



The Lotteries

every punter wants to win the big one

In the bad old days it was known as the numbers racket. People paid cash they could barely afford to enter the draw for the winning number. It was hoped that a big win would solve all of their money problems; and, of course, because no-one could expect to win first time out they kept trying, week after week. The fact that these get-rich-quick schemes were run by gangsters who had no intention of giving a sucker an even break was common knowledge; but who would have dared to face off with such dangerous criminals? The simple remedy would have been to stop playing altogether; unfortunately, if there was even a minuscule chance of a decent payback the gullible continued to throw good money after bad.

Today we have the lotteries. As legitimate businesses they are scrutinised to ensure they play fair by the millions of punters who plough money into the various weekly draws; and people believe this because it's actually true; well, in most cases. They are also very aware, like the latter-day numbers-racket suckers, that the chances of them winning really big are next to none. There are, however, lesser prizes that are small compensation; and an occasional lower dividend helps some to break almost even, while those slipping further and further behind in the winner's stakes keep on spending and hoping.

One advantage is the ability to choose the numbers for each draw. In some respects, accepting this option is no more certain than taking pot luck with a pre-selected ticket; not if it is only a one-off; but to put in the same numbers in the next draw, and the next surely makes the odds more favourable; doesn't it? The law of averages says that if the same numbers are played for long enough, they will eventually come up. An old friend must have thought that as he entered his eight numbers in the British football pools every week from when the competition first started to the day he died. Not once did he have a win of any kind. The cost of his regular flutter was quite small; and he being a successful business man, the impact was negligible. Not so for those who are struggling to survive financially.

The type of draws vary from country to country; but in all cases, the odds of winning the jackpot are phenomenal. The USA's top prizes are Powerball, odds 1 in 292.2 million; and Mega Millions, odds 1 in 302.6 million. Despite this, there are winners, and one lucky punter did score \$1,586,500,000!!! Odds for the UK National Lottery are less – 1 in 45 million – but so are the prizes. The same applies in Australia – 1 in 134.4 million. Mind you, someone there did win a massive \$A107,000,000: not a bad return for a small wager.

Rarely, however, do people take notice of statistics, except for the amount of the likely prize they might, just might win. So they forget the maths and continue to spend on the

lotteries. If they did ever stop to think, they could consider that a wager of \$10 a week would cost them \$520 a year. Carried over for 10 years the total stake would amount to \$5,200, pretty much money down the drain, with the exception of the odd \$15 win here, maybe \$40 there. But, like the player of the dreaded slots, they keep pouring the cash in. And when the top prizes roll over to a jackpot, they may even increase their bet. From time to time there are specials, perhaps in weekly draws that they don't normally enter; but the temptation is too great to resist, and there goes another ten or twenty bucks! They'll never learn the folly of their addiction, which is eventually what it becomes.

We personally shouldn't really criticise because we are also into lotteries; and like our old friend with his football pools, we religiously put our chosen numbers in the same draw every week. Of course we're losing money; sure we could well do without wasting it on the vaguest hope of a decent win; but it seems to have reached the point when to stop playing could be disastrous. How would we feel if the one week we didn't have a ticket our numbers finally came up? It doesn't bare thinking about.

Like most we try to avoid the thinking part and just live in hopes; which is because we are only human, and as such can't resist the odd flutter. Anyway, isn't life in general supposed to be a lottery, so where's the harm in making it profitable along the way? Really and truly, though, anyone who believes that is the proverbial sucker who will be waiting forever for that very illusive even break.

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