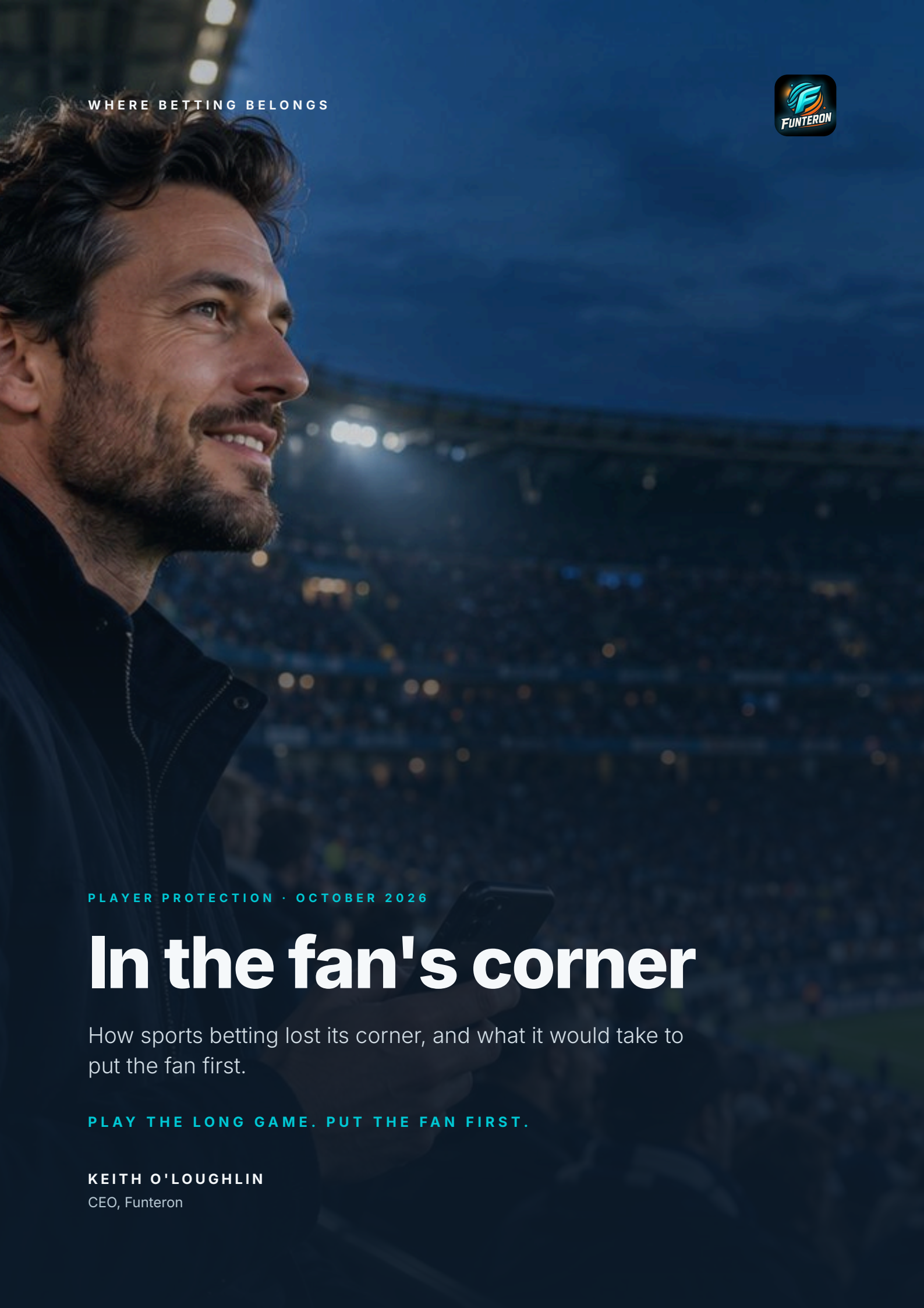


WHERE BETTING BELONGS

PLAYER PROTECTION · OCTOBER 2026

In the fan's corner

How sports betting lost its corner, and what it would take to put the fan first.

PLAY THE LONG GAME. PUT THE FAN FIRST.

KEITH O'LOUGHLIN
CEO, Funteron

THE ONE-PAGE VERSION · 2 MINUTE READ

Sports betting has lost its corner. Twenty years of sensible decisions added up to a product that pushes too hard, shouts too loudly and protects fans mostly with rules and pop-ups. The test for any fix is simple: a fan should be able to stop betting and keep the sport.

