

# Dania Jai-Alai slots plan is put on hold indefinitely

A slot machine casino approved but unbuilt at Dania Jai-Alai is too risky a bet – for now.

A spokesman for Boyd Gaming, owner of the fronton, announced Wednesday that South Florida market conditions – including a “prohibitively high” state tax rate, the continued poor performance of three other Broward casinos and competition from Seminole Indian casinos – mean the company will indefinitely postpone plans to develop a slot-machine casino at the jai-alai property.

„We’re not closing the door on redevelopment,” said Robert Stillwell, vice president of communications for Boyd. „If and when these conditions change, we’ll take a second look.”

Dania Jai-Alai is one of four facilities that won voter approval in 2005 to install Las Vegas-style slot machines. The three others are Gulfstream Park and Mardi Gras Race Track and Gaming Center, both in Hallandale Beach, and the Isle Casino at Pompano Park in Pompano Beach. The facilities pay a 50 percent tax on slot-machine revenues to the state.

## **Seminole Deal**

The other major player in the Broward gambling scene is the Seminole Tribe, which operates the Hard Rock Casino near Hollywood along with six other Florida casinos. The tribe struck a deal in November with Gov. Charlie Crist allowing it to offer Las Vegas-style slots – just like those at the Broward “racinos” – plus card games such as blackjack. Under the agreement, the tribe must pay at least USD 100 million annually to the state.

In their announcement, Boyd officials also noted that last

month's voter approval of slot machines in Miami-Dade County will add another factor to „an already competitive environment.“

Three Miami-Dade venues plan to add slot-machine casinos within the next 18 months to two years: Flagler Dog Track, Miami Jai-Alai and Calder Race Course.

Isadore Havenick, a Flagler vice president, said Boyd's decision has no effect on his company's development plans.

„I don't think anything would stop us,“ he said. „Boyd is looking at it as a publicly traded corporation, but for us, this our home market and our home community. We think we can provide an entertainment outlet for the people of Miami-Dade that they will come to.“

### **Three Generations**

Havenick's family has owned the dog track for three generations.

At Miami Jai-Alai, vice president and general manager Dan Licciardi said plans are still going forward for construction of a slot-machine casino at the fronton.

„Their decision doesn't cause us to rethink anything, but it does stress the point that it is a very high tax rate,“ he said.

Florida lawmakers meet in their annual session starting next week. On the table: a bill that would reduce the state tax on slot machines to 35 percent.

„I don't think anyone can fault Boyd for their decision,“ said Joseph Weinert, senior vice president of Spectrum Gaming Group, which analyzes the Florida gambling market. „Making an entry into the South Florida market at this time is a tough proposition, primarily because of the might of the Seminoles. That is a formidable operation they have there, and when you

factor in what they can do with table games, you're at a substantial competitive disadvantage."