

Tuesday, February 1, 2000

Super push ruins the day for wagerers

**By Tim Dahlberg
Associated Press**

LAS VEGAS - In Atlanta, the St. Louis Rams won. In this gambling city, it was just a super draw.

Long lines of bettors swarmed to the cashier's windows at sports books along the Las Vegas Strip after St. Louis beat the Tennessee Titans 23-16 in Sunday's Super Bowl.

But they weren't collecting their winnings - just getting their money back after the game ended just how the oddsmakers predicted - with the Rams winning by 7 points.

"We're almost as busy now as we were before the game," Imperial Palace sports book manager Jay Kornegay said. "We've got long lines of people here getting their money back."

Those who bet on the Rams minus the 7 points stood in the same lines as those who bet on the Titans plus 7 points. Neither side was a winner, but they weren't losers either.

"Most people are just getting refunds," said Cesar Robaina, who sets odds for many Las Vegas sports books. "It's not horrible, and it's not like the town lost millions. But it's obviously not a good result."

Although it will be several days before the betting results are finally totaled, oddsmakers say the biggest sports betting event of the year turned out to be a dud this time around.

The Rams were a solid 7-point favorite all week long, and the betting line never wavered.

"I suspect from a player's standpoint, they're not too happy either," Robaina said. "Nobody wants a push."

The result was similar to three years ago, when Green Bay beat New England 35-21 in a game that the Packers went into as 14-point favorites.

That line, however, had fluctuated in the two weeks leading up to the game, with books taking a lot of money at 13 and 13 1/2 points.

"This was just a dead line this week," Robaina said. "It just stayed there."

Having to refund millions of dollars in bets capped a bad Super Bowl week for Nevada sports books, which took in \$76 million on the game last year, pocketing about \$3 million of that in profits.

The lack of a marquee team and having only one week between the league championship games and the Super Bowl both cut into the betting. And industry experts said online sports betting may have also cut into the total wagers.

"It was scary on Friday because no one was betting the game," Kornegay said. "Then we just got a mad rush Saturday and today. But I'd still say we were 10 to 15 percent off from last year."

Although sports books and bettors played each other to a draw, the books likely will make some profits on the so-called proposition bets such as which player scores the first touchdown and whether the shortest touchdown came from 11/2 yards out or more.

A handful of fortunate bettors who took the Rams at 200-1 odds to win the Super Bowl before the season will profit, but sports books might have taken a beating if the Titans had won because many bettors played Tennessee on the money line without getting points.