1. **Fewer customers, thinner margins.** Most fans do not bet and a straight bet earns little, so growth comes from working existing customers harder: more offers, more legs on the acca and a casino at the end. At seven British gambling companies in 2018 to 2019, 79% of revenue came from the 10% of accounts that staked the most. It is a problem of incentives, not character.

2. **More tax, tighter rules.** UK duty on online gaming, mainly casino, rose to 40% in April 2026. It was 15% in 2007. Online sports betting goes to 25% from April 2027. Squeezed from both sides, businesses thin the product and live at the edge of the rules rather than in their spirit.

3. **Betting has to shout.** Even with no gambling brand on the front of a Premier League shirt, researchers counted 15,571 gambling messages over the 2026 opening weekend. Betting does not live in the sport, so it shouts to pull fans away from the match. Brazil had all of this at once and lost the public's consent.

4. **Put betting back in the sport.** A sport earns from the whole relationship, has a duty of care and needs the same fans for thirty seasons, so it has every reason to look after them. It's not the stake, it's the connection.

5. **Two hard questions.** A sport paid on betting revenue has a reason to want more betting. And betting next to the match can make a bet feel like part of being a fan. So fans who do not bet must lose nothing, and under-18s should not see betting at all.

6. **Design it, write it into the deal, measure it.** Four moments show the difference: before the bet, after a loss, at the limit and taking a break. Six standards go into the deal, from plain money to a marketing switch and one limit across the sport. An independent scorecard tests whether fans who stop betting stay fans and whether revenue is spread across many fans, not 79% of it from the biggest 10%.

What it means. Sports and media brands should set their standard for the fan before they agree the commercial split. Bookmakers should treat these fans as the sport's fans, and regulators should count outcomes, not pop-ups. The long game is not getting another bet from the fan. It is earning the right to have that fan back next season.

IN BRIEF

How betting lost its corner.

24%

of British sports fans had an online bet in the past year. Three in four follow sport without one (January 2024)[1]

79%

of revenue at seven British gambling companies came from the 10% of accounts that staked the most (account data, 2018 to 2019)[7]

40%

UK duty on online gaming, mainly casino, from April 2026. It was 15% in 2007. Online sports betting moves to 25% in April 2027[13]

15,571

gambling messages counted over the 2026 Premier League opening weekend, the first season with no gambling brand on the front of a shirt[22]

$1.9bn

tax Brazil collected from licensed betting in 2025 (R$10bn)[30]

$7.5bn

a year: the social cost of online betting and gambling in Brazil, as modelled by a study the government cited (R$38.8bn). An estimate, not a bill[32]

Numbers refer to the sources at the end. Dollar figures are converted at about R$5.2 to the dollar.

In boxing, the corner looks after the fighter between rounds. Water, a towel, a word in the ear and someone ready to throw in the towel if it has gone too far. The fighter does the fighting. The corner keeps them safe enough to enjoy it.

Sports betting has lost its corner. Nobody set out to lose it. Over twenty years a string of sensible decisions, made by different people for good reasons, added up to a product that pushes too hard, shouts too loudly and protects fans mostly with rules and pop-ups.

For years the question has been how to protect a customer inside a betting product. I think there is a better one. What would the product look like if it were built around the fan's relationship with their sport, with betting as an optional part of it?

My test for any answer is simple. **A fan should be able to stop betting and keep the sport.**

This paper looks at how betting lost its corner and why one more rule will not bring it back. Then it sets out what putting the fan first would take: in the design, in the deal and in how success is measured.



Fewer customers, thinner margins

Start with the customer. Most sports fans do not bet. YouGov found that 24% of British sports fans had bet online in the past year.[1] In the US it is about one adult in five.[2] The rest follow their sport perfectly happily without a bet.

