

*Can't we all just be fans?! Sports betting in 2026 & beyond*

***18<sup>th</sup> Annual Addiction Conference Mississippi***

February 19, 2026

**Mississippi Council on Problem & Compulsive Gambling**



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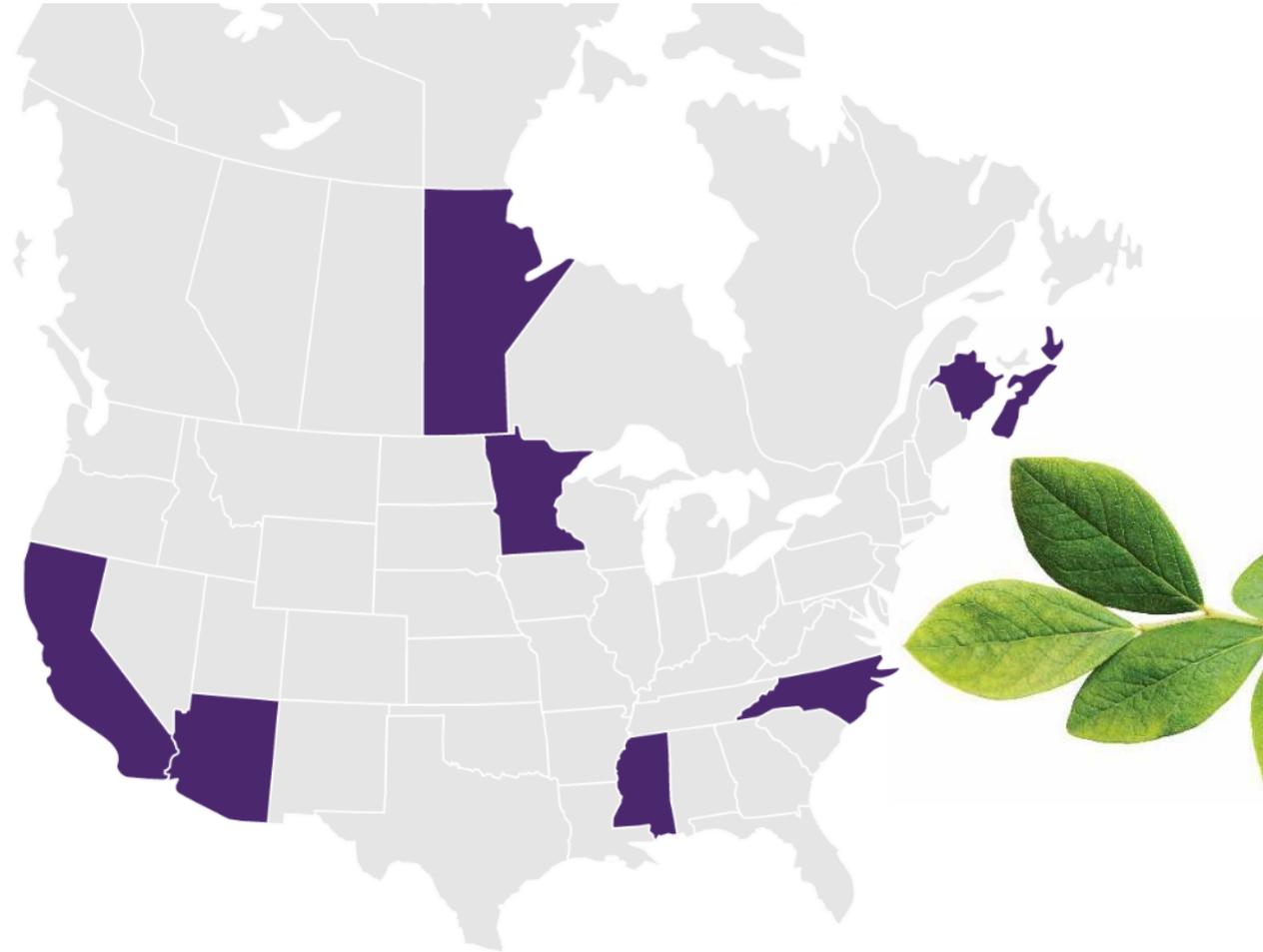
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# Introductions

**Robby Fuqua,**  
*LICSW, ICGC-I*

- Training Specialist (Telus Health)
- Reporting responsibilities to state clients (Telus Health)
- Active private practice, Sports Betting Specialty in MA & IL
- [www.robbytherapy.com](http://www.robbytherapy.com)

# Training Topics

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Introduction

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Sports Betting Profiles

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Gambling and Sports Betting

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Fan Exercise

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Identifying as a Fan, Athlete or “Gambler”

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Approaches, Treatment & Strategy

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Case Exercise

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# Objectives

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1) Learn about 5 characteristics of being a fanatic.

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2) Gain an understanding of the traditional approaches to disordered gambling treatment through the lens of sports betting behaviors.

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# Legal Ways to Gamble in Mississippi

- Legal since 1992, legal age 21 years old
- Casinos (29)
  - Tribal
  - Some form of cruise vessels
- Bingo for Charities
- Lottery (2018), scratch-offs (2019)
- Horse & Dog racing legal (no tracks)
- Sports betting (since 2018)
  - Only at licensed casinos
  - Online only when a licensed casino property
  - **Fanatics Prediction Markets (launched December 2025)**
- Charitable Gambling (for non-profit organizations)
  - Examples: Bingo, Raffles, Slots, Roulette, Lottery

# Gambling & Sports Betting Among Four-Year College Students: Results from a Spring 2025 Survey (William Magee Institute, 2025)

- Conducted by the University of Mississippi, William McGee Institute of Student Wellbeing
- 7 other universities in Mississippi
- 59 question survey, participants were enrolled in 2025 academic year
- Sample:
  - Mean age 22 years old
  - Majority female (60%)
  - White (56%)
  - African/American, Black (34%)
  - Graduated high school in Mississippi (54%)

# Gambling & Sports Betting Among Four-Year College Students: Results from a Spring 2025 Survey (William Magee Institute, 2025)

- Key findings, points:
  - Primary method of gambling
    - 18% lottery
    - 17% cards
    - 16% sports betting
- Gambling was most prevalent amongst:
  - Male
  - White
  - Resided off campus
  - Greek involvement
  - Higher GPA
  - Participated in athletics

## The new reality (Chafkin 2023)

*“The thrill doesn’t come from your team’s victory or even the outcome of the game. **It comes from whether the over hits.**”*

# Legalization + Technology = Industry Changes (2018)

- Potential to change sports, sports data and sports betting industries
- Professional league interests, opportunities and relationships with betting venues
- Current and new data processing opportunities, venues and platforms

“Leonsis calls it the ‘gamification’ of sports, a new reality in which, like the athletes in the spotlight, the fans in the stands also will find themselves rooted in competition that’s centered around the action in front of them, staking their money on informed speculation as much as a lucky hunch.” (Maese, 2018)

# In-Game Wagering & Problem Gambling

“Results from the systemic review suggest that in-play sports betting has the potential to be more harmful than other ways of gambling because of the **inherent structural characteristics.**” (What Is In-Play Sports Betting?, n.d.)

