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## Gaming News

Pompano Beach, FL (November 2, 2011) –Recent gaming news developments are shown below. The Gretna Racing initiative gained more traction yesterday as the Gadsden County Commissioners voted to place slots on a referendum in January. Coupled with the barrel racing for poker these matters create precedent that may be detrimental to existing pari-mutuel operations and to the racing horse breeds that compete in Florida.



### **Barrel Rolled - by Eric Mitchell**

01 Nov 2011 2:39 PM [1 Comment](#)

*(Originally published in the October 29, 2011 issue of [The Blood-Horse magazine](#).)*

*By Eric Mitchell - [@EJMitchellKy](#) on Twitter*

The state of Florida is either on the cutting edge of the pari-mutuel sports industry or being manipulated to fatten the pockets of a few creative investors.

Last month the Florida Department of Pari-Mutuel Wagering gave approval for a company called Gretna Racing LLC to use a Quarter Horse racing permit to conduct pari-mutuel barrel racing at a venue in Gretna, Fla., a rural Panhandle town of 1,758 people northwest of Tallahassee. Gretna Racing is a partnership comprising Tallahassee attorney and Gulfstream Park lobbyist Marc Dunbar (10%), former Gulfstream Park president David Romanik (10%), Tallahassee attorney Paul McGee (10%), and the Poarch Creek tribe (70%), which is based in Alabama.

In its application Gretna Racing said it plans to hold 40 barrel racing cards between Dec. 1, 2011, and Jan. 15, 2012. Gretna's pari-mutuel barrel racing meet would be the first of its kind in the country.

But that's not all the permit allows. Any Florida pari-mutuel permit holder that conducts 90% of its approved performances a year can have a poker room that can be open 365 days a year. Gretna is taking it a step further and has just started pursuing the opportunity to offer slot machines as well. The company has approached the Gadsden County Commission about putting a referendum on the 2012 ballot asking voters to allow slot machines at any pari-mutuel business in Gadsden. Apart from the referendum, a pari-mutuel permit holder must run the minimum number of required events for at least two consecutive years before it can offer slot machines.

Using rodeo events to activate a Quarter Horse racing permit continues to be a concern to the Florida Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association and the Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association. Both groups see this as a low-cost alternative for permit holders to open card rooms and not provide any substantive support to the horse industry.

"It looks like they will make a lot of money on a poker room without a lot going to the barrel racers," said Kent Stirling, executive director of the Florida HBPA. "This also could be very detrimental to the future of horse racing in Florida."

So where do the liberties one can take with a Quarter Horse racing permit stop? Why stop at barrel racing? Several timed rodeo events would likely qualify, such as pole bending or calf roping. All these events involve horses.

And how does wagering on barrel racing work? Barrel racing is a timed event where the horse and rider follow a cloverleaf pattern around three barrels that form a triangle. Is this a win-place-show wager or can you have an exacta or trifecta composed of the top two or three finishers by time?

Other questions involve medication. Rick Hardy with the National Barrel Racing Association, the nation's largest barrel racing organization, said no drug testing is conducted at any of its events. Barrel horses are allowed to run on medications such as Bute and banamine. Hardy said testing has been discussed, but the expense is the biggest barrier.

"We would have to pass the cost directly on to the competitor, and there doesn't seem to be enough of an outcry or concern about it," he said.

It means we have the makings of a legalized wagering event and no idea if the horses competing have received substances, therapeutic or otherwise, that would enhance or hinder their performances.

Too many questions.

If some of these issues and concerns are resolved, then maybe Florida has cracked open the door to an entirely new pari-mutuel venture that could help build up the Quarter Horse industry, provide jobs and income to rural communities, and perhaps create another avenue for Thoroughbreds needing second careers. If not, then it appears the political machine has again been manipulated.

Let's hope against hope the state's racing industry isn't being hauled over a barrel.

# Update: Gadsden commission unanimously approves referendum on slot machines

8:59 PM, Nov. 1, 2011 |  
3Comments



Referendum supporters wave signs in front of the Gadsden County Courthouse this afternoon. / Paul Flemming/Democrat

By Paul Flemming  
Florida Capital Bureau

## 8:46 P. M.

Gadsden County Commissioners, before an overflow crowd, unanimously approved tonight a January vote to allow slot machines in the impoverished county.

No opponents spoke against the referendum, or the slot-machine plan, before the commission voted after an hour and 10 minutes of public and commission discussion.

"Come out and vote and get something you want," said Commissioner Brenda Holt, whose District 4 includes Gretna and the site of already approved gambling. Each of the five commission members agreed.

"It's as if this county is constantly being blessed," said Commission Chairman Sherrie Taylor said. "I am proud to be a Gadsdonian."

Creek Entertainment Gretna is building a poker room and pari-mutuel barrel racing arena there where activities will begin in December. State regulators approved licenses for pari-mutuel wagering and poker in October.

Now Gadsden voters will get to decide Jan. 31 if they want add up to 2,000 slot machines to those operations. If approved, construction would begin on a complex that promoters say would result in more than \$1 billion in wagers, \$100 million in revenues for owners and employ hundreds in the rural county, which consistently has the area's highest unemployment rate.

