

Idaho instant racing parlor closes after court ruling

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho (AP) — An off-track instant racing parlor in eastern Idaho says it has been forced to shutter its doors and lay off 70 employees.

The Post Register (<http://bit.ly/1QNX41S>) reports that Double Down Betting, Sports Bar and Grill announced its decision Wednesday. Co-owners of the establishment say the closure is a result of a recent Idaho Supreme Court ruling that made lucrative instant horse racing machines illegal in Idaho.

Instant horse racing allows bettors to place wagers on prior horse races with no identifiable information. The machines have spinning wheels, sounds and animations that mimic slot machines. Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter vetoed legislation banning the machines earlier this year. However, the state's highest court later ruled that Otter failed to issue the veto on time.

Double Down operated 80 instant racing terminals. After years of declining revenue, the slot-like machines were seen as a much-needed shot in the arm to revive the sluggish horse racing industry. That's because portions of the profits went to the track owners and breeding groups, with the amount paid to the highest finishers at live races.

"As you can imagine, it was a sad day," said Melissa Bernard, co-owner of Double Down. "There were a lot of tears and a lot of grief. We had a flourishing business and it makes no sense, this whole process makes no sense."

Double Down isn't the only establishment to lose employees and business since the court's decision. Over in Garden City, Les Bois Park laid off 80 employees after it was forced to shut off its 200 machines.

Former Double Down employee Amber Job said she had just received a sizable raise as a manager for the betting parlor. She had used that money to help pay for riding lessons for her daughter — an option not financially possible before.

"It has just been completely devastating," Job said. "Jim and Melissa are such good people, they tried so hard."

Bernard says she and her husband, Jim, invested \$3.35 million in a 7,000 square-foot expansion to their bar and grill to install the instant racing machines less than a year ago.

However, Bernard says despite the closure, she doesn't plan on selling the machines just yet.

"Right now we're going to sit tight," Bernard said. "We're hopeful that there will be some kind of a compromise or new legislation in the future. We're certainly open to anything the lawmakers would like to discuss as far as concerns they have about technology or those kinds of things."

Information from: Post Register, <http://www.postregister.com>

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