high street. In 2003, in Edinburgh, he opened the first of what he expected to be many Easibet internet cafes.

Use of the cafe's computer terminals was initially free, although later a £20 charge was introduced. Easibet also received a share of the commission payments made by its customers to Betfair. Spurway hoped to open 100 outlets.

Instead, in February 2005, fol-

lowing a dispute with Betfair over commission, the Edinburgh shop was closed without any others having opened. Easibet's failure reinforced a widespread belief that betting shops had their place, and exchanges theirs, but the place was not the same, nor the customers.

In May 2006, when Better opened its first betting shop in London, terminals were installed to enable customers to access Betdaq.

Now Better has 20 shops and 40 terminals, but the service is different from that used by Betdaq's home-based clients.

The terminals are similar to fixed odds betting terminals, only accept cash, and issue tickets. Customers are not betting online and the odds they see on the screen have a margin built in that is similar to SP margins.

Ian Hogg, Better's chief executive, explained: "The terminals are linked to Betdaq and customers have the option of backing or laying, and a choice of whether the odds are in decimals or fractions.

"We are trying to provide more choice for traditional betting shop customers. We put a margin on the exchange price because customers have the use of the shop, which has SIS and Turf TV, and *Racing Posts* on the wall.

"The terminals account for about six per cent of our slipage and the people who use them love them, but there is a certain amount of conservatism among shop customers. I think it will become more important over time and, if the system of having one SP price in all shops comes to an end, I could use the prices from the terminals."

Better's approach reflects the relatively high cost of delivering services through high street shops, which helps to explain why there are few betting exchange shops and why Betfair and Betdaq have not sought to establish their own chain of shops.

Betfair has agreements with eight exchange shops. Tony Calvin, Betfair's senior press officer, said: "We have not invested in, nor do we have any input into, these shops or how they are run, but we do have commercial agreements in place with them, based on commission." The precise details are confidential.

Two of the eight shops are in Edinburgh, with others in Leeds, Beverley, Lymington and London (Highgate). The remaining shops, in Coventry and Rumney, on the outskirts of Cardiff, are run by bookmaker John Lovell.



I NDEPENDENT B ETTING A DJUDICATION S ERVICE



The year 2007 is one of major legislative change.

Adjudication - will be the way forward for dispute resolution in the Gambling Industry

What is Adjudication?

Adjudication is a method for resolving disputes that avoids the delay and expense of arbitration and recourse to the Courts, but at the same time enables an expert view to be taken of the complex rules that typically govern gambling disputes.

The adjudication services offered by IBAS have been available since 1999, and are widely respected in the industry and by the Gambling Commission.

How does it work?

In the event that a customer is dissatisfied as to the manner a particular bet has been settled, the operator and customer will attempt to resolve the dispute internally in accordance with published procedures.

In the event that the customer is not satisfied as a result, the dispute can be referred for adjudication to IBAS. The independent IBAS Panel will consider written representations from each party as to the facts of the case, carefully apply the relevant rules and terms of the bet, and make a recommendation as to the outcome of the dispute.

The adjudicator's conclusion will be communicated to the parties and is considered binding.

IBAS requirements

The 2005 Gambling Act requires all licensed operators to have a written dispute resolution procedure, which must include access to an independent dispute resolution body in the event of efforts to successfully resolve the dispute failing resulting in a genuine deadlock between the parties.

IBAS offers independent dispute resolution that satisfies the requirements of the Act, and will accept disputes for resolution from licensed gambling operators who have registered with the IBAS scheme signed up with and subscribed to the IBAS service, and have agreed to abide with its terms and conditions.

For more information about IBAS visit www.IBAS-uk.com or call 0207 881 2690.



‘These aren’t casual punters – they’re like City traders’

VISITING the John Lovell Betting Exchange Office near Cardiff is an eye-opening experience. On an afternoon when the sole race meeting was at Catterick, the shop was virtually full, and it was no ordinary shop.

Traditional over-the-counter betting is available, but accounts for less than two per cent of business. The shop is geared to the needs of Betfair users. There are 24 terminals, each with an adjacent screen showing SIS, or other channels. The clientele is exclusively male, but also exclusively young, most in their early 20s.

