Analysis: DraftKings, FanDuel wrong for now, but on right side

By Paul Newberry, AP

Say goodbye to all those annoying commercials.

Forget about the promise of winning millions of dollars.

The courts are sure to find what the rest of us already know.

Daily fantasy games are no different than putting down a bet at the horse track or handing over a few bucks to your neighborhood bookie.

Once we get past the obvious – yep, FanDuel and DraftKings are indeed sports gambling, which is against the law in most places – we can move on to the more important issue: should this sort of wagering be legalized?

Frankly, it's long overdue.

People love to bet. Always have, always will. Might as well let them head down to their local gaming parlor or simply place a wager on their smartphones.

As is often the case with issues of social relevance, the NBA is leading the way. Specifically, Commissioner Adam Silver, who one year ago wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* calling for a new approach to the illicit world of gambling.

"Despite legal restrictions, sports betting is widespread," Silver said then. "It is a thriving underground business that operates free from regulation or oversight. Because there are few legal options available, those who wish to bet resort to illicit bookmaking operations and shady offshore websites."

FanDuel and DraftKings brought it out into the open, allowing gamblers – call them what they are – to wager each day on a group of specific athletes, using the fantasy sports model that exploded in popularity over the past few decades.

When those two Web sites began raking in millions, and began pouring that money back into an onslaught of television commercials during the NFL season, it was only a matter of time before someone noticed.

That someone was Eric Schneiderman, who happens to be New York's attorney general. This week, he'll be in court arguing that FanDuel and DraftKings are running an illegal gambling operation.

It doesn't take a law degree to know he's right.

"My job is to enforce the law," Schneiderman wrote Friday in his own op-ed in the *New York Daily News*. "For more than a century, New York laws have banned gambling. The few narrow exceptions that exist – which do not include sports betting – all come with strong regulation and oversight to ensure fairness and protect New Yorkers from fraud."

Rightfully, he scoffed at the companies' argument that they're not bound by gambling regulations because they are games of "skill." There is no question the most skillful players probably have the best chance of winning, but that applies to any form of wagering.

Information always improves the odds, whether it's reading the countless books on the best ways to play blackjack, to having an inside tip on a horse's injury before the Kentucky Derby, to coming up with a complex set of algorithms that gives a fantasy player the best chance.

But nothing (except perhaps fixing a sporting event) guarantees a winner.

That’s when it becomes gambling.

“FanDuel and DraftKings have made the argument, over and over … that they run ‘games of skill’ and are therefore legal,” Schneiderman went on. “This is nonsense. New York law prohibits sports wagering – betting money on a future event outside of the gambler’s control – regardless of the skill involved.”

OK, so that’s a slam dunk for the attorney general.

But let’s get back to Silver.

Like Schneiderman, the NBA commish is right, too.

He notes that times have changed dramatically since 1992 when all the major leagues, the NBA included, pushed for Congress to approve the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, which generally prohibits states from legalizing sports betting (Nevada and a handful of states with licensed sports pools were exempted).

“Gambling has increasingly become a popular and accepted form of entertainment in the United States,” Silver said. “Most states offer lotteries. Over half of them have legal casinos.”

He correctly notes that plenty of countries around the world allow betting on professional sports, most notably England, without any major issues. For years, one of the major arguments against legalized gambling was that athletes might be swayed to throw games in exchange for a big payout. Multi-million-dollar contracts have largely removed that risk.

Besides, as Silver points out, a legal but tightly regulated betting system would provide even more assurance that everything is on the up and up.

There are still issues to sort out, from verifying that players are old enough to wager to coming up with mechanisms to identify and help those who have a gambling addiction.

But that’s for down the road.

In the short term, before the courts deliver a devastating blow, let’s give thanks to FanDuel and DraftKings for being on the right side of this issue.

Even if they’re on the wrong side for now.

Restoration of Hope Valley meadow in the works



Preservation of Hope Valley meadow in Alpine County has been assured. Photo/Provided

By Anne Knowles

The restoration of Alpine County’s Hope Valley meadow has been a long time coming.

Within a year, work to restore a 400-acre portion of the

1,600-acre meadow, which includes three miles of the West Fork Carson River, should be complete.

That project, which is just the start of a long-term healing process, has been in the planning stages for five years. But everyone involved in the undertaking will tell you it all started more than a century ago.

“There had been heavy grazing there, sheep and cattle, since the Emigrant Trail days,” said Julie Fair, project manager with American Rivers in Nevada City. Her group is taking the lead on the restoration effort.

As a result, vegetation was nearly eliminated, causing erosion and incision that left some banks as much as 10 to 12 feet higher than the river and creeks, upending the overall ecosystem.

