



Indiana casinos' edge also extends to slots

Friday, November 29, 2002

By JOHN G. BROKOPP

Illinois or Indiana? It's a question many Chicago-area casino gambling enthusiasts face every time they plan an outing. Casino options in both states are equally accessible for a majority of residents, but, as we discovered last week, there are some differences in the two jurisdictions that can have an impact on where people decide to go.

Current legislation prohibits Illinois casino license holders from exceeding 1,200 gaming positions. In Indiana, there is no such restriction. This paves the way for casino destinations in the Hoosier state to offer a greater number and a wider variety of table games. Today, we're going to take a look at the situation for slot players.

Gaming

As we did last week, the study covers the nine casinos within driving distance of the Chicago-area: Harrah's Joliet, Empress Joliet, Hollywood Aurora and Elgin Grand Victoria in Illinois, and the Horseshoe Hammond, Harrah's East Chicago, the Blue Chip in Michigan City, and Gary's Trump and Majestic Star in Indiana.

The number of slots (electronic gaming devices) available on casino floors in the five northwest Indiana locations vs. the four in Illinois underscores the difference: 8,419 on the Indiana side vs. 4,476 in Illinois.

The casino-by-casino breakdown in Indiana is topped by Harrah's East Chicago with 2,005 machines, followed by Trump (1,794), Horseshoe (1,569), Majestic Star (1,546) and Blue Chip (1,505). The slot inventories dwarf those available in Illinois: Harrah's Joliet (1,138), Empress Joliet (1,133), Hollywood Aurora (1,105), and Grand Victoria (1,100).

Whereas the difference in numbers affects all slot denominations, it is most profound when it comes to nickel slots. There are 2,365 5-cent slots on casino floors in northwest Indiana, while there are just 747 at Chicago-area casinos in Illinois.

The nickel slot king in Indiana is Harrah's East Chicago with 763 units, followed by Trump (638), Majestic Star (523), Blue Chip (280) and Horseshoe (161). In Illinois the nickel champ is Hollywood Aurora with 275, followed by Empress Joliet (258) and Harrah's Joliet (214). The Grand Victoria in Elgin doesn't have any nickel units.

If you like 10-cent slots, the only casino in Illinois that offers them is Harrah's Joliet (135 units). On the Indiana side, every location, with the exception of the Horseshoe, has the dime variety.

The Horseshoe is the area leader in 50-cent, \$1 and \$5 slots. Its 160 half-dollar machines far exceed the 82 machines at distant runner-up Blue Chip. There are 577 \$1 slots at the Horseshoe, 99 more than runner-up Harrah's East Chicago. It also has 116 \$5 slots, more than twice as many as Harrah's and even more than the 91 \$5 slots at the Grand Victoria in Elgin.

CASINO NEWS: William Buegel, an 81-year-old retired Chicago city employee, won the \$250,040 Caribbean Stud Poker progressive jackpot at Jack Binion's Horseshoe Casino Hammond on Nov. 13. The jackpot had been growing for more than seven months.

"When I looked at my hand, I was dumbfounded," Buegel said about being dealt the royal flush. "Horseshoe is so close to our home. It's only about 15 minutes. It's relaxing to go to the Horseshoe."

John G. Brokopp is a Chicago-based casino gambling columnist, horse-racing specialist and author of "Thrifty Gambling." He and the Daily Southtown caution that gambling is

risky and assume no responsibility for any losses incurred by applying the information presented in this column.