“These characteristics include but are not limited to *bet frequency, event frequency, event duration, and payout frequency.*” (Killick & Griffiths, 2018)

“This *increased accessibility* to online gambling platforms and the ease of interaction on platforms such as smartphones *may accelerate the acquisition of maladaptive learned behaviors* such as problem gambling “ (James et al. 2016)

# Online, in-game sports betting is kind of like crack to cocaine in the 80's



- It's faster
- Immediate
- Dopamine flow
- Highly accessible
- Shorter life span



## The Sports Bettor: A Profile

# Escape & Action

## Action

Predominately male

Start young

Competitive

Gambling "friends"

Grandiose

Narcissistic

Money is principal relapse issue

## Escape

Predominately female

Non-competitive

Short gambling career

Late onset

Relationship issues

Debts lower, no attempts to control

Emotion is primary relapse issue

# The “target market” (Stewart 2024)

- **NCAA found:**
  - Young adults
  - Specifically college campuses Black & Latino
- **Pew Research found:**
  - Men under 50 more prone to gamble than women over 50
- **Men are:**
  - More prone to overconfidence
  - Gamble more than women
  - Lower levels of impulsive coping in gambling settings

# The “target market”

- **Day Trading**
- **Stocks, Futures, Options Trading**
- **Skill based-games**
- **“Crypto biased”**
- **Video gaming**
- **Competition, risk and winning**
- **Action, action, action**

# The “target market” (Stewart 2024)

## New Jersey 2023 Prevalence Report

- 1) men doubled the rate of high-risk problem gambling when compared to women
- 2) Ages 18-44 were at highest risk
- 3) High-risk stock trading
- 4) Problem gambling hotline volume tripled in 5 five years
- 5) Ages 25-34 most likely to reach out

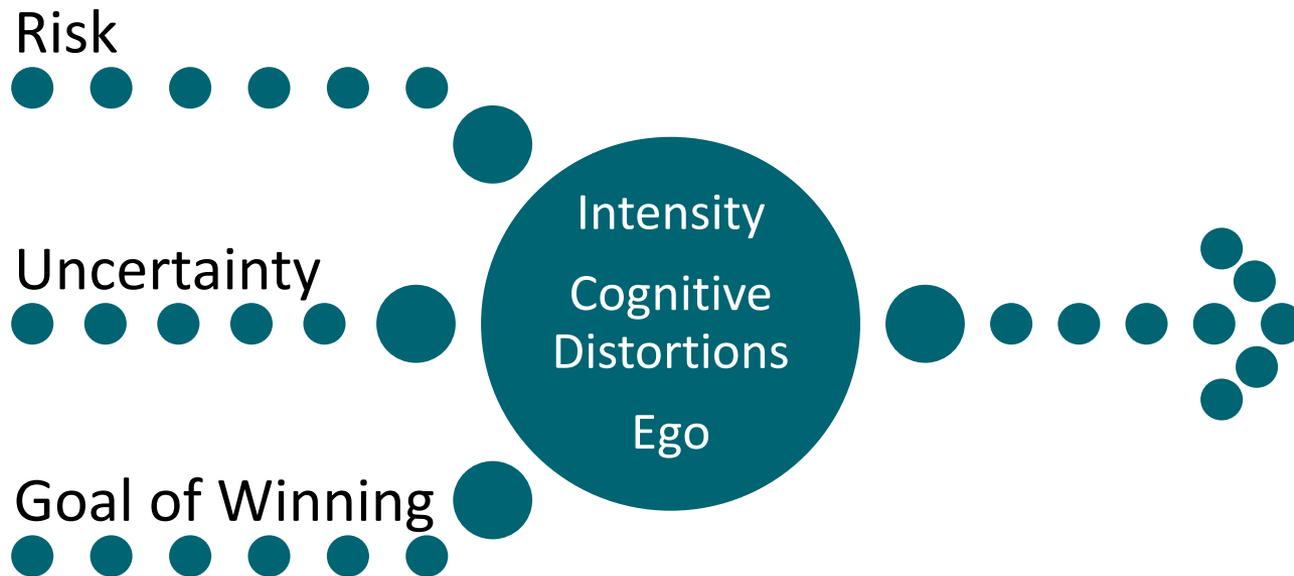
*“The **technology** that brings us that intersection between **gambling, gaming, investing, and financial risk**, that technology barrier is so low right now”* Dr. Tim Fong, UCLA

# What is gambling?



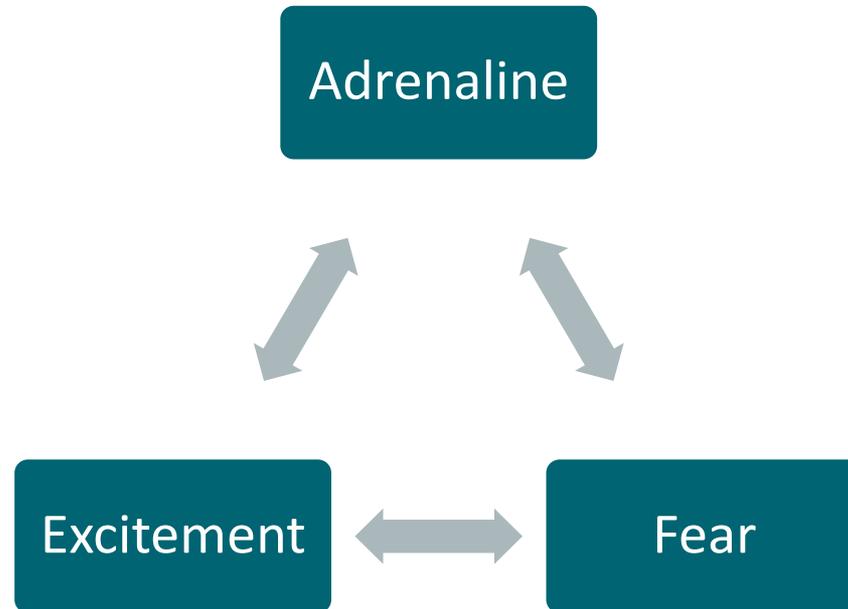
“Risking something of value on an activity or event in which the outcome is uncertain in hopes of winning something of material value”