The meadow hasn’t been grazed for 20 years and during that time Friends of Hope Valley, a citizen’s group founded in 1985 to stop the installation of a power line in the valley, has been planting willows to stabilize the river’s banks.

Before that, the group was instrumental in saving the meadow from development.

In the early 1990s, ranchers in the area were planning to sell their land, possibly to a condo developer.

Friends of Hope Valley teamed up with the Trust for Public Lands, a 43-year-old organization that works to protect lands, to stop it.



There was a time when this area south of Lake Tahoe was slated to be paved. Photo/Provided

“We walked the halls of Congress and in 1992 we got $23 million to purchase the land,” Debbie Waldear, president, Friends of Hope Valley, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

The meadow was then turned over to the U.S. Forest Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, which manage it now.

“Since then we’ve been the watch dog of the area. We prevented some logging and we’ve been doing restoration work everywhere,” Waldear said.

Now, American Rivers, in conjunction with its partners, is building on that work.

In 2011, it did an initial assessment of the meadow and, at the same time, the Alpine Watershed Group established its Hope Valley Meadows Stewards Program to collect data on the meadow in preparation for the restoration.

“Our goal is to protect water quality and the integrity of the meadow,” Shane Fryer, watershed coordinator for the Alpine Watershed Group, said. For the watershed group, the goals are to drop water temperature, lower the alkaline content and extend the river’s flow season past August.

“It’s an important water source for Carson Valley,” Fryer said.

After the initial assessment, Waterway Consulting Inc. in Santa Cruz and River Run Consulting Inc. in Cedarville did a more detailed plan.

From that, American Rivers determined the project should use a more “light-handed approach,” to the restoration, according to Fair.

A popular technique to quickly raise the water table is to do what she called pond and plug.

“You put in a series of berms in the channel and it raises the water table without damming it,” she told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It mimics what beavers do.”

It also creates ugly ponds, which eventually fill in with sediment. But it’s costly and causes more disturbances to the watershed.

“So we decided to focus on stabilizing the banks rather than raising the water table rapidly,” said Fair.

To do that, American Rivers is using several methods, including additional vegetation planting and excavating sod from high banks to essentially bring the meadow back down to the water.

“It’s a pilot in one part and if we had all the money in the world, we’d do that everywhere. It would create a wet meadow right away. We’ll see if we want to do more of it,” she said.

Another technique is using logs to stabilize the banks.

“You put in logs with roots still attached and lay the out with the root wad in the water and stabilize with other logs and willows,” Fair said. “The root wads will push flows away from the banks, create a buffer and as flows meander it

creates a great fish habitat.”

The log crib structure was the first phase of the project, completed last month by Habitat Restoration Sciences Inc., an engineering firm that works throughout California.

“We had a short window because of the permits,” Fair said.

The overall project, which is costing about $750,000 to construct, has required four permits.

“Permitting is a bottleneck. Some permits haven’t been streamlined for restoration and you have to meet the same criteria as development projects,” said Fair.

But no delay came from any protest to the permits.

“Throughout developing the designs we worked with the Alpine Watershed Group, the Friends of Hope Valley and had public meetings,” Fair said. “I think that was critical to the process. Everyone was engaged and it reflected what the community wanted.”



Beavers are good and bad when it comes to restoration. Photo/Provided

If any controversy remains, it’s over beavers, which are thriving there and have created more than 70 dams in the area at last count.

Everyone agrees they’re a mixed blessing, doing some of the

restoration work, but some see the animals as more hindrance than help.

The beaver use the willows for dam making, reducing the vegetation, and the pools they create can heat up the water, said Fryer.

“Is this a beneficial use? The Forest Service will decide, they have management authority on this issue,” said Fryer. “We think the beaver should be managed where they’re a detriment and encouraged where they help.”

The remainder of the Hope Valley meadow restoration project is scheduled to be completed over a six to eight week period next summer.

Are daily fantasy sports contests gambling or games of skill?

By Michael Hiltzik, Los Angeles Times

If Californians – indeed, all Americans – had a thoughtful, consistent approach to gaming, daily fantasy sports sites such as FanDuel and DraftKings would be treated as gambling and their sponsors regulated and taxed. They’d be subjected to government oversight, background checks of employees, audits of their books and certification that their games aren’t rigged – just like most other forms of U.S. gambling.

Instead, fantasy sports games have become ensnared in the web of inconsistent laws and confusing regulations governing gaming. At issue is whether daily fantasy play really

qualifies as gambling, and if so whether it should be outlawed or merely regulated.