Lovell, a bookmaker who pioneered on-course computerised betting in Britain, enjoys the unfamiliar experience of hoping that his customers win a lot of money.

Lovell said: “I was interested in Henry Spurway’s idea, and went to see an exchange shop in Beverley. I always thought the con-

John Lovell: “Older people aren’t quick enough and don’t last. Young ones speak a Betfair language”

cept would work and opened this shop in May 2005. Its success depends on having successful punters because the people here are not casual punters, betting for fun, they are betting to win, like City traders. I do all I can to help them win, by providing the best, fastest connections, one-click software, and the best supply of pictures.”

Lovell’s son, David, has played a big part in attracting customers, and leads a mutual help system, with customers learning from each other.

Lovell snr says: “I’ve learnt that you need young people. Older people just aren’t quick enough, and don’t last. Young ones speak a Betfair language. It is a different era.”

The players here are very quick on the keyboard, betting largely in-running. David Lovell, backing and laying, in and out rapidly, said: “It is more like playing a computer game than reading a race, and sometimes involves trying to capitalise on the major changes that can take place towards the end of a race.”

Collectively, the shop’s customers have over half a million pounds in Betfair accounts, and some are clearly very successful. Brett Lloyd, at 36 probably the oldest in the shop, said: “It has changed my life. I never used to bet in-running but, with SIS right next to the terminal, I have been very successful. I started last September and now have a new apartment on Cardiff bay and a new car.”

A 19-year-old Cardiff University student, who asked to remain anonymous, said: “I started almost a year ago and have won over £100,000, largely backing horses in-running. I have been taught by David Lovell – we help each other. It needs discipline and patience. Having SIS right next to the terminal is a big help.”

Dan Kaye, 23, with a law degree, gave up a job with Coca-Cola to concentrate on exchange betting, despite not having previously been a betting shop or racecourse customer. “I struggled for the first few months,” he said, “but have since done really well. I am making three times

what I was earning before.”

They are a friendly group of bright young men, who Lovell charges up to £30 a day for the use of the facilities. He also has a commission-sharing agreement with Betfair. Yet this is not necessarily a vision of the future, with hundreds of similar shops about to open.

Lovell said: “It was not an instant success, and my shop in Coventry has not yet been successful. You need a nucleus of successful players.”

There is no doubt about the attractiveness of the facilities Lovell offers to exchange users, particularly having an SIS screen next to each terminal, but it remains to be seen whether it is a business model viable on a national scale.

Lovell’s shop is not in a prime, high street location, where the costs would be higher. For the big bookmakers, offering shop customers ready access to unadjusted exchange prices could simply divert business from more profitable, higher-margin SP bets.

David Ashforth



17-18 October
2007

the

BETTING SHOW

Hall 9
NEC
Birmingham, UK



Europe’s only show for betting professionals moves to Hall 9 at the NEC

The Betting Show’s new location makes way for an unprecedented demand from new and existing exhibitors to show case their products and services to the entire betting industry. With an increase in show floor space the exhibition is now larger than ever, reflecting the expanding market both in the UK and Eire and mainland Europe.

Drawing on both the traditional and technological elements of the industry, the show floor will become the European hub for all betting professionals.

The show will be supported by a seminar programme aimed at informing visitors and exhibitors about up-to-date topics key to the betting industry.

Seminar topics are set to include subjects such as European changes in law and licensing conditions and codes of practice within the UK, which come into effect in September. In support of the new licensing conditions, the **Gambling Commission** will also be taking a stand at the show, where they will be available to answer any questions you may have, in a confidential environment.

Free Industry Seminars:

This year’s seminars will focus on the hot topics affecting the bookmaker.

Issues to be covered in the four sessions will include:

- Licensing Conditions & Codes of Practice – current status and practical implications for the bookmaker
- Sale of the Tote to Racing
- Impact of TurfTV on the bookmaker

Networking Events:

Away from the show floor, specially organised networking events allow you to entertain clients prior to the show and meet with fellow professionals in an informal environment.