# Sports betting & gambling definition



“Risking something of value on an activity or event in which the outcome is uncertain in hopes of winning something of material value”

# The *Intensity*



- \*\*Two sides of the coin, “I miss it but I don’t miss it, I love it and I hate it”
- \*\*“like a piano hanging over my head”
- \*\*“I don’t like being glued to the TV- frozen...”

# Cognitive Distortions

- Sabermetrics: empirical analysis of sports, especially statistics that measure in-game activity
  - *Moneyball*
  - More knowledge = more skill = more money
- Sports bettors perceive themselves as having experience that helps predict the outcome. Yet, those who had previous knowledge of the game were no less accurate at predicting wins & losses.

# Cognitive Distortions

- Attribution error
- Gambler's fallacy
- Anthropomorphism
- Selective attention
- Over-interpretation
- Probability bias
- Contagion
- Illusory correlation
- Luck as a trait or a variable



# Cognitive Distortions

## *Attribution Error*

“I know my stuff, I played the sport, I did the research...”

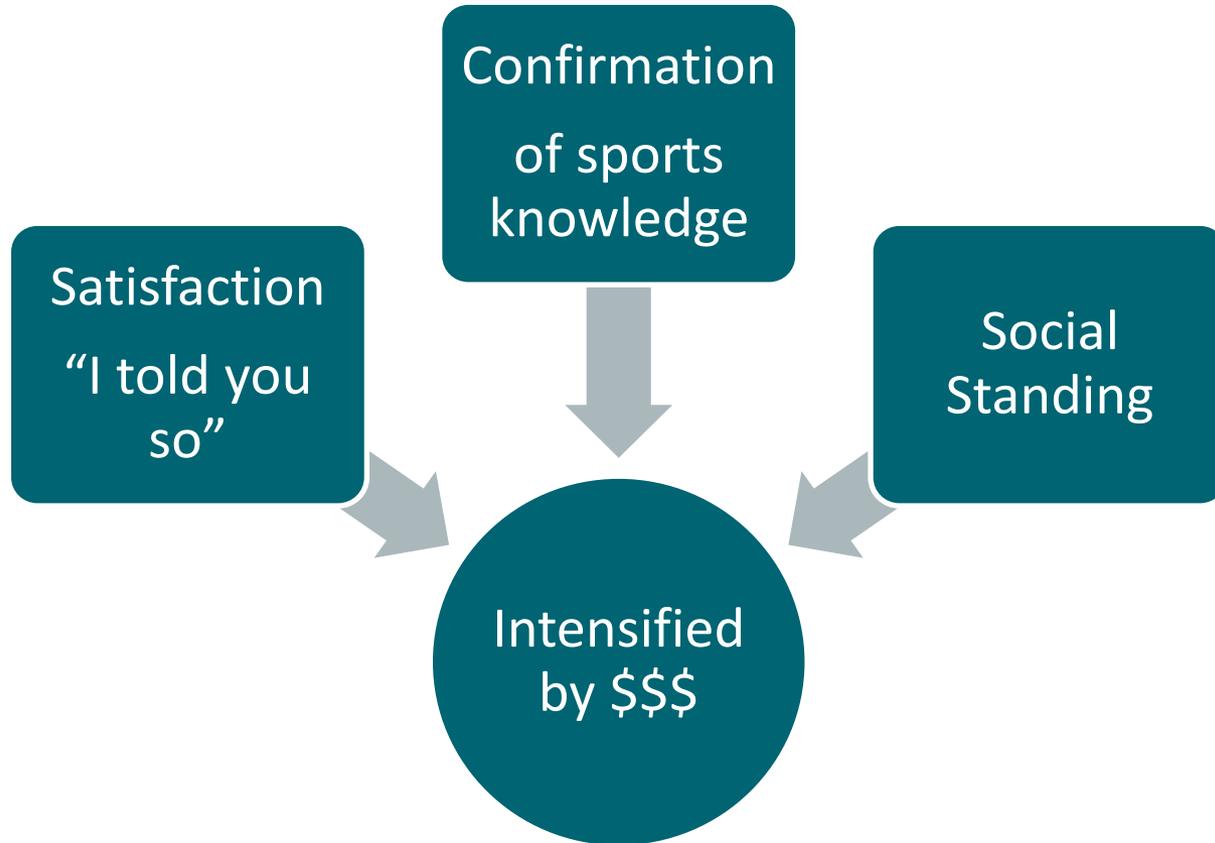
## *Gambler's Fallacy*

“they're due, he's due, it has to happen...”

## *Selective Attention (as connected to **FOMO**)*

“I miss it, so much fun..”