The biggest stakes for the mushrooming fantasy sports industry may be in California, which could hold the largest population of fantasy sports players in the nation. And at the moment, the legality of their daily games is very much up in the air.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe in store for a white Thanksgiving

Enjoy the blue sky and 50 degree weather in Lake Tahoe because all of that will change on Tuesday.

“Early Tuesday strong gusty winds could create significant turbulence for anyone flying in for the thanksgiving holiday. Strong cross winds of up to 50 mph are also possible on north to south oriented roads making travel hazardous for high profile vehicles,” the National Weather Service in Reno said in a statement.

Forecasters predict the higher elevations could get more than a foot of snow from Tuesday into late Wednesday. Six inches is predicted at lake level.

Highs will drop to the high 20s and low 30s through Thanksgiving, with overnight lows in single digits on Wednesday night.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Sensory overload with BC's natural beauty



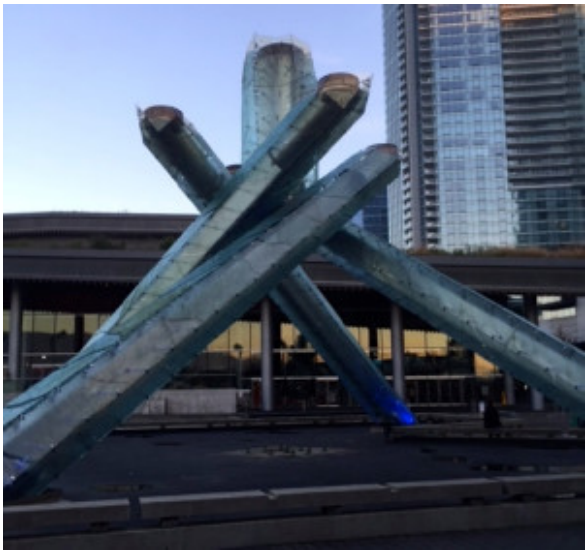
View from Quarry Rock in British Columbia. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

VANCOUVER, British Columbia – For people who can't decide if they prefer the ocean, mountains, or city, Vancouver is the place to visit.

A certain vibrancy fills this Canadian city of 603,502 people. It's easy to walk throughout downtown. Then there is the natural beauty that is reminiscent of the Sierra.

A long weekend last month barely scratched the surface of what there is to see and do. Fortunately I had my good friends Kim and Dan to play tour guide. I had driven through Vancouver in January 2010 to get to Whistler, but didn't stop.



The flame is rarely seen at the Olympic cauldron along the Vancouver waterfront.

There are few overt signs the Olympics were here nearly six years ago. A stop on the train from the airport to downtown has some reference to the Games, but my friends said all the Olympic Village housing is now condos.

Near the waterfront, in Jack Poole Plaza, is the glass and steel cauldron for the Olympic flame. It was relighted during part of the Sochi Games last year. It costs about $5,000 to light it for four hours, so it is mostly dark.

Seaplanes dot the harbor unlike any water city I've been too. It shows the common choice of transport to get to neighboring islands.



Lions Gate Bridge was completed in 1938.

My friends live on the other side of the 77-year-old Lions Gate Bridge. I had to agree with their description of it – it's like crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge, except instead of being dropped into Oakland it's more like Tahoe.

At the end of their street is a forest. While we didn't do it, going up would have delivered us to **Cypress Mountain** where the Olympic snowboarding events were staged.



Canadian maple leaf

We went on a few walks/mini hikes in the region. One was the 2.4-mile round-trip trek to Quarry Rock from Deep Cove. This is a little town on what is called the North Shore. Walking through the woods it's lush. It's almost tropical.

Vancouver gets an average of 57.3 inches of rain a year. To put this in perspective, Sacramento averages 21 inches a year.



Views along on the way to

Quarry Rock.

Beauty is everywhere. What is nice it that it isn't super dense, so it's possible to see the forest through the trees. Hemlock and Douglas fir are the predominant trees. And those Canadian maple leaves, they are huge – bigger than any I have seen in New England.

The end, well, it's just stunning. The rock provides views of fjords that make this oasis of the world so captivating.



Shannon Falls

Another day we took a little road trip toward Whistler. We stopped in Squamish where Shannon Falls is located. The Sea to Sky Highway, which was overhauled for the Olympics, is worth driving on even without a destination.

The falls drop nearly 1,100 feet – making it the third tallest falls in British Columbia. It's like a ribbon of white rushing water.

From here we could have hiked Sawamus Chief, but the brewery sounded better. It's easy here to get distracted by good beer. It's a nice reward after enjoying the outdoors.

What are Ted Ligety’s performance secrets?