Golf Classic 2007

Taking place the day before the show opens at the world famous Brabazon Course at the Belfry. Includes a full round of golf, a prize giving ceremony and gala dinner.

For more information contact Daniel Wiseman on +44 (0)207 370 8141.

Networking Evening

A free networking evening after the first day of the show for all industry professionals. Full details to be announced shortly.

Log on to www.bettingshow.co.uk for full details, including how to register for free entry and how to book accommodation during your time at the NEC



Association supporters:



▶▶ Talking Shop special

OFF-COURSE

FORMS and more forms: the lot of the high street bookmaker has not been an easy one, anticipating the new Gambling Act and dealing with the Gambling Commission, which will implement it from September 1.

However, those companies that have been prepared and engaged themselves in the process from the start, backed by the enormous help handed out by such as the Association of British Bookmakers, should be on the right lines to a smooth transition from the past to the future.

That's the opinion of Betfred managing director John Haddock, who has had to keep one eye on the new rules, regulations and codes of practice while coping with day-to-day business in the UK's fastest-growing betting-shop estate.

"I can't say it was easy at the start," he explains. "You'd have a meeting with one set of people from the Gambling Commission, and then a couple of months later they'd have changed and you'd be meeting a completely different set."

"But because we were involved from the beginning, and there were a lot of people at the Commission who did want to understand bookmaking, three or four of us from the industry were able to sit down with them, discuss issues and give advice."

"No-one wants the Commission to ride roughshod over us, but at the same time we've got

G-DAY

Howard Wright reports on the issues that matter on and off the racecourse as the new Gambling Act comes into force on September 1

our point of view, as well as a lot of experience in the business, and we can come to a solution that suits both parties.

"Bookmaking has a very good track record on tackling crime and adopting self-regulation, particularly on under-age gambling and social responsibility, and the Commission have listened and come back with solutions."

Haddock believes that one of his first decisions, to appoint Jim Winder as compliance officer, has proved the best. "We've never needed anyone in that position before," Haddock says, "but Jim's very methodical and he's liaised with the Commission every step of the way."

Winder has held workshops with Betfred area managers, and put together a comprehensive booklet, which has gone to all 3,500 employers spread among 670 shops.

"It's a big thing for all of us," Haddock explains, "and our shop staff will be trained to the highest level to deal with anything that the Commission might cover."

"There's still a lot of discussion going on, but we're comfortable with what's been dealt with so far."

"In any case, the Gambling Commission was set up by the government, and we've got to accept it."

ON-COURSE

FIVE years' time, not a few months, is the witching hour for racecourse bookmakers, if you believe the first hour of a 90-minute adjournment debate held in Westminster Hall at the beginning of this month.

Some things will change on September 1 – the National Joint Pitch Council will fold, new betting sites will be open to commercial negotiation – but what is due to happen on September 1, 2012 is causing most concern, and not a little acrimony towards racecourse executives, among on-course bookmakers.

Then, as a result of the Racecourse Association's decision to delay implementation, the 'five times' rule on admission will disappear, along with 'list positions', which bookmakers follow to decide who bets where on a given raceday.

That means the value of positions, which have been bought and sold since 1998, will be rendered virtually worthless, say the bookmakers, and that was definitely not the impression they had gleaned when the Act was introduced.

The likelihood that hundreds of small family businesses would go under, while the big firms swept up and the RCA plun-

dered "in excess of £100 million in accrued assets", was the theme of a succession of MPs who took up the cudgels on behalf of their constituents.

Some unusual bedfellows emerged: Robin Cook's successor Jim Devine, who raised the debate, being followed by ex-Tory leader Ian Duncan Smith, who picked up his favourite theme of an industry open to corruption.

Suave Tory Crispin Blunt described the situation as "a substantial injustice", before Rhondda Labour MP Chris Bryant spoke about "a process not of petty larceny, but of grand theft".

Yes, replied the RCA, it was true that making a commercial charge to bookmakers for access to the track would likely reduce the value of list positions, but that had been fully understood since at least 2003, and in any case, lists have never been part of the new legislation.