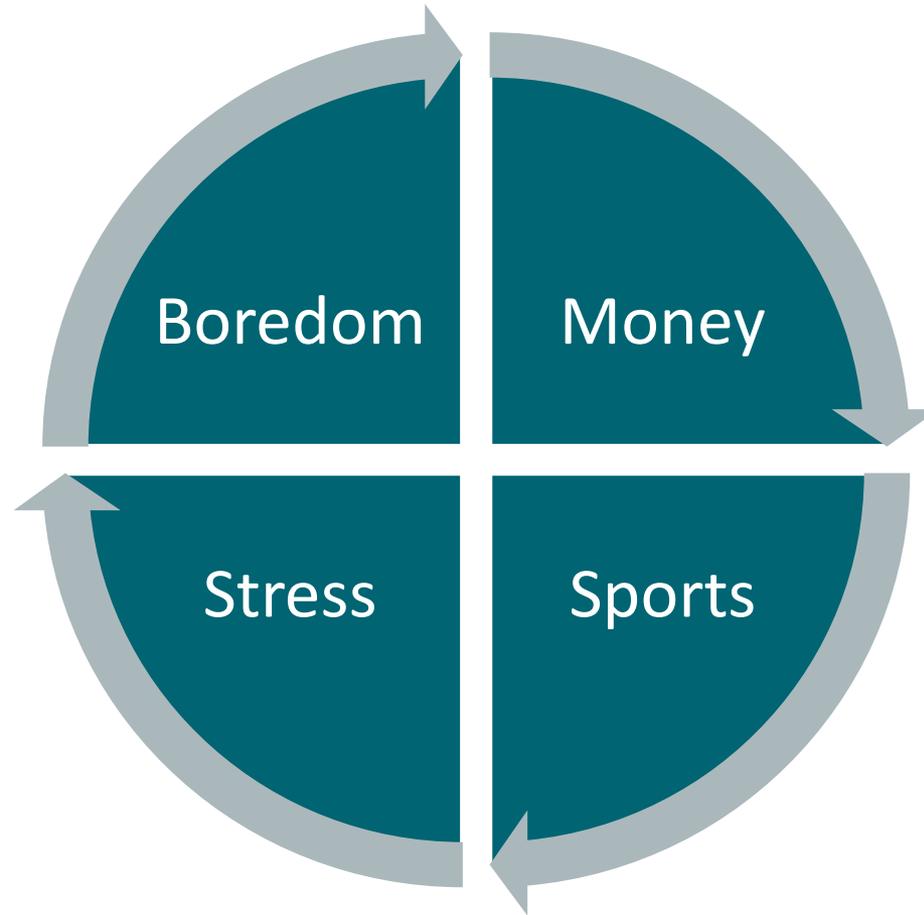
# Ego



# Let's make this more interesting...



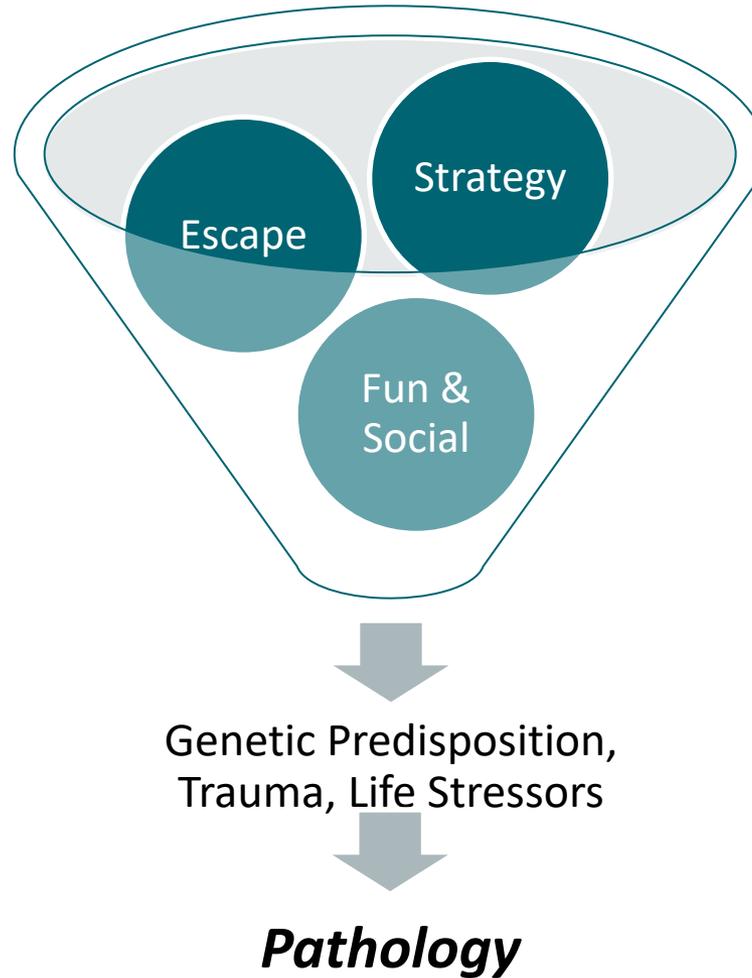
# Approaches, Reasons & Assessing



# Approaches, Reasons & Assessing

- Money (*Strategy*)
  - Immediate gratification
  - Side hustle
  - Chasing
  - Over value of money
- Sports connection (*fun*)
  - Expert
  - Control
  - Fun
  - Social
- Stress (*escape*)- work, personal, relationship stress
- Boredom (*fill downtime*)

# Approaches



# Fan Loyalty vs Betting & Action

*“If you had a choice between the **Bruins** winning the **Stanley Cup** and/or you winning **BIG** on a parlay, which would it be....?”*

# How do you identify?



# Social Identity Theory (Mcleod 2023)

- Henri Tajfel (1979) proposed “a person’s sense of who they are is based on group membership”
- Groups provides “a sense of social identity, a sense of belonging in the social world”
- In-groups versus out-groups enhances self-image (Cubs vs White Sox)
  - **Categorization:** helps us understand our social world and determine appropriate behaviors
  - **Social Identification:** we adopt the identity of the group that we’ve connected
  - **Social Comparison:** group self esteem is maintained by comparing to other external groups

# “Identifiers” of being an Athlete

- Athlete definition “a person who is proficient in sports and other forms of exercise”
  - Driven
  - Competitive
  - Internal locus of control
  - Ambitious
  - Welcome challenges

# What is a Fan?

- Sports Fan definition: “an enthusiastic devotee of sports”
- Synonyms: “rooter, enthusiast, fan”
  - When you’re a fan, what is the risk?
  - What is the uncertainty?
  - What is the hope?
  - *Can there be an issue/problem with being a fan?*

# What is a fanatic? (Wang 2006)

- **A Need to Belong:** affiliation, social connectedness
- **An Extension of Self:** self esteem & self competence connected to team allegiance
- **Belonging is More Important than Winning:** “one of us”, accessibility, part of the organization, “family-like”
- **Loyalty Benefits the Loyal:** coping mechanisms to maintain team/fan loyalty through “thick & thin”
- **Superstition as a Way to Cope:** fans develop superstition rituals for the illusion to gain control

*“A huge part of who they are, where they drive a lot of their positive and negative affect, is from what their team is doing” Edward Hirt, associate professor of psychological & brain sciences at IU Bloomington*