Now look at the bookmaker. Every bookmaker sells the same match at much the same price, so a straight bet earns very little. A multiple bet, a parlay in America and an acca in Britain, earns a lot. In New Jersey in 2025, parlays kept 19.2% of what was staked, against about 5% on everything else. They took a third of the money staked and almost two thirds of what the bookmakers kept.[3] Flutter, the biggest bookmaker in the world, told investors its American margin went up because more of its stakes went on parlays.[4] Meanwhile new customers are hard to find, because the product has become so complicated it puts off the people who have never bet.[5]

So a listed bookmaker that has to grow does the obvious thing. It works harder on the customers it already has: more offers, more legs on the acca and a casino at the end of the funnel. In Britain, in the year to March 2026, online betting brought in £2.4 billion. Online casino

brought in £5.7 billion, more than twice as much.[6]

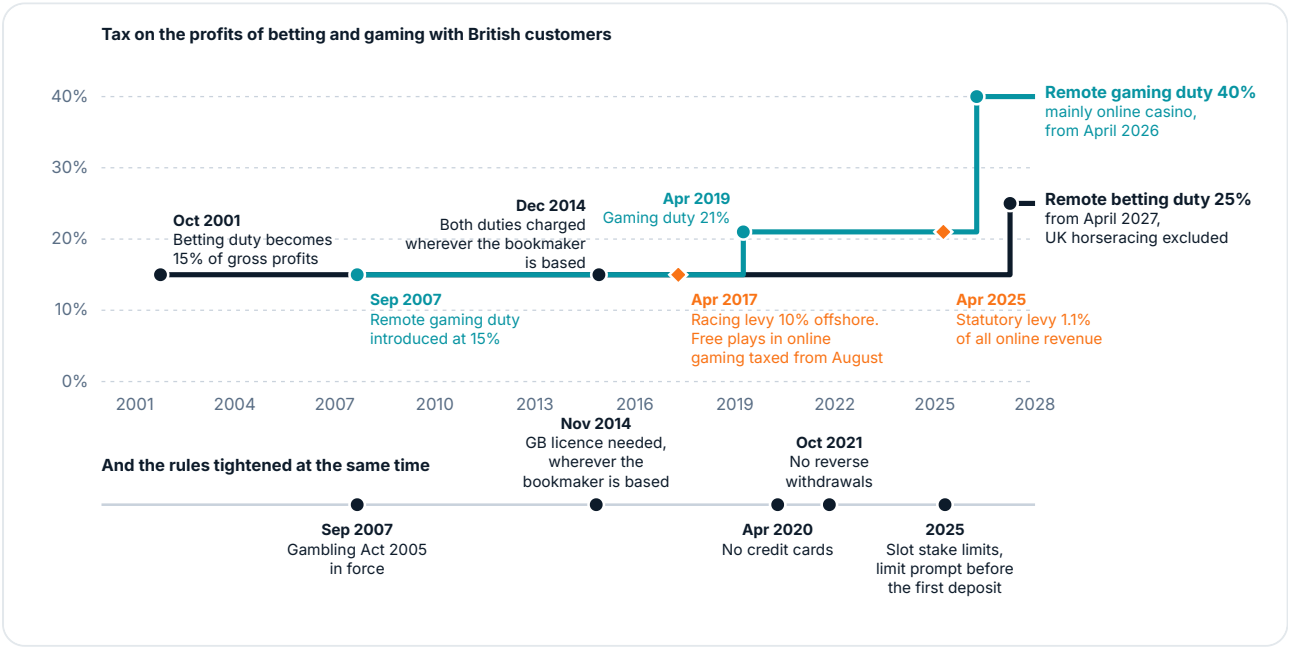
The money is concentrated too. When NatCen studied a year of accounts at seven British gambling companies, from July 2018 to June 2019, the 10% of accounts that staked the most produced 79% of the revenue. For betting on its own the figure was the same.[7] Spending a lot is not the same as being harmed, and the data is now several years old. But a business that earns most of its money from its biggest customers will always find it hard to tell them to slow down.

I have run one of these businesses, and nobody in the building is a villain. The job of a chief executive is to grow profit, and that is where the profit is. This is a problem of incentives, not of character.

The taxman's share

Then add tax. Britain has one of the most mature betting markets in the world, and over twenty years it has raised the tax on it again and again. Betting duty became 15% of profits in 2001, and online gaming got its own 15% duty in 2007.[8] From 2014 both applied wherever the bookmaker was based.[9] Free plays in online gaming became taxable in 2017 and the racing levy went offshore.[10, 11] Gaming duty went to 21% in 2019, and a statutory levy added 1.1% of online revenue in 2025.[12]

The biggest rises are happening now, and it matters which product they hit. Remote gaming duty, which falls mainly on online casino, went from 21% to 40% in April 2026. Online sports betting gets its own rate of 25% from April 2027, with bets on UK horseracing left out.[13] Both are a long way from 15%.



