

New Binion's owner plans to target hard-core gamblers

Hard-core gamblers will be MTR Gaming Group's target market when it takes over operation of downtown Las Vegas' Binion's Horseshoe from Harrah's Entertainment Inc. a year or more from now, company executives told investors and analysts on a call today.

„We want to recreate the old Binion's atmosphere,“ MTR Chief Executive Ted Arneault said. „Hard-core gambling ... we think Binion's is the true classic casino. (We want to return) the joint to the old place it used to be.“

MTR bosses said that under Harrah's management, the Horseshoe is expected to have a reduced slot inventory, dropping from about 1,200 to about 800 – while the number of table games will remain about 40.

Harrah's expects the property to reopen April 1, and it will retain the Binion's Horseshoe name until Harrah's gives up operation, at which time Harrah's will take the Horseshoe name and MTR will keep the Binion's name on the property. The company may add the name „Speakeasy,“ to Binion's, the name of the MTR subsidiary created to manage the Binion's purchase.

The two companies will each receive the entire customer list after Harrah's turns over operation to MTR, with each able to market to the the entire database. MTR executives said they believe Binion's customers are downtown customers, demographically different from those who stay and play on the Strip, and that those customers will stay at the property after Harrah's gives up operation.

Harrah's executives said this morning that they do not plan to use the company's Total Rewards slot-players cards at the downtown property. Total Rewards is the world's biggest slot

club database, by far.

Asked whether the loss of the Horseshoe brand name and the loss of the World Series of Poker would cripple the property, Arneault said he believes the Binion's name is a valuable brand.

„In our opinion the Binion's name is as valuable in our own little world (in Las Vegas) as the Horseshoe name,“ Arneault said. „If you go to Vegas the name Horseshoe is maybe used more than Horseshoe. Binion's is one of the classic names.“

He acknowledged the WSOP's primacy among poker tournaments, but said that doesn't mean an MTR-run Binion's won't compete.

„There are a lot of competing poker tournaments out there,“ Arneault said. „It's not that Binion's won't have poker tournaments.“

Harrah's announced this morning that this year's winner of the WSOP championship event – a 10,000 USD buy-in, no-limit Texas hold'em tournament slated to begin on May 22 – will earn 3 million USD. The event is expected to draw more than 1,000 entrants, award 10 million USD or more in prize money and pay 100 or more places.

Last year's champion Chris Moneymaker parlayed a 40 USD online poker tournament entry into a WSOP championship entry and then won the tournament, beating a field of 839 players and collecting 2.5 million USD.

The WSOP begins this year on April 22. Players interested in registering in advance for the tournament can call 877-FOR-WSOP to register in advance for tournaments after transferring the money via wire, a Harrah's statement noted.

Arneault said the Binion's property is in remarkably good shape for its 52-year age.

Capital expenditures needed to improve the property will be

split by Harrah's and MTR.

Harrah's Entertainment spokesman Gary Thompson on Thursday said that letters have been sent to all former Horseshoe employees, inviting them to call 382-1600, ext. 7329, to schedule interviews.