

# [***Firing of Ohtani's interpreter highlights how sports betting is still illegal in California***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BKY-MNC1-DYMD-63Y8-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The [*firing of Shohei Ohtani's interpreter*](https://apnews.com/article/shohei-ohtani-ippei-mizuhara-gambling-a86471f296e986ad65634574da504e45) by the Los Angeles Dodgers over allegations of illegal gambling and theft has highlighted an issue many outside of California don't realize: [*Sports betting*](https://apnews.com/hub/sports-betting) is still against the law in the nation's most populous state.

Betting on sports has exploded in the United States since the 2018 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that [*cleared the way*](https://apnews.com/article/f3fa1f71b8f44378a7e2c51d321b13b4) for states to legalize it. Thirty-eight states now allow betting on sports, and ads promoting bookmakers DraftKings and FanDuel are [*seemingly everywhere*](https://apnews.com/article/gambling-addiction-betting-ohtani-dodgers-mizuhara-456460e191e0d5676bbb80ee8c9eb9f7).

Sportsbooks salivate at the thought of gaining access to California's 39 million residents, but the industry's efforts thus far have failed.

Two rival proposals were brought before voters in 2022 and tanked badly. One that was largely backed by gaming companies would have allowed adults to wager on mobile devices and online. The other would have legalized sports gambling at tribal casinos and horse tracks.

The rival campaigns became the most expensive ballot proposition fight in U.S. history, with both sides hoping to break into what was then estimated to be a potential billion dollar market.

Another attempt stalled earlier this year without ever making it to the ballot.

In California, gambling is permitted on horse races, at Indian casinos, in card rooms and on the state lottery.

The ***politics*** involved are tricky. Wealthy Native American tribes that operate the state's largest traditional gambling operations generally view bookmakers and other outside gambling interests as a threat to tribal sovereignty.

It has also been a challenge selling the idea to voters, many of whom are cynical about the industry's something-for-nothing promises.

In the 2022 election, advertising made sweeping claims about how new gambling revenue could be used, from helping the homeless to providing financial security to poorer tribes that haven’t seen a windfall from casino gambling.

At the time, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst’s Office determined that the two proposals would increase state revenues, though it was unclear by how much.

[*Ohtani’s*](https://apnews.com/hub/shohei-ohtani) interpreter and close friend, [*Ippei Mizuhara*](https://apnews.com/article/ohtani-mizuhara-interpreter-74da3b2a476a4649c2a62d12c0b6aca1), 39, was fired by the Dodgers on Wednesday following reports from the [*Los Angeles Times*](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-03-20/gambling-story) and [*ESPN*](https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/39768770/dodgers-shohei-ohtani-interpreter-fired-theft) that he owed millions of dollars to an illegal bookmaker.

Mizuhara has not been charged with any crimes and it’s unclear if his alleged relationship with the bookmaker broke California law.

In an interview Tuesday with ESPN, Mizuhara said he gambled on international soccer, the NBA, the NFL and college football, but that he never bet on baseball, which MLB forbids team employees from doing. He added that Ohtani, the sport's [*highest-paid player*](https://apnews.com/article/ohtani-mizuhara-gambling-image-508e55ca5039ea8ce65cd4ed163ce725), paid his gambling debts at his request.

Mizuhara changed his story a day later, following a statement from Ohtani’s lawyers saying the player was a victim of theft.

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