

# Sports officials say gambling could help China through downturn

Liberalizing gambling laws could help China survive the global economic downturn, sports officials said at the annual meeting of China's parliament last week. Gambling was banned in mainland China after the Communist takeover in 1949, the exceptions being two state lotteries – one of them run by the sports ministry to fund the building of facilities.

It thrives, however, on the race courses of Hong Kong and in the casinos of Macau – both special administrative regions – while the frequent break up by police of underground syndicates indicates a flourishing illegal sector. „I suggest we deregulate the lottery,“ Hebei delegate Yang Jingzhi told the Sports Circle at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

„Our present lottery games are monotonous. We should fully introduce the international practices, such as betting on horses, „mark six“ and various others. „There are lots of types of lottery in Britain and the US, can we see any harm? As long as it is well legislated, there is not much harm.“

Flushed with pride at Premier Wen Jiabao's mention of the success of the Beijing Olympics in his keynote speech, the delegates to the advisory body discussed ways sport could contribute to the economic challenges China faces. „The sports industry in the short term can help maintain stable economic growth and employment,“ deputy sports minister Wang Jun said.

„The sports lottery can help create jobs. There are some 300,000 lottery ticket sellers in the country. „We are facing a problem that underground casinos and overseas gambling have dangerously broken in, taking an estimate 10 times as much as

our official lottery.

In Hong Kong, where the legal lottery is well developed, the official business is 10 times as big as the private ones.“

The central city of Wuhan hosted first commercial horse race in China since 1949 last November. Gambling was strictly limited with prizes, not cash, on offer for winning bets.

The sports manufacturing industry, three representatives of which were invited into the Sports Circle for the first time this year, could also play a role in keeping the economy growing, delegates said. „About 60 to 65 % of the world's sports products are made in China, but we earn little profit as we don't have a many influential brands,“ Wang added.