The RCA explained that it could ignore lists from this September, but had been mindful of government wishes for transitional arrangements, hence the five-year moratorium.

Enter Gerry Sutcliffe, the new minister for sport, who ruled: "Meetings should take place and we will facilitate them, although I am sending the message out loud and clear that it should be the RCA and the on-course bookmakers who reach an adequate conclusion, because that is the right way forward."

That's where the situation remains, but no-one is holding their breath.

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▶▶ Talking Shop special



Catherine Deshayes
on the changing face of
sports betting in the UK

OVER the past decade, the betting industry landscape in the UK has changed beyond all recognition. The leading bookmakers have ridden on the crest of a technological wave, transforming themselves from smoke-filled down-at-heel shops, into managers of multi-channel, multi-location gaming emporiums, boasting online casinos, telephone betting, fixed odds betting terminals and mobile platforms. Once betting was seen as a seedy activity, little better than visiting a red-light district. Now, it is as accepted as playing the stock market or visiting the gym.

Until the 1960 Betting and Gaming Act legalised off-course betting, it was exclusively based on two sports – horses and greyhound racing. In 1967, the Bookmakers' Afternoon Greyhound Service was launched to provide punters with betting opportunities between horse races. Today,

GROWTH SPORT

multi-sports betting, particularly on football and golf, has broken the duopoly of horses and greyhounds.

Over the years, bookmakers have expanded into a multitude of sports and other betting options, and as they have gained the trust of successive governments have been able to develop their premises to be more attractive and welcoming to both regular and occasional punters. Some of the latest betting shops look like up-market coffee shops, a world away from the dingy cloth-capped hideouts of the 1960s.

The launch of Sky Sports in

the late 1980s, and the subsequent explosion in live TV coverage of Premiership, FA Cup and European matches, kickstarted the revolution in football betting. More than £1 billion was wagered on the 2006 World Cup, compared with just £20 million for the 1990 tournament.

Bookies have seized the moment and given strong promotion to everything from golf to snooker to tennis. Telephone betting has mushroomed, and the dawn of the internet has brought UK companies a global customer base, with £5bn now wagered online annually, 20 per cent of it

on football and only 13 per cent on horseracing. The 2001 change in taxation, scrapping betting duty on winnings, made gambling virtually tax free from the punters' point of view, giving a further boost to turnover.

The blue-chip events such as the Grand National, Derby, FA Cup Final and Open golf remain jewels in the sports betting crown, but every day there are hundreds of different betting options and a range of ways to have that punt.

Horseracing, while still the most important single betting activity, accounts for less than half of bets placed. "Ten years ago, horseracing provided 70 per cent of the turnover for the gambling industry, and nowadays it is down to just over 50 per cent," says Rupert Adams, media communications officer at William Hill. "Much of this is due to the increase in choice, both in what to bet on, and in how to place that bet.

"The horses are supplemented by betting on greyhound racing, football, golf and cricket and the opportunity to bet on events ranging from the Irish lottery to virtual horse and dog races. Ten years ago we did not accept singles on football, whereas now we do, which has led to a sharp rise in the revenue produced from this kind of betting."

Despite the growth of phone and online gaming, the betting shop still accounts for most sports betting activity. Today, there are 8,700 active betting shops in Britain, attracting seven million people at least once a year, almost a fifth of the adult population.

Bookmaking has progressed over the years into a modern business, with an increasingly sophisticated clientele. Bespoke bookmakers are carving out a lucrative niche. Mayfair-based Fitzdares is the brainchild of Balthazar Fabricius, a former Ladbrokes executive and son of Goodwood managing director Rod Fabricius. With an upmarket gambling emporium for high-end clients, Fabricius has attracted an array of well-known and well-heeled founder members, including Zac and Ben Goldsmith, sons of the late billionaire Sir James Goldsmith.

"We set up Fitzdares last year as we felt that, due to the way the industry was going, the niche top-tier of gamblers was being forgotten about. The large-stakes punter was not being looked af-

ter," says Fabricius.

