

THE SPIRIT OF MARCH MADNESS TOUCHES ALL

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Nothing beats the camaraderie and emotion that accompanies an NCAA basketball tournament barn-burner, except, perhaps, the spoils and bragging rights that go along with picking an unforeseen upset of a top seed or, even better, winning your office pool. March Madness office pools are so much fun they should be illegal ... well, actually, they currently are, at least in Wisconsin.

Presently, the Wisconsin statutes make it illegal to bet on sports events, and that includes an office pool. The Wisconsin statutes define a bet as “a bargain in which the parties agree that, dependent on chance even though accompanied by some skill, one stands to win or lose something of value specified in the agreement.” Wis. Stat. § 945.01(1).

The consequences of violating the current Wisconsin statute forbidding betting on sports events may be a fine of up to \$1,000, imprisonment for not more than 90 days, or both. Even more alarming, the fine for running an illegal commercial gambling operation is a fine of up to \$10,000, imprisonment of up to 3½ years, or both.

A recent bill of the Wisconsin Legislature, however, proposes to decriminalize managing and participating in office sports pools by excepting sports office pools from the definition of a “bet” under Chapter 945. If the proposed bill is enacted, people may legally participate in office sports pools under the following circumstances:

- All participants in the pool are employed by the same employer
- The entry fee does not exceed \$50
- A prize is awarded based on the results of a sporting event or a series of related sporting events
- The prize is all or any portion of the money provided by the participants
- The person managing the pool is a participant and does not manage the pool for gain

This proposed amendment to Chapter 945 seems a good start toward decriminalizing an enjoyable and morale-boosting event in which a substantial number of American workers participate. Any bets on whether this proposal becomes a law?