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Gaming Moves Forward: Ontario Launches New iGaming Framework and Sports Betting Expands

By Portia Biswas and Peter K. Czegledy

Today is the day.

April 4, 2022, is the date that two important Canadian gaming legislative and regulatory changes - each years in the making - come to fruition. Firstly, Canadian sports fans nationwide are now able to make bets on single events. And secondly, a Canadian province has opened up regulated online gaming to broader competition, providing equal opportunities for private industry alongside the offerings of the provincial Crown corporation.

On August 27, 2021, Bill C-218, the *Safe and Regulated Sports Betting Act*, came into force, amending s. 207(4)(b) of Canada's *Criminal Code* (the "Code"), legalizing single-event sports betting in Canada. This expanded the type of sports betting available in the regulated sphere - making it, at least in theory, competitive with private industry unregulated offerings, allowing Canadians to place a regulated bet on single events, such as the winner of the Grey Cup or the final game of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Introduced as a private member's bill, Bill C-218 received multi-party support, with many keen to see the regulated market extend beyond placing bets on multiple events simultaneously (i.e. "parlay betting") to single-event sports betting. The amendments to the Code enabled provincial governments and licensed authorities in every province and territory to establish processes to conduct and manage single-event sports betting (other than for a horse race). As noted by the Honourable David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the amendments apply both on land and online, with the hope that gaming facilities near the Canada-U.S. border will also benefit from the expanded betting format.

Provinces were quick to implement changes via their respective provincial gaming corporations to take advantage of the new opportunity. The British Columbia Lottery Corporation introduced single-event sports betting on its online gambling website, PlayNow.com, the same day that Bill C-218 received royal assent. In Ontario, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG) launched PROLINE+ on August 27, 2021, a "digital sports book" allowing players to bet on a single sporting event. Similarly, the Alberta Gaming and Lottery Commission introduced sports betting to the province's only regulated online gambling website, PlayAlberta, on September 1, 2021. The other provincial gaming corporations have made similar changes, or are expected to do so in the near future.

Further, historic change has taken place in Ontario. Following a long period of both informal and formal consultation, the province has created a new regulatory and operational framework that permits private operators the right to obtain licensing registration to carry out iGaming directly to customers, ending the regulated monopoly formerly held by the OLG. It will be facilitated, managed and conducted through a newly established subsidiary of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO), iGaming Ontario™. The launch date for the new framework is today, with a number of operators already fully qualified and eager to start - and even more still working through the regulatory and commercial requirements that are a prerequisite to active operation.

The legislative and regulatory amendments to the Canadian gaming landscape are welcome changes, as they seek to modernize and revitalize the industry. Other provinces are expected to follow Ontario's lead on the regulatory front. The governments' goal is to ensure that Canadians are afforded the best betting offerings on a competitive basis, from credible and regulated operators, reducing the appeal of "grey" and black-market wagering. Doing so is a laudable goal. At the same time, however, some parties - notably existing Canadian land-based operators, Indigenous peoples and provincial gaming corporations - have voiced concerns as to how the process is to be implemented, and whether it is fair to all industry

participants. Time will tell as to what the outcome will be, but the general consensus is clear. Canada is moving in the right direction.

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