

What Is the Price of March Madness?

Friday, March 17, 2006

By C. Spencer Beggs



Twenty days. Sixty-four games. And nearly \$4 billion in lost wages and productivity. March Madness is hoop heaven for college basketball fans, but many employers worry that the nationwide office *fixation* with the Big Dance could put big dents in their bottom lines. American companies could lose up to \$3.8 billion in lost wages and productivity this year due to the distraction of the NCAA men's college basketball tournament, according to an estimate by consultancy firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

With employees organizing and monitoring betting pools, scouring the Web for the latest updates and even watching games on company time, Challenger says workplace productivity is *poised* to take a major dive this month. And thanks to 21st century technology, slacking off in the office has just gotten easier: CBS will stream video of the first three rounds (56 games) for free over the Internet.

"We think that [\$3.8 billion] is actually a pretty conservative estimate, because it just takes into account time visiting Web sites, but you can't account for time people spend armchair quarterbacking," said Rick Cobb, 48, executive vice president of Challenger, Gray & Christmas. Challenger estimates that for every 13.5 minutes workers spend watching games online, companies lose over \$237 million in lost wages alone. And with 16 games being played on Thursday and 16 more on Friday, computer networks could be strained or even crash under the load.

Office pools are everywhere, even if they may not be legal. The laws pertaining to this form of gambling vary from state to state. But even where it's illegal, authorities generally agree that enforcement is not worth the time and effort. The FBI estimates that of the \$2.5 billion Americans gamble on the NCAA tournament each year, only \$80 million is legally bet through bookmakers in Nevada. According to a 2006 Office Betting Pools Survey conducted by career publisher Vault Inc., 57 percent of workers said they participate in March Madness office pools. The percentage of workers admitting that they participate in some form of interoffice gambling rose from 61 to 67 this year.

In fact, a 1999 survey of 2,300 human resources managers conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management revealed that only 6 percent believe that there was a noticeable loss of productivity due to gambling in the workplace; 56 percent said there was no change and 13 percent felt it actually increased productivity. No matter how much you play up the numbers, Kaufman says, the effect on the nation's productivity is most likely *benign*.

1. An average (mean) of how many college basketball games will occur daily? Weekly?
2. American companies will lose approximately how much daily throughout the duration of the March Madness tournament? Weekly? Hourly? How can they tactfully combat these figures?
3. Currently (Thursday, March 16, 2006 at 8:30 p.m.), there are an estimated 298,315,812 in the United States; whereas 6,503,884,553 occupy the world (www.census.gov). According to the F.B.I., about how much money will every American gamble on the NCAA tournament?
4. Based upon the estimates given in question three, what percent of the world resides in the U.S.?
5. What concerns exist for upcoming Thursdays and Fridays? Explain.
6. What percent of the \$2.5 billion will be legally bet through bookmakers in Nevada?
7. What percent of workers said they *not* participate in March Madness office pools?
8. In paragraph(s) form, summarize the passage printed above.
9. In the passage above, in paragraph form, explain at least seven ways using the "**Reading Across The Curriculum**" poster simplifies understanding of the material. Be specific.
10. In paragraph form, list at least five ways using guidelines from the "**Writing Guidelines**" will make you a stronger and more convincing writer; specifically, on The Daughtry Times.
11. Using contextual clues only, explain the meaning of the italicized words *fixation*, *poised*, *benign*.
12. In paragraph form, explain five legitimate and educational purposes behind The Daughtry Times.