

Tipster betting on Australian rules football may encourage people to take gambling seriously

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Winning at the annual AFL tipping competition is a lot of fun at work or the pub, but does that translate to a financially viable option in online sports betting sphere?

Not necessarily, and it may even lead winning tipsters towards a pathway to [problem gambling](#), warns Dr. Ben Riley, a [gambling](#) therapy expert at Flinders University's College of Medicine and Public Health and the South Australia's Statewide Gambling Therapy Service.

In the first published study of AFL tipster predictions, titled "Betting on Australian Rules Football: Can Expert Tipsters beat Randomness?" in the *Journal of Gambling Studies*, researchers test the idea that tipping talent—or ability to pick winners for home game fixtures, player fitness, etc.—may translate to an ability to gain money from AFL betting.

The question is worth testing, researchers say, with Australian Rules Football (AFL) the most popular sport in Australia, the heavy presence of gambling advertising during broadcasts and AFL commentators often promoting their tips and betting suggestions to thousands of potential punters.

Online gambling and advertising is on the rise in Australia, with total gambling expenditure (losses) almost \$25 billion in 2019 and expected to rise with the convenience of mobile electronic devices and online sports betting.

Irrational beliefs, such as the ability to control the outcome of the game, have long been considered an important factor in why some gamblers continue to play despite repeated losses.

"We compared expert AFL tipsters against a [random number generator](#) across 6 years of AFL games—around 1,200 games and 4,500 individual \$2 'mock' wagers using the closing betting odds for each [game](#)," says Dr.

Riley, who worked with psychiatrists on the latest research.

While the experts did predict more correct games than random picks, their equivalent monetary outcomes correlated equal to random picks on sports betting sites.

"However, when looking only at the wins, the random picks had a greater monetary gain on average than the tipping experts. Essentially, knowledge about AFL will not help you win money betting.

"We argue that by using their knowledge, AFL punters may pick more correct games than chance and this keeps them gambling—despite losing money over the long term. Being right is incredibly reinforcing, particularly for adolescents.

"Essentially, making correct AFL selections, and winning money are not the same thing—a distinction that many AFL betting fans may not appreciate.

"Another way of saying this is that just because you are good at the tea room AFL tipping comp doesn't mean you will win money gambling on AFL. The two things are very different."

The researchers called for more information about winning and losing and betting odds in future gambling harm [public health](#) messaging.

As well as helping to inform psychological interventions targeting gamblers' illusions of control, the researchers say sports media personalities and commentators should be discouraged from promoting their footy tips or best bets.

In 2022, gambling and wager companies spent \$310 million in advertising in Australia. One study found 32% of sports bettors in SA

gamble at risky levels compared to 27% of poker machine players and 12% of gamblers generally.

More information: Ben J. Riley et al, Betting on Australian Rules Football: Can Expert Tipsters beat Randomness?, *Journal of Gambling Studies* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10899-023-10244-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-023-10244-9)

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