How Britain has taxed online betting and gaming since 2001, and the rules that arrived alongside. Remote gaming duty falls mainly on online casino. Remote betting duty falls mainly on online sports betting. Sources 8 to 18.

The rules tightened at the same time, and most of them were right: a British licence for everyone in 2014, no credit cards in 2020, no cancelling a withdrawal to bet the money in 2021 and, in 2025, stake limits on slots and a prompt to set a limit.[14, 15, 16, 17, 18] Nothing in this paper argues for fewer of them. Good design is not a substitute for good regulation.

Each of those makes sense on its own. Together they pull in opposite directions. One hand takes more of the margin. The other narrows what the product is allowed to do. Squeezed from both sides, a business does what businesses do. It thins the product, chases revenue wherever it is still allowed to and lives at the edge of the rules rather than in their spirit. The rules are met, and the fan still loses out.

Betting has to shout

Then there is the noise. British gambling companies spend somewhere between £1 billion and £2 billion a year on advertising, depending on who you ask.[19] Researchers at the University of Bristol count the gambling messages around the opening weekend of each Premier League season. In 2023 they found 10,999. In 2024 they found 29,145.[20, 21] This year, the first season with no gambling brand on the front of a shirt, they still found 15,571.

That is a count of every time a gambling message appeared in the coverage they studied, not 15,571 different adverts. The point is the exposure: a fan with no interest in betting is surrounded by it anyway. Gambling branding on sleeves and training kit rose 362%, and the researchers estimate the shirt-front ban helped cut gambling messages during live matches by just 10.5%.[22]

Why does a Premier League shirt matter so much? Because it is watched in Lagos, Jakarta and São Paulo. Before the ban, 11 of the 20 clubs had a gambling brand on the front.[23] The government estimates that last season about 40% of Premier League clubs had sponsorship or advertising deals with gambling companies not licensed in Britain, buying global reach through English football.[24] A fan in the stand could be wearing an advert for a company they could not legally use. The shirt was never for them.

Italy, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands have banned most of this.[25, 26, 27, 28] Bans turn the volume down, and that matters. But they do not change the reason for the noise, which is that betting does not live in the sport. It lives somewhere else, so it has to shout to pull the fan away from the match.

Brazil: all of it at once

If you want to see what happens when all of this runs at full speed, look at Brazil. It opened a licensed market in January 2025. A licence cost about $5.8 million (R$30 million) and 79 companies held one, paying about $480 million (R$2.5 billion) before a single bet was placed.[29] In the first year the industry kept about $7 billion (R$37 billion) of what was staked and paid about $1.9 billion (R$10 billion) in tax.[29, 30] On paper, the rules were strict.

Then the public saw the other side of the ledger. The Finance Minister estimated that Brazilians were sending more than $11.5 billion (R$60 billion) a year to licensed betting companies. Money sent is not money lost, but it was the number people heard. More than 1.3 million self-exclusion requests had been made on the national register.[31] A study the government cited, from the health policy institute IEPS, put the yearly social cost of online betting and gambling at about $7.5 billion (R$38.8 billion), most of it in health.[32] That is a modelled estimate, not a bill, and it cannot simply be set against the tax. But it is a number the tax receipts could not answer.