## Objectives

***Can you be a sports fan and enjoy sports viewing, attend games, and/or watch in social settings while in recovery?***

***Can you participate in sports and maintain your competitive levels while in recovery?***

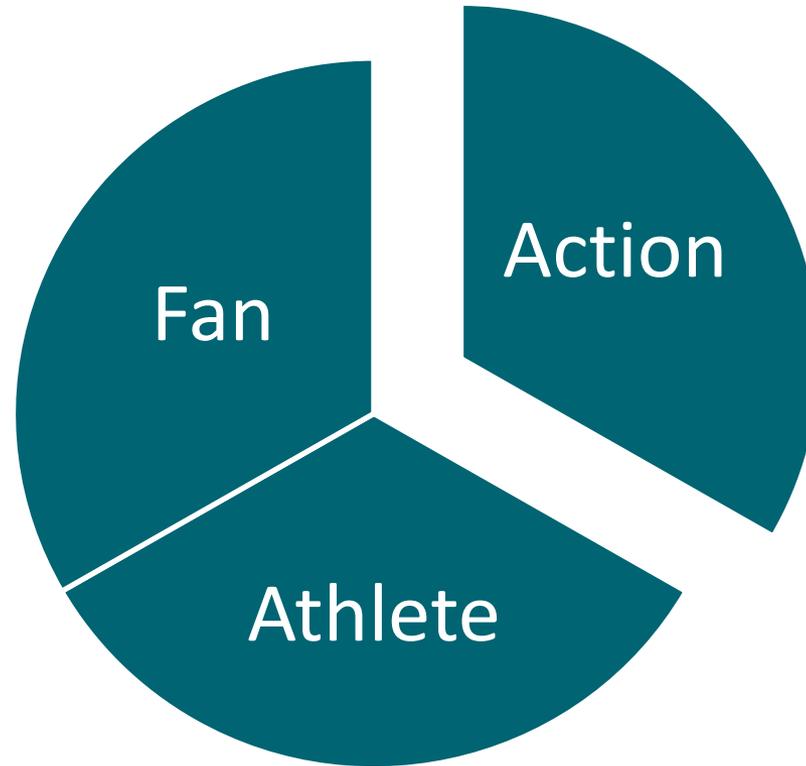
# Safe Sports Viewing

**Sports Viewing IS NOT gambling**

**Allowing sports viewing isn't harm reduction**

**Socializing & substances analogy**

# Impossible Goal?



# Sports Fan Exercise- sports

- 5 Groups
  - Write down **sports that you watch, rank them** and answer the following questions for #1 sport
    - Did you or do you currently participate in this particular sport?
    - Did you grow-up watching this sport?
    - Did family members or loved ones participate in this sport?
    - Is it a geographically popular sport where you live or where you were raised?
    - Do you view and or participate in social settings regarding this sport
    - What or why do you find this sport interesting or feel a connection to this sport?

# Sports Fan Exercise- teams

- 5 Groups
  - Write down **teams that you follow or root for** regarding the above sports chosen & answer the following questions for #1 team:
    - Community or geographical reason? Current residence or where you were raised?
    - Family of origin (mother, father, siblings raised you on viewing this team, grew-up wearing the jerseys)
    - Social reason to root for this team? (is it a neighborhood thing, current adult friends, office or work colleagues, childhood friends)
    - Alma mater
    - Is it a “we versus them” reason (White Sox example, Dallas Cowboys, Duke Blue Devils, New York Yankees, etc)

# Sports Fan Exercise cont'd

- 5 Groups
  - Let's dig a little deeper and discuss with group members for #1:
    - **Community:** write out feelings of connection, or being a part of regarding this particular team (NFL, European soccer)
    - **Family:** connection, emotional history with family, holiday viewing (Thanksgiving, July 4<sup>th</sup>, etc), bonding with mom, dad or grandparents
    - **Social:** connection, same as above but childhood friends
    - **Alma mater:** connection or sense of belonging, with alumni, fraternity/sorority club members
    - **“we versus them” mentality:** satisfaction or enjoyment watching heart break of enemies

