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EDITORIAL: Are gamblers being fleeced?

Lawsuit says casinos abusing technology

Tourists visit Las Vegas for all kinds of reasons: the spectacle of the Strip, fine dining, shopping, entertainment and warm weather among them. And despite the spread of casino gambling to all parts of the country, plenty of the valley's visitors come just to take a chance at the slots or the felt tables. The odds favor the house, but the games aren't fixed.

At least, they're not supposed to be.

A lawsuit filed Monday alleges new gaming technology allows casinos to significantly limit blackjack players' chances of winning. The system, sold by the MindPlay division of Alliance Gaming Corp., purportedly protects the integrity of blackjack games by ensuring cards are dealt in the order they are shuffled.

But attorney Bob Nersesian alleges some casinos use the system to count cards and boost the house advantage. Each card is scanned, its spot in the deck recorded, allowing the system to calculate the house's chance of winning each hand. With that information, Mr. Nersesian says, casinos can reshuffle whenever the odds favor players.

The allegations in the lawsuit are disturbing, and not just because casinos have detained and banished blackjack players believed to be counting cards -- a legal tactic.

The gaming industry's viability -- and the state's economy -- hinge on the premise that gamblers get a fair shake. Even the slightest hint that fancy shufflers and other glittering casino technologies can be used to swing the outcome of games is a black eye for Nevada.

The Gaming Control Board, named in the lawsuit, should take the allegations seriously and investigate whether casinos are using the technology to soak gamblers.

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