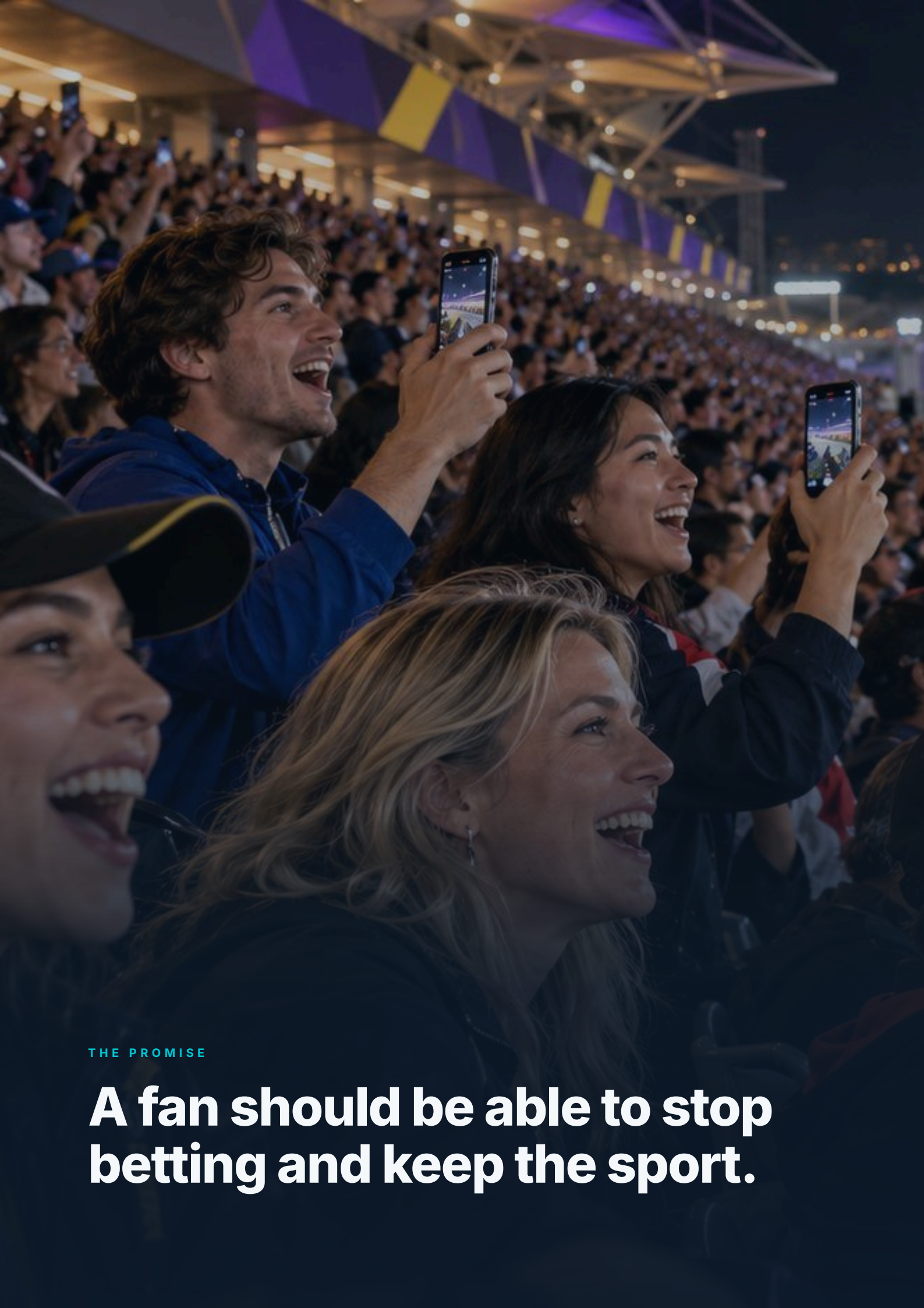
On 25 September 2026, twenty months after the market opened, the government banned fixed-odds betting by provisional measure. Sites went offline on 6 October and licences were cancelled with no refund of the fee.[31] Congress still has to approve the measure to make it permanent, and it has been challenged in the Supreme Court. At the time of writing, the ban is in force.[33, 34]

Brazil shows that a market can be licensed, taxed and compliant and still lose the public's consent. It did not lack rules. It lacked a product built for the fan.

Nobody planned this

Put it all together. Fewer new customers, so the ones you have get worked harder. Thinner margins, so the product drifts towards parlays and casino. More tax, so there is less room for anything else. More rules, so the business lives at their edge. More advertising, because betting sits outside the sport and has to drag fans towards it. Nobody planned any of it, and every step made sense to someone. Together they built a product fans need protecting from, and the protection is more rules and more pop-ups.

I think it is time to try something that is not another rule.



THE PROMISE

A fan should be able to stop betting and keep the sport.



Put betting back in the sport

A sport or a media brand has a different job from a bookmaker. It earns from the whole relationship: the subscription, the ticket, the sponsor, the time spent in its app. It also carries a duty of care to its audience. Betting is a supplement, and the reason to have it is what a bet does to attention. When Nielsen studied the NFL for the American Gaming Association, fans who bet were a quarter of the audience and watched nearly half of all the minutes.[35] That shows an association, not a cause. But in my experience the size of the bet barely matters. A fan with a pound on the match watches it like a fan with a hundred on it.

> **It's not the stake, it's the connection.**

That changes the time horizon. A business that lives on this week's bets is always tempted to mine its customers. A sport has to farm them, because it needs the same fans for thirty seasons. Its name is on the app, and a fan who has a bad night remembers whose app it was.