Representatives of Creek Entertainment Gretna -- majority owned by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians -- propose up to 2,000 slot machines at their development on Interstate 10 at State Road 12.

Poarch Band tribal council and PCI Gaming Authority board member Keith Martin said, if voters approve, his tribe would begin a five-year development plan that includes a poker room, hotels, quarter-horse racing and restaurants.

## **8:06 P. M.**

In a unanimous vote, the Gadsden County Commission approved placing the slot machine referendum on the ballot in January.

## **6:05 P. M.**

QUINCY -- The Gadsden County Commission chambers are filling up a half hour before the start of this evening's meeting that will consider a Jan. 31 county-wide vote to approve slot machines at the Gretna Racing development on Interstate 10

There's plenty of chatter in Quincy, the county seat of impoverished Gadsden County, and political activism.

Five neon green-clad sign-wavers stood on the Jefferson Street/U.S. 90 main drag through town two hours before the meeting was to start. Intermittent cars honked in support of the "It's Our Time For Jobs" placards of the supporters wearing "YES On The Referendum" T-shirts.

LaShonda Pride of Quincy was one of the sign-bearers. She said she was a member of St. Peter Apostolic Church here and volunteered at her pastor's request, Bishop John Battles. Pride said Commissioner Brenda Holt is a member of St. Peter.

Holt last week indicated she supported putting the question of slots to Gadsden voters.

"I think it will be to allow the voter to decide on whether they want slots or not," Holt said.

Things are already changing in Gadsden County. Gretna Racing, majority owned by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, begins operations when pari-mutuel barrel races start Dec. 1 and the first poker hands are dealt at an adjacent card room Dec. 17 at the interchange 20 miles west of Tallahassee. Barrel racing is traditionally a rodeo event where horses and riders race a clover-leaf pattern around obstacles against another horse and the clock.

If proponents get their way and the commission puts the question on the ballot and voters approve in January, Gretna Racing promises a five-year path to a resort casino featuring hotels, a world-class equestrian center, simulcast horse races, restaurants, quarter-horse racing and up to a maximum 2,000 slot machines.

Some residents are keeping their skepticism honed.

Grace Maloy, executive director of the Gadsden Arts Center on the square in Quincy, was busy Tuesday afternoon as artists streamed in to hang their work in preparation for Friday's opening reception for the 23rd Art in Gadsden regional exhibition of fine art.

Maloy said she doesn't have a position on allowing slots. She owns land near the Gretna Racing development, however, and is eager to see how developers deliver on promises of a flat quarter-horse track at the site, along with facilities to house and care for the horses necessary to run traditional quarter-horse races.

That's a concern shared by the Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association. President Steve Fisch has opposed the Gretna Racing pari-mutuel license granted by the state in October, saying barrel racing does not meet definitions in state law and is merely a cheap way for developers to get a card-room license and open the door for slots. He's also said the barrel races threaten funding pari-mutuel quarter horse races provide to horsemen in the state.

Commissioner Doug Croley last week said he shared some of those concerns and will press Gretna Racing officials on what they're doing to fulfill promises to the community.

"I'm happy to talk about (a referendum on slots), and have a discussion," Croley said. "I'm not against it. I welcome the Poarch Creek Indian tribe. Just as a humble public official, I can tell you I want the benefits for the citizens to Gadsden county to be what was represented."

## Morning post

Gadsden County Commission members likely will face a full house at its meeting in Quincy tonight.

On the agenda is a request to authorize a county-wide vote Jan. 31 to allow slot machines at the Gretna Racing card room and barrel racing track at Interstate 10 and State Road 12.

Pari-mutuel wagering on barrel races and poker is set to start there in December. If placed on the ballot by commissioners and approved by voters, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians — majority owners in the venture — could operate up to a maximum 2,000 slot machines at the facility.

Arthur Lawson, interim county administrator in Gadsden, said there's high interest in the issue.

"There will probably be a pretty good crowd, from what I'm hearing," Lawson said.

He said he expects a capacity crowd at the commission chambers for the 6 p.m. meeting. The commission's meeting room can hold up to 80 people, Lawson said. In the past, Lawson said, high public-interest agenda items have led the commission to limit public comment to three minutes per speaker.

Among opponents will be those representing the Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association. President Steve Fisch, a veterinarian, says the barrel racing approved for Gretna Racing by the state's Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering is a cheap way to establish eligibility for a card room, which will open in December. He says barrel racing represents a threat to traditional quarter-horse racing

He also says Gretna Racing's initial focus on barrel racing diminishes the jobs and economic impact the project will generate. Barrel racing, traditionally a rodeo event, involves horse and rider running against other horses and the clock in a clover-leaf pattern around barrels.

Fisch says Gretna developers promised an oval track for quarter-horse racing and a world-class equestrian center. Gretna Racing owners said last week that wetlands-permitting difficulties have delayed construction of a flat track at the I-10 site and the threat of more legal challenges by Fisch's group could delay it further.