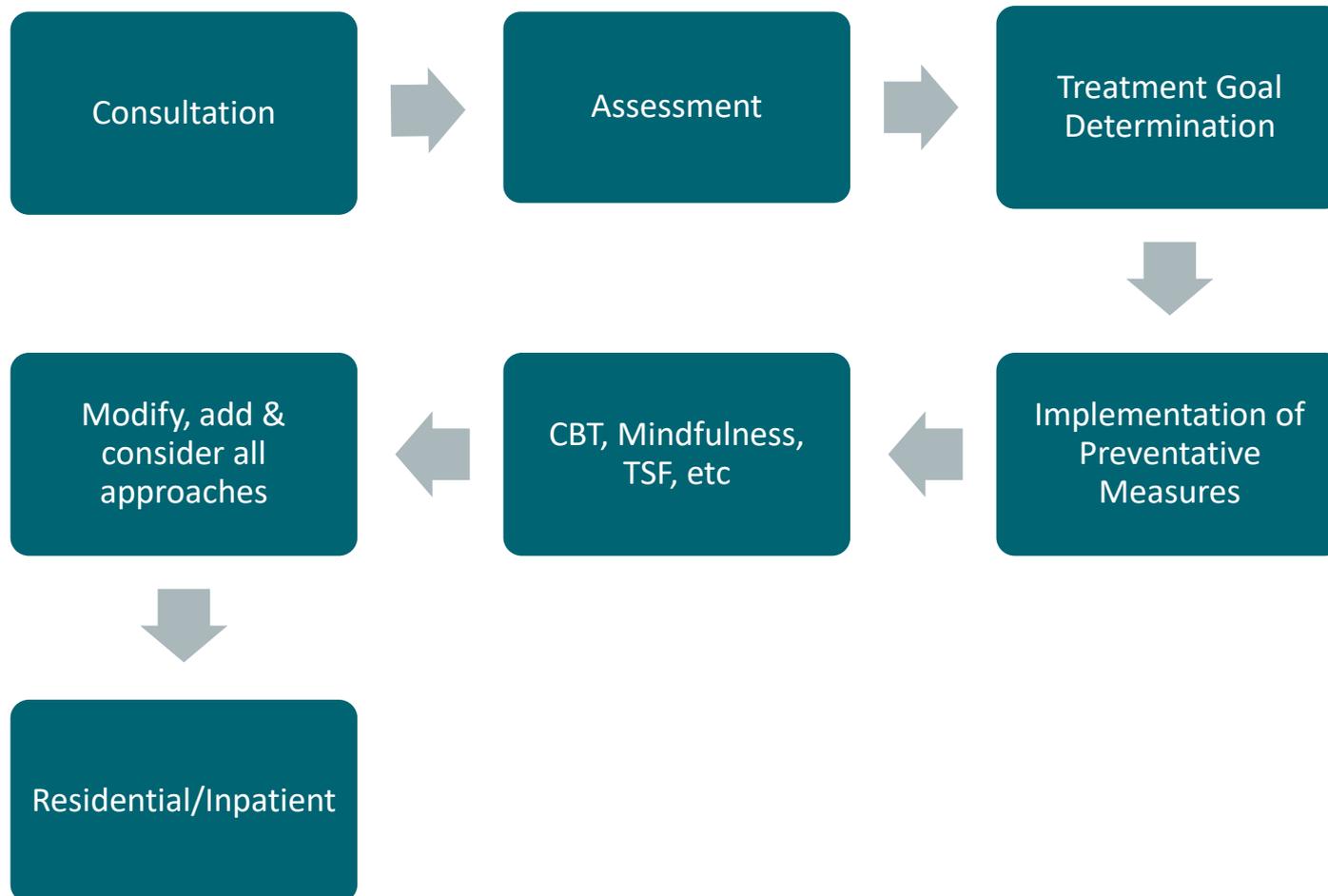
# Safe Sports Viewing

*“Stick to the story lines, not the betting lines”*

# Treatment Approaches, Strategy



# General Treatment Road Map



# Connection



# Connecting & sports betting therapy

- **“Connection”**
  - Defining the therapeutic relationship
  - ***Building rapport with sports bettors***
    - Open ended questions
    - Active listening skills
      - Trust
      - Empathy
      - Warmth
      - Respect
      - Understanding
      - Compassion
      - Confidence

# What do you think? Building rapport

- Do you talk sports with clients in recovery- is there a protocol? What's appropriate? Why would you think sports talk might help, or would it hinder treatment?
- Potential countertransference examples
  - Sports fan
  - Sports viewing history with family
  - Recovery (abstinence program, substance and/or behavioral)
  - Have a family member or loved one that suffers from an addiction disorder

# The “sports connection”

- Double edged sword
- Not *“one size fits all”*
- The very thing connecting used in build rapport for building therapeutic relationship is what is killing client
- But is it?
- Is it the sports or the pathology of action (over-sensitive dopaminergic pathways, adrenaline, cognitive distortions)?

*Thoughts?*

# Review: Disordered Gambling Treatment

## Abstinence

- CBT
- Mindfulness principles
- Twelve Step Facilitation (TSF)
- Holistic Approach

## Harm Reduction

- Time focus
- Money focus
- Responsible Gambling
- Safe Play
- Managing “the gray”

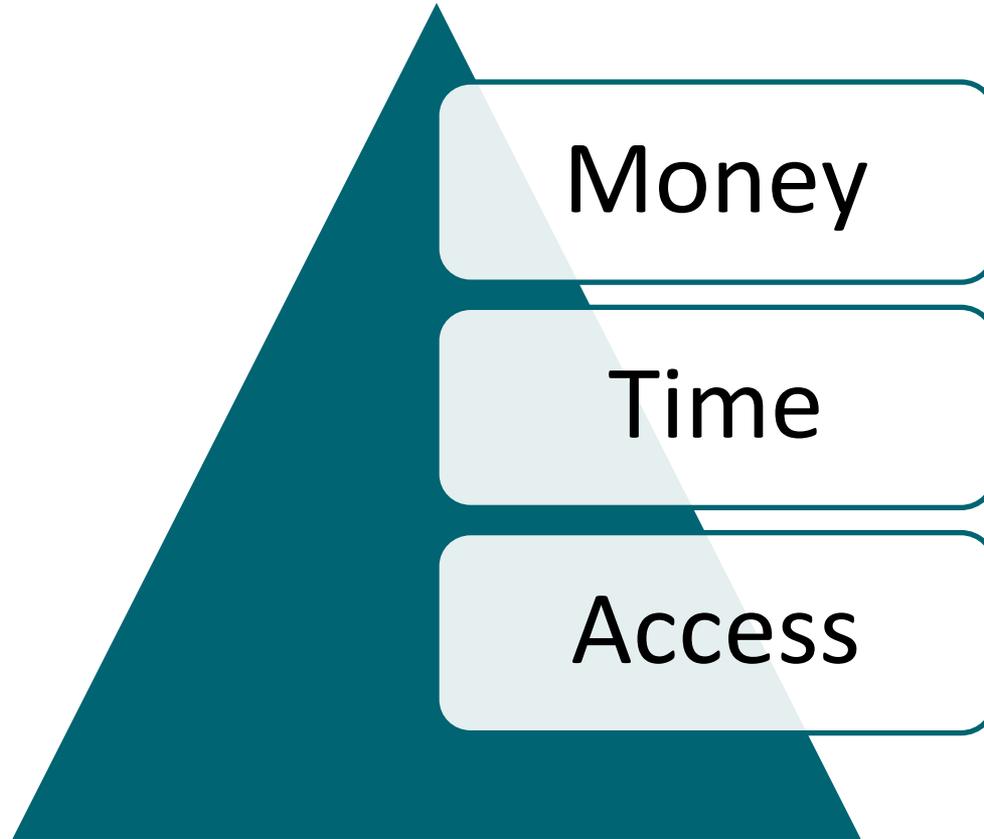
## Process Approaches

- Financial Management
- Financial Education
- Money Distortions
- Risk Awareness