Two hard questions

That is the opportunity. It is not a free pass. There are two questions any sport should answer before it puts a betting button anywhere near the match.

The first is about money. If a sport is paid a share of betting revenue, it has a reason to want more betting too. Put the bet in the sport's app, pay the sport on volume and judge it only on revenue, and you have moved the problem without changing it.

The second is about the fan who does not bet. The closer betting sits to the match, the easier it becomes to make a bet feel like a normal, even necessary, part of being a fan. That is not what I am proposing. A fan should be able to watch the match, follow their team, read the news and enjoy everything their sport offers without ever being nudged to bet. Under-18s should not see betting at all. For those who choose to bet, it should be clear, controlled and protected. For those who choose not to, nothing should be missing. And for someone who decides to stop, the sport must remain.

So the difference cannot be left to good intentions. It has to be designed into the product, written into the deal and measured. The rest of this paper is about those three things.

Designed: what the fan sees

Protection is easiest to judge at four moments. Here is what each one looks like in a product built for the next bet, and in one built for the next season.

1 Before the bet

Saturday, 2.55pm

BUILT FOR THE NEXT BET	BUILT FOR THE NEXT SEASON
One more leg on the acca, a boost to make it look better and a clock counting down to kick-off.	Plain money: "£10 gets back £35 if your team wins. You could lose your £10." The week's limit is on the same screen.

2 After a loss

Saturday, 5pm

BUILT FOR THE NEXT BET	BUILT FOR THE NEXT SEASON
A reason to come back tonight: an offer, a boost, something else to try.	The match report, the highlights and next week's fixtures. Nothing is triggered by the loss.

3 At the limit

Wednesday

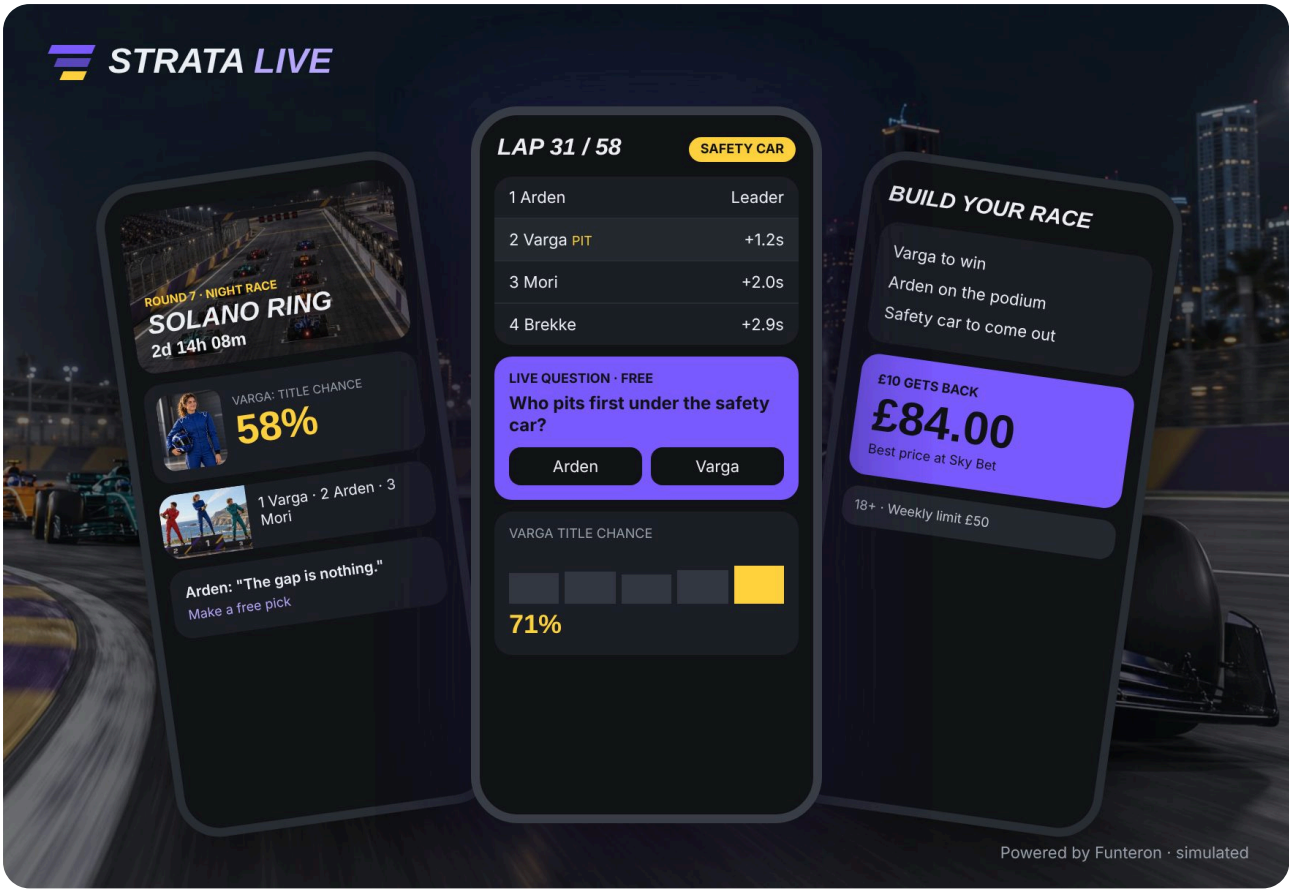
BUILT FOR THE NEXT BET	BUILT FOR THE NEXT SEASON
A higher limit, or the fan's attention moved somewhere else.	The prices go quiet until the limit resets. Lowering a limit takes effect at once. Raising one takes time.