By Bradley Stulberg, Outside

After his World Cup win on the Rettenbauch glacier in Solden, Austria, on October 25, American Ted Ligety confirmed he is still the fastest human down a slalom course on skis. The 31-year-old from Park City, Utah, is a three-time Olympian and the only man in U.S. history to win multiple gold medals in alpine skiing. He’s also won 25 World Cup races and is the owner of five World Championship crowns.

Ligety’s passion for mountain sports extends beyond the snow. He loves mountain biking and he co-founded Shred, an alpine gear company on a mission to “un-limit an athlete’s pursuit of fun through technological advances in engineering.” We caught up with Ligety upon his return from Europe to learn more about his habits for peak performance.

Read the whole story

Court docs show big business of daily fantasy sports

By Michael Virtanen, AP

ALBANY, N.Y. — Documents filed at the court examining the legality of daily fantasy sports in New York show a rapidly

growing national business built on billions in entry fees.

An estimate by DraftKings says the industry will take in up to $4 billion in entry fees in the United States this year, and could reach up to $20 billion in 2017.

Daily fantasy companies like FanDuel and DraftKings generally charge roughly 10 percent of each wager for hosting games.

The insights into the industry are contained within court exhibits as the companies fight New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, who is attempting to halt what he considers illegal gambling under state law. A hearing is scheduled Wednesday in Manhattan before a state judge.

The companies say their games are legal and based on player skill.

New York is just one of several states where the daily fantasy sports industry is facing recent scrutiny. Several states that don’t have specific prohibitions are considering new regulations or laws.

The companies caught the New York attorney general’s attention with their ad blitzes this year around the start of the NFL season.

“The growth in (daily fantasy sports) advertising has been as spectacular as it was sudden,” the attorney general wrote in his motion for an injunction. “Advertising reached a peak in the weeks leading up to the 2015 NFL season, when it became nearly impossible to watch televised sports without encountering a (daily fantasy sports) commercial.”

A spreadsheet collected by investigators shows FanDuel and DraftKings spent $34 million on TV advertising with NBC and Comcast through Oct. 28 this year, compared with $3.2 million in 2014. In another court document, the attorney general said FanDuel has spent more than $75 million this year on all ads,

saying it was “paying out over $2 billion dollars this year” and “anybody can play, anybody can succeed.”

U.S. entry fees were $20 million in 2011 and are expected to reach up to $10 billion next year, the DraftKings market estimate said.

Another document submitted to the court by the attorney general says the U.S. has a market of 63 million male sports fans between 21 and 50 years old, including 25 million fantasy sports players. They are described as passionate about sports, white collar, having high disposable income and “underserved by social and skill game developers.”

Both companies say they have hundreds of thousands of customers in New York.

New York-based FanDuel was forced to stop taking deposits from New Yorkers late last week, saying its bank and processors were deterred by Schneiderman’s efforts. It stopped letting customers in New York enter contests on Tuesday.

Both say they remain committed to ensuring their customers can keep playing and will argue their position Wednesday.

Controlled burns planned for Tahoe basin

North Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Douglas fire protection districts will continue prescribed fire operations on the North and East shores of Lake Tahoe. Operations may take place on urban lots on the west side of Incline Village, lower Kingsbury Grade near Palisades Drive and the area adjacent to Van Sickle Bi-

State Park.

Operations will continue through next week as weather and conditions allow.

Fall and winter bring cooler temperatures and precipitation, which favor prescribed burning.

Smoke from prescribed fire operations is normal and may continue for several days after an ignition depending on the project size and environmental conditions. Agencies coordinate with state and local county air pollution control districts and monitor weather conditions closely prior to prescribed fire ignition.

Before prescribed fire operations are conducted, agencies post road signs around areas affected by prescribed fire, send email notifications and update the local fire information line at 530.543.2816.

LTCC men’s soccer team wins conference

Lake Tahoe Community College men’s soccer team won the Golden Valley Conference championship for the second time in two years.

The Coyotes are seeded No. 5 going into playoffs. They take on No. 12 Lassen College on Nov. 21 at 2pm at home.

If they win, the Coyotes would play at home again on Nov. 24 at 7pm.

Sierra-at-Tahoe to open Friday

Sierra-at-Tahoe will open Nov. 20, the earliest it has done so in 11 years.

Nob Hill, Easy Rider Express, Rock Garden, Slider and Magic Carpet will be running, providing access to beginner and intermediate trails and the Broadway terrain park.

An added bonus is season passes and additional products from 2014-15 will be valid through Dec. 20. Activation of the passes is through the season pass office.

Snow play will be available next to Slider surface lift on Broadway and near the base area (no tubes or sleds will be provided).