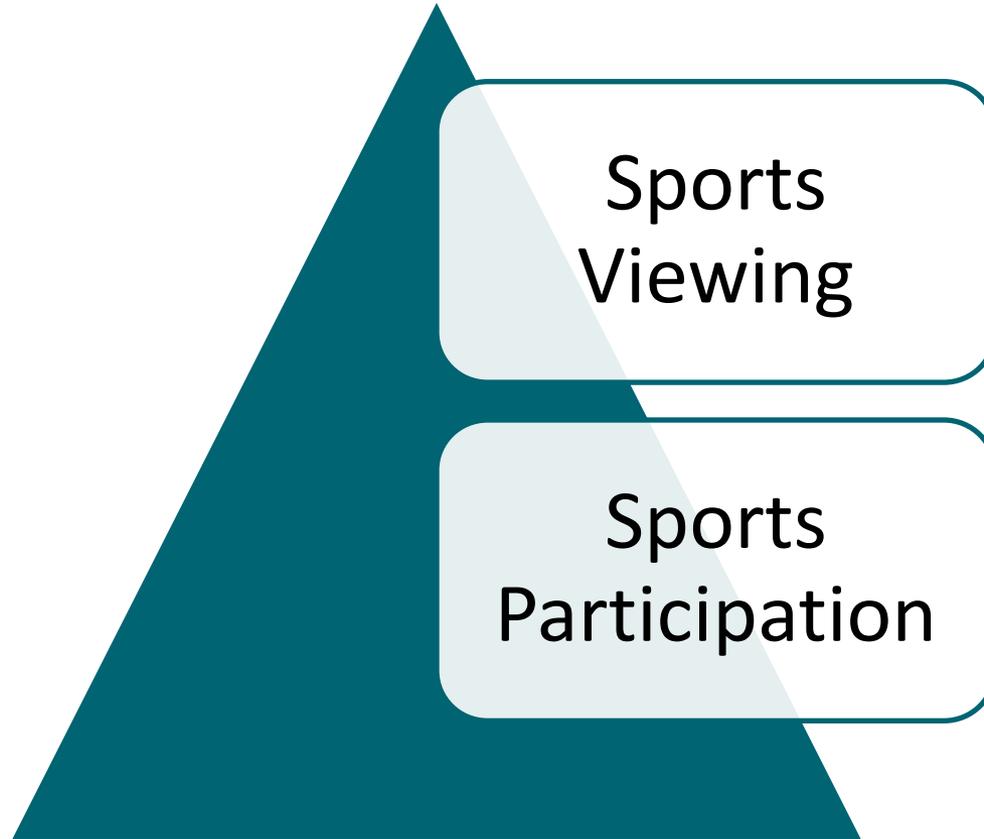
# Review: Disordered Gambling Treatment

- Defining harm reduction
- Dangers & risks of harm reduction- “*proceed with caution*”
- Have a plan, goal, reason & approach
- Examples
  - Scheduling, time frames, appropriate amounts of time spent on betting, specific money amounts, specific types of bets
  - Participating in Fantasy Sports Leagues (traditional, examples, contract examples), survivors pools
  - Other types of monitored gambling (casino, scratch offs)
  - Focus must be on balance (avoid white or black thinking, gray area), self awareness, journaling
  - Preventative measures in place

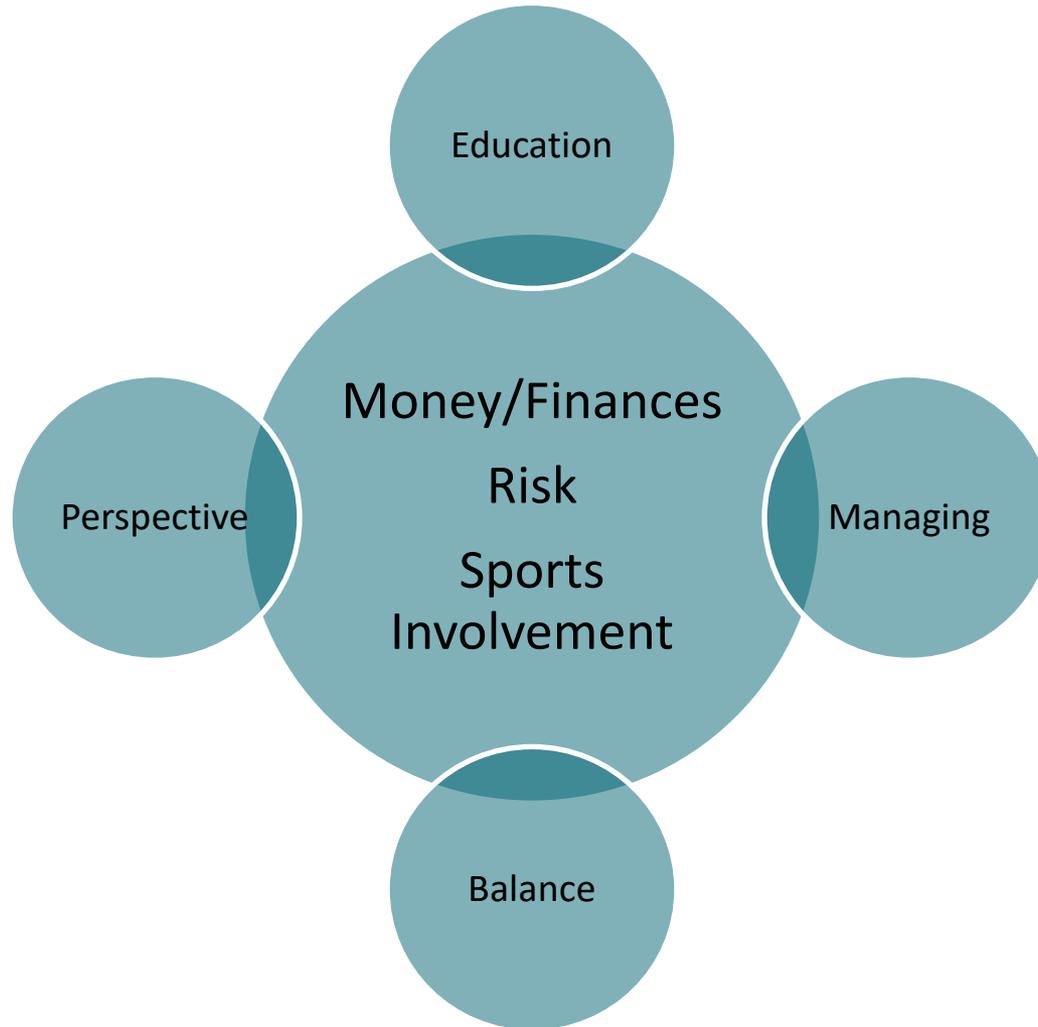
# Preventative Measures (Bechtold)



Additionally...