4 Taking a break

The month after

BUILT FOR THE NEXT BET	BUILT FOR THE NEXT SEASON
The fan back the day the break ends.	The news, the scores and the highlights stay. The prices and every betting message go. If they never bet again, they are still a fan.

Imagine someone who loses more than they meant to on a Saturday afternoon. On Sunday they should still be able to read the team news without being shown a bigger offer. That one moment says more about protection than a page of warnings.



Simulated demo with an invented brand, not a live product. How a sport could show the price in money, a chance with no bet needed and the weekly limit on one screen.

None of this needs a new law, and the research supports building protection into the design. When the Behavioural Insights Team worked with bet365 on how deposit limits are offered, taking away the high preset amounts almost halved the limits people chose. Only 4% of the customers invited set a limit, though, and whether they then deposited less could not be confirmed.[36] In a 2026 experiment with 585 UK bettors, people shown a welcome offer without a worked example underestimated how much they would have to stake by a third. Showing them the sums made the offer look much less attractive.[37] Design changes decisions. Whether it reduces harm has to be shown in what people actually do.

Written into the deal: six standards

Some of this a sport can do on day one. Some of it needs the bookmakers to agree, and some needs integration and the rules of each market. It is worth being clear about which is which.

1. The sport comes first

The scores, the news, the video and the community never depend on a bet. The bet sits next to the team news and the table, and the fan takes it when they want and only if they want. Under-18s never see it.

WHAT IT TAKES
A design choice

2. The money is plain

Before a fan confirms, they see the stake, what comes back if it wins and that the stake can be lost. If odds are shown as a percentage, the fan is told it includes the bookmaker's margin.

WHAT IT TAKES
A design choice

3. Messages are about the sport

Kick-off, the result, your prediction. Never "your free bet expires at midnight". Nothing is sent because a fan lost, hit a limit or decided to stop.

WHAT IT TAKES
A design choice for the sport's own messages. The bookmaker's agreement for theirs

4. The marketing switch

Every customer has an absolute right to say no to direct marketing. When the account is opened through the sport, the fan can make that choice at the start, and the sport can make honouring it a condition of the deal.[38]

WHAT IT TAKES
The fan's choice and the bookmaker's agreement

5. One limit across the sport

A limit set in the sport applies to every bookmaker account opened through it. Germany shows a limit across bookmakers can work, though it took a national system to do it.[39] It covers betting through the sport, not every account a fan holds.

WHAT IT TAKES
Integration with each bookmaker, the fan's consent and the local rules

6. A break keeps the sport

A time-out, a limit or a self-exclusion switches off the prices and the betting messages, never the sport.