"The sad part is that Gadsden County is just not getting what they were promised, in our opinion," Fisch said.

Lawson placed the referendum request on the commission's agenda at the behest of the owners of Gretna Racing. PCI Gaming CEO Jay Dorris will appear before commissioners.

In a memo, Dorris told commissioners that North Florida "is likely to experience phenomenal growth in the coming years."

The Gretna track offers Gadsden the opportunity, Dorris wrote, "to take advantage of such growth and define itself as a gateway to the region, becoming a leader among small rural counties in meeting the demand for entertainment amenities and recreational opportunities in the area."

Among three options offered to commissioners — put the question on the ballot, reject the request or offer other direction — Lawson recommended putting the question to voters. The memo to commissioners says Gretna Racing will pay all expenses related to the ballot issue.

Quarter-horse groups challenged state regulators not to approve the Gretna license and they also have voiced opposition to Gadsden commissioners.

"I am writing to let you know I strongly oppose the approval of Gretna Racing's slot referendum for the January 31, 2012 ballot," wrote Alyce Michelbrink, president of the [Palm](#) Beach County Mounted Posse, in an email to Commissioner Doug Croley. "This organization has not delivered on its promises and is using the barrel racing community to leverage its real plan for slots."

## **Gambling**

### **Racetrack gets license for another Miami casino**

#### **State regulators gave the owners of Magic City Casino a new gambling permit that could open the door for them to operate another casino.**

BY MARY ELLEN KLAS

HERALD/TIMES TALLAHASSEE BUREAU

TALLAHASSEE -- Miami could be home to South Florida's ninth slots-and-poker casino, long before any destination gambling resort breaks ground, under a permit quietly sought by the owners of Flagler Dog Track and Magic City Casino and approved by state regulators.

Flagler attorney John Lockwood uncovered a never-used loophole in a 30-year-old pari-mutuel law and used it to persuade the Florida Division of Pari-mutuel Wagering to give West Flagler Associates a permit to

operate summer jai-alai — and potentially slot machines. The company owns Magic City Casino, and would operate its new facility as Magic City Jai Alai.

The fresh permit comes loaded with advantages that legislators never imagined in 1980, when the law was written. For starters, it comes with an opportunity to build a new jai-alai fronton and poker room anywhere in Miami-Dade County, including downtown Miami or Miami Beach.

It also comes with the chance to operate slot machines — the result of a 2009 law that opened the door for Hialeah Racetrack to operate slots after Miami-Dade voters authorized them for three other pari-mutuels in the county. If West Flagler decided to pursue the lucrative Las Vegas-style slot machines, jai-alai would become a sideline.

“This permit doesn’t change the gaming debate because West Flagler hasn’t decided what its intentions are with the permit,” Lockwood told the Herald/Times on Monday. “We are trying to decide what makes sense for the client.”

The decision by state regulators to grant the jai-alai permit came just days after two state legislators filed a bill intended to limit the expansion of pari-mutuel and strip-mall gambling in Florida and replace them with mega-casinos, known as “destination resorts.”

The permit could affect the state’s revenue-sharing compact with the Seminole Tribe, which says that if slot machines are awarded to more than four pari-mutuels in Miami Dade County, the tribe can cease paying the state. Magic City Casino, Miami Jai-Alai and Calder Casino and Race Course now operate slot machines, and soon the Hialeah Park race track will operate them as well.

The tribe is expected to pay Florida \$233 million next year in exchange for its exclusive operation of blackjack and other banked table games at its seven casinos, and is scheduled to make similar payments for up to 20 years.

This is the second decision by state regulators that has allowed the expansion of gambling using pari-mutuel permits, and both of them could threaten the compact with the tribe.

The state previously awarded a horse-racing permit to Gretna Racing LLC, a company whose primary financing comes from the Poarch Band of Creek Indians in Alabama. The Gretna company will ask the Gadsden County Commission on Tuesday to conduct a referendum during the Jan. 31 presidential preference primary to allow slot machines at the horse track .

If the referendum succeeds and the state grants Gretna a permit to operate slot machines, the conditions of the compact will be violated and the state could stop receiving money from the tribe.

Lockwood believes Gretna’s potential for getting slot machines poses a greater threat to the compact at this point than West Flagler’s jai-alai permit.

Just as the state could not deny West Flagler a jai-alai permit, it will have not grounds “to deny that they would be qualified for a slots permit,” he believes

“The tribe would absolutely stop payments,” he said.

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The Florida Standardbred Breeders and Owners Association, Inc. is a non-profit organization responsible for promoting the standardbred horse-breeding and racing industry in Florida. The FSBOA maintains a registry of Florida-bred standardbred horses, manages various Florida-bred stakes events and an annual fall sale featuring FL-bred yearlings. The FSBOA website contains information about stallions standing in Florida, special standardbred events taking place throughout the year, and stake race information (including payment schedules, eligibilities, purses, and results). This website also will publish advertisements relating to standardbred services and articles offered for sale.