He was clearly on to something, as Fitzdares has just celebrated a first-year turnover of £60m.

In the mid-1990s, the UK betting industry had a turnover of £5bn. Fast forward to 2002, and the figure was around £11bn. Today, it is a whopping £53bn, and gambling has almost entirely shaken off its seedy image, thanks in part to the way betting on football has brought in a younger, hipper clientele.

Adams says: "Whereas the shops tend to attract the more traditional horses and greyhound bets, when it comes to the phone and web businesses, football is the top for turnover, and horses and dogs are much less important.

"As far more of the EU is betting with us now, American sports such as basketball, which is hugely popular in Europe, and also ice hockey are rising in importance. Fixed Odds Betting Terminals have been introduced into bookmakers and they have also had a significant impact on revenue.

"There remains a generation that are essentially computer illiterate, so they stick to betting on the horses and dogs in the shops, plus they like the whole culture of discussing each race with the other regulars."

AS BETTING-RELATED technologies have evolved, policy makers have been slow off the mark. The first draft of the UK Gambling Bill (2003) left out many of the big issues concerning remote gambling.

The driving force behind any new codes of practice or secondary legislation will be the Gambling Commission, which has officially taken over from the Gaming Board. It has responsibility for the regulation of betting and remote gambling, and will fully regulate gambling from September 1.

John Travers, from the Commission, declines to be drawn on specifics, but the latest Gambling Prevalence Survey from May this year showed that young men aged between 18 and 24 are clearly one of its concerns, with 12 per cent of them participating in at least one form of remote gambling.

The 8,000 people surveyed illustrated the increase in interest in remote gambling via a computer,

laptop or handheld device, which had risen from 5.2 per cent in 2006 to 5.7 per cent, and mobile phone gambling, which had risen from 2.2 per cent last year to 2.5 per cent this year.

Almost three-quarters of the British population (72 per cent) took part in some sort of gambling activity within the past year. Although that is still lower than some other countries, notably Australia (90 per cent), we are unique in the diversity of our gambling.

Novelty betting has soared in Britain and Ireland in the past five years, attracting a swathe of new casual gamblers, many of them women. Graham Sharpe, media director at William Hill, says: "There aren't many countries in which you can bet on anything, and we lead the world in this."

Even the poker-mad Americans, whose favourite site, Partypoker.com, has a market capitalisation of more than £6bn, are amazed at how many things Brits bet on.

Dublin-based budget airline Ryanair plans to introduce in-flight gambling in the hope that they can offer passengers free flights, covering their costs by the revenue gambling generates. According to chief executive Michael O'Leary, Ryanair hopes to launch a gambling service in the next 12 to 18 months, provided it can devise a payment system that allows it to debit a passenger's credit card before the plane lands.

Passengers will be able to gamble using their mobile phones or Blackberries supplied by the airline. He predicts that if 25 to 30 per cent of passengers chose to enjoy a mid-flight flutter, then it could easily add £50m to Ryanair's bottom line.

Internationally, although the European Commission has recently muddied the waters by proposing a transition period for gambling monopolies until 2010, it is probably safe to say that the writing is on the wall for Europe's state-run gambling monopolies in France, Scandinavia and the Netherlands.

The formation of a single European market in betting services is also on the horizon. Stateside, while declining revenues have jeopardised the horseracing industry in some parts of the country, a new breed of racing casino may save the day. More than 35 racetrack casinos, or 'racinos', have opened up since 1992. According to the American Gaming Association, racinos raked in £1.8bn of punters' money last year, a 16 per cent increase from 2005.

The transformation of the UK betting landscape clearly owes much to the introduction of choice. Sky Sports, the internet and the National Lottery have paved the way for Britain to become a true nation of gamblers.

The culture of the long-established betting shop will always include regulars discussing the horses and dogs, and for the older generation they will remain the big two on which to have a flutter. The younger generation, having grown up in the computer age, will continue to shift the landscape even further away from the traditional sports. For them, it is no longer a two-horse race.



If you own a betting shop, don't forget to apply to your local council for a premises licence by 30 July

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