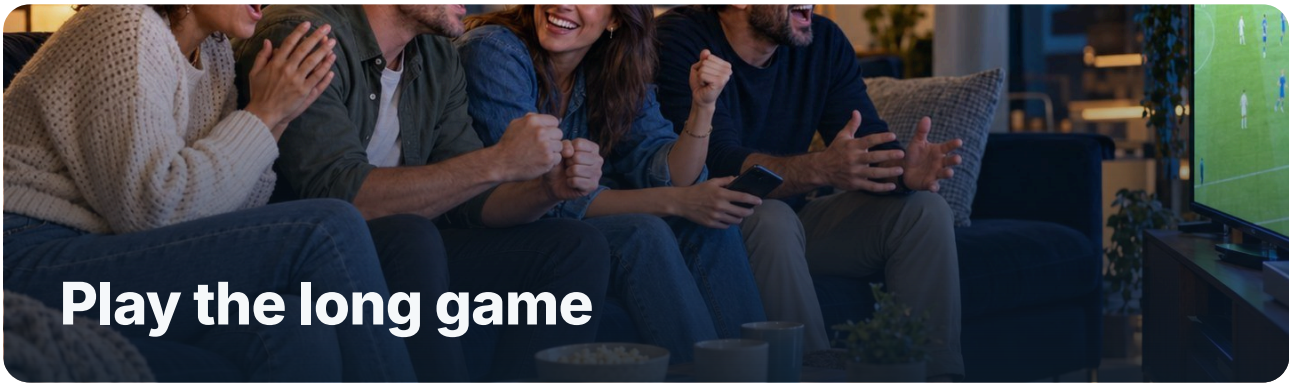
WHAT IT TAKES
A design choice, working with each bookmaker's own tools

Measured: the long game scorecard

If betting in the sport really is different, it will show in the numbers. These are the measures I would want every sport, media brand and bookmaker partner to track. I would want them checked independently too, because every commercial party, Funteron included, has incentives of its own.

Measure	What good looks like
Fans who stop betting	They keep watching, reading and renewing like everyone else.
Where the revenue comes from	Spread across many fans, not 79% of it from the biggest 10%.
Limits	More fans set one, and most stay within it.
Bad nights	Fewer sessions where a fan loses far more than they usually do.
Opt-outs	A marketing opt-out holds with every bookmaker the sport works with.
Understanding	Fans can say what they stood to win and what they could lose.

The second line is the sharpest test. If a sport's betting revenue looks like the industry's, with most of it from a small group of its biggest customers, the model has failed, whatever logo is on the app.



Play the long game

So here is my ask, to sports and media brands most of all. It is your name on the app. Set your standard for the fan before you agree the commercial split. Ask for control of the experience and for the marketing switch. Insist on knowing what happens to someone after a bad night. Then ask yourselves the hard question: if a fan never bets again, do you still value them as much? If the answer is yes, write it into the design, the deal and the way you measure success.

To bookmakers: these fans come to you through the sport, so treat them as the sport's fans. A fan who arrives for the football should not become a target for every other product you sell. A trusted route to millions of fans is worth more than one more promotion.

To regulators: keep the rules that matter, and judge the system by what changes for people. Count outcomes, not pop-ups.

I am not claiming this model has been proven to reduce harm. These are design standards, and their benefits have to be tested independently against real outcomes. But twenty years of rules have brought us here, and the fans deserve a corner again. An industry built around the next bet

should make room for one built around the next season.

> **The long game is not getting another bet from the fan. It is earning the right to have that fan back next season.**

The corner does not exist to make the fighter throw more punches. It is there so they can come back for the next round, or walk away, safely.

Play the long game. Put the fan first.

WHERE FUNTERON FITS

Funteron builds the betting layer that sits inside sports and media apps, working with licensed bookmakers. It sets no odds, holds no funds and accepts no bets.

The standards in this paper are the ones it designs to. Some are design choices a partner can make on day one. Others depend on bookmaker agreements, integration and the rules of each market. Their effect has to be shown, not assumed, and Funteron expects to be held to them. funteron.com

About this paper: dollar figures are converted at about R$5.2 to the dollar, the rate on 25 September 2026. Brazil's figure for money sent to betting companies is a government estimate, and money sent is not money lost. The R$38.8 billion is a modelled estimate of social cost, not a bill, and cannot be netted against tax. The NatCen figures come from account data for July 2018 to June 2019 and cover betting and gaming. The Bristol figures count appearances of gambling messages, not separate adverts. The NFL viewing figures show an association, not a cause. The standards in this paper are proposals to be tested, and the demo shown is simulated. Facts and rules were checked to 25 October 2026. 18+. Free support is available 24 hours a day from the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133.

Keith O'Loughlin is CEO of Funteron and former CEO of OpenBet. He chairs Christchurch Casino in New Zealand.

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WHERE BETTING BELONGS

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