

# THE GAME OF CHANCE RULES IN SA'S CASINOS

By Steve Howell

I know that there are very few people who can say with absolute honesty that they love the industry they work in. So it is with a hint of smugness that I'm able to brag about being one of these rare individuals. The non-stop excitement and glamour that surrounds the casino industry attracts enthusiastic and energetic staff with a flair for interacting with customers from hugely diverse backgrounds and cultures. I thrive on being part of an industry that never sleeps!

So it will come as no surprise that I get highly annoyed at the ease with which people are willing to believe the worst when it comes to casinos and gambling. In many ways, however, this negative public opinion has done the industry a huge favour because, when public opinion is at risk, then the legislators step in.

As a result, casinos in South Africa are heavily regulated and offer exactly what they're supposed to – games of pure chance and some skill in varying degrees. Neither the tables nor the slot machines can be randomly manipulated to alter the odds. That they often can be is a myth that is likely to have perpetuated since the days of illegal gambling "joints" prior to the new, post-apartheid gaming dispensation. As with any other business, you may find the odd scam carried out by consumers and/or staff trying to steal from the company. Having said that, the necessary controls and procedures have been put in place to protect consumers and to minimise this risk.

Furthermore, the application for a licence to operate a casino is exceptionally stringent – and obtaining one is no mean feat. Casino operator licenses are not freely available to any keen capital-rich business. The number granted per province is limited and is determined by national legislation. When a licence is available, the granting of it is based on a competitive bid process in which businesses have to present detailed proposals and plans for the casino to the provincial licensing authority.

The operational process that follows the granting of a licence is legislated by the National Gambling Act and is equally rigorous. It's implemented in Gauteng by the Gauteng Gaming Board, which is committed to regulating the industry in a transparent, fair, equitable and competent manner for the benefit of all stakeholders – which, of course, includes consumers. Casinos are monitored through internal control procedures, electronic monitoring systems, as well as surveillance measures to ensure the integrity of gaming operations. It is also externally audited by the regulators.

On the casino floor the software used on every slot machine is SABS-certified to perform within specifications and the machine's computer chip is sealed before installation. Similarly on the tables cards and roulette tables are subject to intense scrutiny and monitoring, both internally and by external authorities. So you can be assured that all wins are random on both slots and tables.

On the tables, the notion that dealers are 'swopped' when you are losing at a table is a myth; as is the supposition that cards or roulette wheels can be tampered with. Dealers have their assigned shifts – and come off a table when their shift is over. Cards and roulette tables are subject to intense scrutiny and monitoring, both internally and by external authorities. Wins are simply random – on slots and on tables.

Random wins is what casinos are about; and that's what appeals to most people who see it as a form of entertainment where their main goal is to have fun – and thrill associated with the possibility of winning money. Yet another reason why I love this industry!

