

# WEB LETTER

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## For Those Suffering from Problem Gambling, It Has Never Had a More Fitting Name: March Madness

**Problem Gambling Awareness Month occurs annually in March, in part due to the wagering frenzy associated with the NCAA collegiate basketball championship tournament – known to many as March Madness.**

This year, March Madness is in action from Selection Sunday on March 17<sup>th</sup> until the NCAA Championship Game on April 8<sup>th</sup>. Like the Super Bowl, March Madness draws in even those who don't otherwise bet on games during the regular season. The popularity of the tournament inspires office betting pools and bracket contests of all kinds, as millions around the country make efforts to be included in the action.

**How big is March Madness?** Before last year's tournament, the American Gaming Association (AGA) estimated from the results of its survey that 68 million Americans planned to wager \$15.5 billion on the March Madness. <sup>1</sup> The AGA's estimates for the 2024 tournament had not been published by the time of this writing, but given the trend in growing sports betting legalization across the country and the increased estimates for the Super Bowl, we should expect this number to grow. A 2018 survey by Challenger, Gray & Christmas looked at the time spent filling out March Madness brackets during the workday and estimated that this comes at a combined annual cost of \$17.3 billion in lost productivity for U.S. employers! <sup>2</sup>

These days, it's pretty difficult to avoid being caught up in all of the talk about odds, predictions, betting lines, celebrity participation, and so on. When one tunes into a broadcast of one of the games or a pre-game show, the announcers and commentators chime in on the betting lingo, too. **For individuals suffering from problem gambling, the temptation and risk of relapse goes up significantly as a result.**

Though none of us can control this changing environment, we can all do our part to be mindful of those suffering from gambling addiction. Importantly, consider that someone you know or are around may be struggling with problem gambling, and you may have no idea. Known as the hidden addiction, disordered gambling lacks the outward visible signs common with alcohol and substance abuse. Many suffer in silence because of persistent stigma.



Whether or not problem gambling is a factor, no one should be pressured to make bets. Someone in recovery or at risk for problem gambling doesn't have to wager hundreds or thousands to feed the addiction. Even small bets use the same mental mechanisms that led to the gambling problem. What's at risk when organizing a betting pool or bracket contest?

**For someone in your group who suffers from problem gambling, the offer of joining a betting pool or bracket contest risks much more than the wager itself.** It could be the tipping point for someone at risk for disordered gambling or trigger a relapse for someone in recovery, undoing months or years of work and therapy!

For this reason, the FCCG strongly recommends avoiding asking others to join betting pools or bracket contests. Watching basketball or any sport should be fun for everyone, so let's keep

the focus on the sport and hit the brakes on the madness. **If you or someone you know needs help in Florida, call or text the 24/7, Confidential, and Multilingual Problem Gambling HelpLine: 888-ADMIT-IT.**

March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month (PGAM) and a great time to spread awareness about how "888-ADMIT-IT Fills in the Blanks" and answers questions left by gambling addiction. Help "Shine the Light on Problem Gambling" for your fellow Floridians! Learn more about this year's campaign at [problemgamblingawarenessmonth.org](https://problemgamblingawarenessmonth.org).



## References

1. "2023 March Madness Wagering Estimates." American Gaming Association, 20 Apr. 2023, [www.americangaming.org/resources/2023-march-madness-wagering-estimates/](https://www.americangaming.org/resources/2023-march-madness-wagering-estimates/).
2. Front Office Sports. January 2024. Bracket Madness Could Cost Employers Billions, Study Projects. <https://frontofficesports.com/bracket-madness-could-cost-employers-billions-study-projects/>.

Contact FCCG's 24/7, Confidential,  
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