

# Online bettors add Supreme Court to wagers

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Though it's unclear whether the American public cares about the Supreme Court as much as it does about reality TV or the NFL, it shares one thing with those two pop-culture phenomena: You can now wager money on it on the Internet.

Costa Rica-based online gambling site WagerWeb.com last Friday began offering clients the chance to wager on who President Bush will next nominate to the vacant Supreme Court seat, as well as the chance to wager on whether chief justice nominee John Roberts will be confirmed by the Senate.

According to Dave Johnson, CEO of WagerWeb, about 300 wagers had been placed on the vacant seat as of Wednesday afternoon, with Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez getting the most support. Johnson also said about 250 wagers had been placed on the Roberts bet.

WagerWeb's offerings come on the heels of the first week of the NFL season. NFL and college football typically are the most wagered-upon sporting events, both online and in casinos.

"Football is definitely the biggest," Johnson said.

Larry Mac, linesmaker at Betmaker.com, agreed.

Johnson said his site started looking at political wagers during last year's presidential election.

"It lit a fire under us how much interest there was," Johnson said of his clientele's reaction to WagerWeb posting odds on the presidential election. Johnson said that in response to the interest, WagerWeb also posted odds on Senate races.

"It opened the opportunity to create something like this again," Johnson said.

Johnson said he was only slightly concerned about the potential for people with inside information to take advantage of the Supreme Court wagers.

"It's just like using inside information on the stock market," Johnson said.

He relayed a story regarding wagers on the winner of the reality TV show Survivor from a few years ago. According to Johnson, a huge number of bets from series of closely-situated IP addresses were placed on the eventual winner all at once at WagerWeb.

WagerWeb, suspecting foul play, took the bet off its site, but ended up taking a big financial loss from it. Johnson believes some collusion took place.

"We were never legally able to prove it, but it's an assumption," he said.

Mac said that political and entertainment wagers will not have a big impact on the online gambling industry.

"It's a novelty attraction that just adds to the spice of the business for customers," Mac said. "We're not going to get a tremendous rush of monetary action on it."

WagerWeb and other online gambling sites also offer betting lines on events such as award shows and movie opening-weekend grosses.

The recent surge in popularity of online poker and casino gaming has had a positive impact on the online betting industry, Johnson said.

"The poker craze allows people to be more familiar with how to gamble online," he said.

"Plus, online poker is not a risk (to the sites); you can't lose big money running games," he added.

Mac wasn't sure the poker craze would have any impact, though.

"Some money that would have been invested on sports may go to poker instead," he said. "It isn't increasing sign-up numbers, however."

Though the first week of the NFL season is a big social event, that doesn't hold in the gambling community, Mac said.

"From a social player's standpoint, Week 1 is a big kickoff event," he said. "There's less action in Week 1 than in later weeks, though."

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