

MAD IN MARCH



March Madness is here again with an estimated 51 percent of U.S. workers illegally, according to the FBI, betting up to \$2.5 billion on the NCAA Tournament. While the FBI is unlikely to be conducting any sting operations, participating or organizing inter-office gambling is illegal. Officially, betting on college sports is only legal in Nevada. March Madness as the nation's favorite office pool is a recent phenomenon with the closest being the Super Bowl as the most gambled upon event in the annual calendar. Whatever workers may choose to spend their cash on, they need to be wary of not using too much of their office time making or obsessing over their picks. Any perception to the contrary is likely to be viewed unfavorably by at least some colleagues. Workplace productivity may be negatively impacted, with colleagues talking about the games instead of doing their jobs, watching the games online or on TV and even getting slack on attendance. However, a recent OfficeMax survey indicates that many employed Americans are comparing brackets, showing their team spirit, and even checking scores during work hours. 48 percent of workers, according to a "Hoops at Work" survey check the game scores online at least once a day during work hours. Colleagues characteristically organize office pools during March Madness, even if the organization discourages the behavior. According to Donelson Forsyth, University of Richmond psychologist, all the betting pools, glances at score updates and coffee chatter about the NCAA Tournament are good for an office, in fact even profitable. "Certainly time will be taken away from tasks we're doing, but the gain in terms of energy and overall cohesiveness in the long run will have a positive yield". All in all, most workers, including bosses and CEO's who participate in many cases view workplace gambling as a means of having some fun in the office. Team Spirit, as well, receives a boost with employees in many cases being allowed to openly celebrate their teams in the workplace by donning team jerseys or hats, sporting team colors and displaying bracket boards. Career expert, Vicki Lynn, says, "Spending too much time going over picks, researching teams, watching games or discussing the betting pool will raise a red flag with managers and could become problematic. It's best to keep the fun to an acceptable minimum". Forsyth in a publication on March Madness and other "collective crazes" in history, refers to a 2011 Robert Morris University survey in which workers owned up to watching tournament games on company time, but viewed their jobs more positively in the long run. The survey also revealed that bosses who deny workers the guilty pleasures of March Madness will stir resentment that will last long after the final buzzer.

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