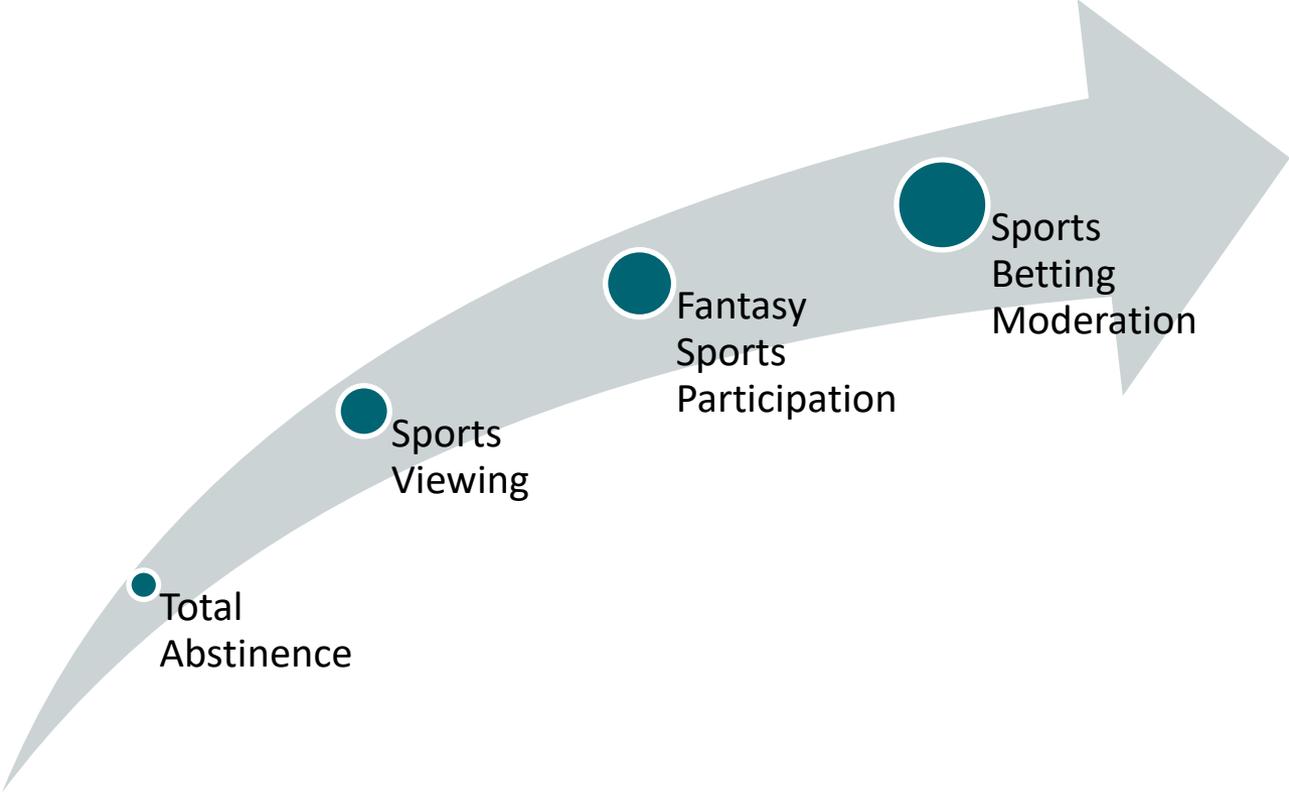
# Preventative Measures in Process Addiction



# Approaches

*“If it wasn’t for **Fantasy Football**, I’d probably be betting....”*

# Sports Betting Approach Levels



# General Sports Betting Considerations

- What is the motivation for watching the game or event?
- Do you feel safe?
- Can you separate the Action (and or money motive) from the fan motive?
- What if your team loses?
- What if your Fantasy Season down the drain- where does your mind go? (talk about holistic approach, living problem, money issue or escape issue)
- Scale intensity of frequency of thoughts related to money and/or action
- WHERE CAN WE DIRECT THIS ENERGY? Is it possible to maintain?

# Safe Sports Viewing Reflection

- **Assessing: Sports Viewing**
- How often do you watch sports live? Action involved?
- How often do you watch sports online? Action involved?
- How often do you watch sports on TV? Action involved?
- How often do you watch sports news (ESPN, FSN, ect)?
  - *Why do you watch sports news?*
  
- **Assessing: Sports Research**
- Do you watch specific sports betting shows?
  - Which ones?
  - How often?
  - *Why do you watch specific sports betting programs?*

# Safe Sports Viewing Reflection

- **Assessing: Sports Participation**
- How often do you participate in sports? Action involved?
- How often do you participate?
- How many sports do you participate?
- How long have been participating?
- Why do you enjoy?
  - Competition
  - Social/family
  - Fun
  - Fitness

# Identifying: Assessing the reason for viewing or play

- What sports do you like? Favorites?
  - Why favorite?
  - Provide history, **before betting and after**
- What sporting *event* is your favorite?
  - Why favorite?
  - Provide history, **before betting and after**
- How do you view the sports?
  - Why is this your favorite venue?
  - Provide history, **before betting and after**
- When do you view the sports?
  - Why is this time so important?
  - Provide history, **before betting and after**

# Safe Sports Viewing Tips

- **Tape games or sporting events** (fast forward through gambling promotions, sports analysts recommendations on betting & have the ability to exit games if necessary due to triggers, etc)
- Set limits on the amount of **games**
- Set limits on the amount of **time** (research & viewing)
- Set limits on the amount of **sports shows**
- Set **specific days/times** during week to view sporting events, news and shows
- **Journal** thoughts, feelings & triggers before, during & after sports viewing

# Safe Sports Viewing Tips

- **Forget the pre-game & post game shows**
- **Set your safe “parameters” for sports viewing (number of games, which games, which days, what is your plan?)**
- **Beware of back-to-back games**
- **Check your environment**
  - **People**
  - **Places**
- **Schedule other things day/weekend of big sporting events, before & after**
- **Check yourself before viewing/attending sporting events, games**
- **Bring-in support to watch**

# Safe Sports Viewing Tips (cont'd)

- **Check-in with sponsor, therapist, peers before, during & after games as necessary**
- **Remember to focus on the reason you're watching (fan, event history, loved ones & family)**
- **Remember the pain (or reason you're in recovery)**

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