

# Teachers say teens gambling futures with poker frenzy

By **MARTHA IRVINE**  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**CHICAGO** — Now that his high school football season is over, Zak Coppinger has been playing poker every chance he can get.

With his mom's blessing, he's turned the family dining room, complete with green walls and a chandelier, into a poker parlor for himself and his buddies. He also keeps a deck of cards at school so he can play impromptu games during class or lunch.

"It's better than homework, I can tell you that," the 18-year-old from Austin, Texas, says with a chuckle.

He's just one of the many young people who have become avid players of Texas Hold 'Em and other poker games — a trend sparked, in part, by TV shows that feature tournaments for celebrities and professional poker players. But gambling opponents wonder if some teens, and the adults who let them play, are taking it too far.

"It's fun. It's exciting. It's glamorous on TV and in the media in a way that other addictions are not," says Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling. "There's the impression that through skill you can beat the odds. But randomness is always going to have a bigger factor in determining the outcome than your skill."

"And unfortunately, that's not the message these kids get."

Some parents have heeded the warning, cutting back on casino nights at after-prom parties and other events. And

officials at a growing number of schools — from New Trier High School, north of Chicago, to Apple Valley High School in suburban Minneapolis — have recently started banning poker-playing on their campuses.

Dave Smiley, principal at Elgin High School in suburban Chicago, began enforcing an old ban on card and dice games months ago: "We're like church — you shouldn't be gambling in school," he says.

That said, Smiley concedes that his view softens when it comes to teens playing poker at their friends' homes.

"I'm not going to be hypocritical. I think my own son has participated in some of these games — and he's in high school," he says, noting that he likes knowing his son is somewhere safe and supervised.

Teens also argue that, with the standard \$10 buy-in to get into a game, the stakes aren't particularly high.

"You're paying for entertainment," says Eli Goldfarb, a freshman at Columbia University in New York. "The long and the short of it is, I have fun playing poker, and when I play well, I can buy more burritos."

"What's not to like?" He started playing Texas Hold 'Em when he was in high school at the Field School, a private academy in Washington, D.C., where teacher Will Layman says poker's never been a problem. But Layman also understands that some teens may not be able to control their betting.

"I would never criticize a parent who felt that poker — which really isn't much



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Westlake High School seniors, from right, Zak Coppinger, Marc Effenson, Tony Gulla and Brandon Black play poker around Coppinger's dining room table on Nov. 14 in Austin, Texas. With his mother's blessing, Coppinger has changed the family dining room into a poker parlor, complete with chandelier and green walls, for himself and his friends.

of a game at all if you don't bet in some form — was too tempting for their kid," says Layman, who plays poker with his daughter and son, ages 14 and 10. "But it is not the same as, say, smoking pot because with poker, the activity isn't harmful unless it becomes an overindulged habit — whereas pot impairs you every time."

Some parents goes as far as saying that poker teaches critical-thinking and math skills.

And Josh Kohnstamm, a father in Mendota Heights, Minn., says it's become the perfect escape for his

studious 16-year-old son, Josh, who "takes everything too seriously."

Poker, Kohnstamm says, allows Josh to "whoop the school's best athletes — computer geek that he is — and allows him to come away feeling lucky when that is a sensation that rarely happens in his everyday life."

But Dan Romer, a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, worries about kids who take gambling too far.

"At a minimum, it should be monitored," says Romer, director of research at the Adolescent Risk

Communications Institute at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center.

He oversaw the 2003 Annenberg National Risk Survey of Youth, which found that about 8 percent of the young people surveyed showed signs of having a gambling problem.

Those results led him to conclude that schools should teach about the dangers of gambling, the same way they teach that alcohol and drugs can be addictive. He also says that government officials who oversee public gambling —

casinos and lotteries — have a special responsibility to closely watch young people, who are allowed to gamble legally in many states as young as age 18.

Romer says Internet gambling is a particular worry because it can be done on the sly and is often less regulated.

Still, Ross Atteberry, a high school senior in Westfield, Ind., says the poker he plays with friends is not in that league of gambling.

"Obviously," the 18-year-old says, "cops aren't going to be kicking in doors to bust in on friendly card games."

## BRIEFING

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buildings but more as a vision of expanding the university in the technology areas we're declared," Pastides said.

USC officials have already planned for research focusing on nanotechnology, hydrogen energy, photonics, cancer and bioterrorism defense.

Sorensen said at the initial

announcement that he hoped to have 500,000 square feet worth of new research space to be built on the west side of the campus within 10 years, now less than nine left since the time of that comment. He also said plans were flexible and not final, as he wanted to rely primarily on Davis' recommendations.

Pastides confirmed Sunday that development between Assembly Street and the Congaree River would be the primary focus.

"We're looking at growth of the

university toward the Colonial Center and well beyond there," he said.

Pastides also said the focus of the meeting at the convention center would be for city and county officials, as well as business leaders, to receive details on the campus. He said business leaders are interested in future presence of interdisciplinary cooperation in research to benefit several industries. The city has a potential for interest in development because USC officials are planning for retail and commercial space to be integrated in the campus.

"We're looking at a 24-7 model in which the lights don't go off every night at 6 and all of these facilities will be deserted," Pastides said about using commercial development to help the new campus benefit the public on a daily basis.

USC officials announced earlier this year that November would be the target month for a groundbreaking for construction in the second phase. Officials are in consultation with faculty members and students about preferred amenities to consider when planning the

campus and are expected to give an update at Tuesday's briefing on their progress in working out details.

Sorensen isn't expected to name any corporations that might be interested in partnerships with USC, even though he has said for more than a year that he is regularly in private meetings with executives of several firms ready to move in to the buildings as soon as they are finished.

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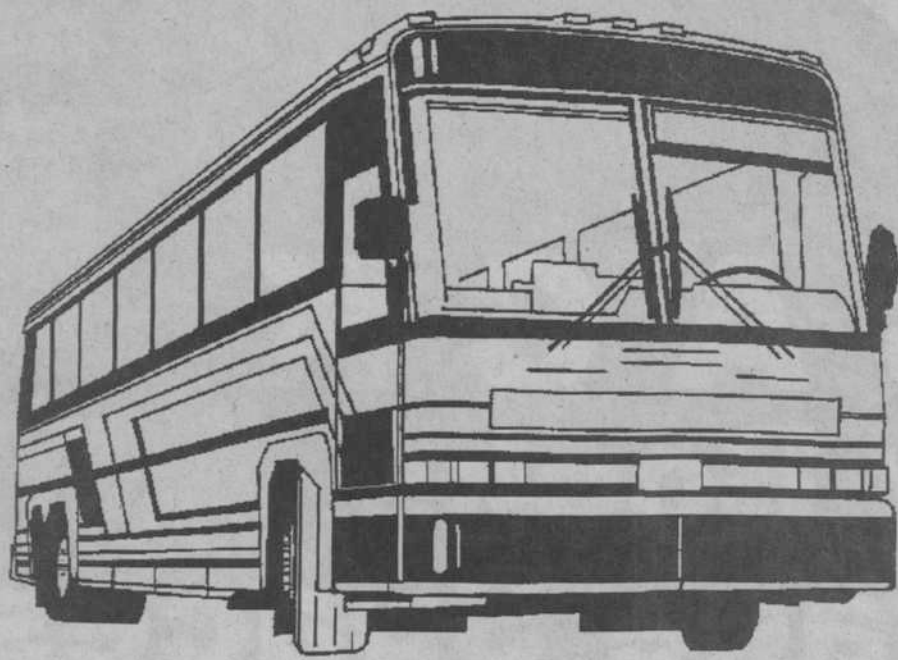


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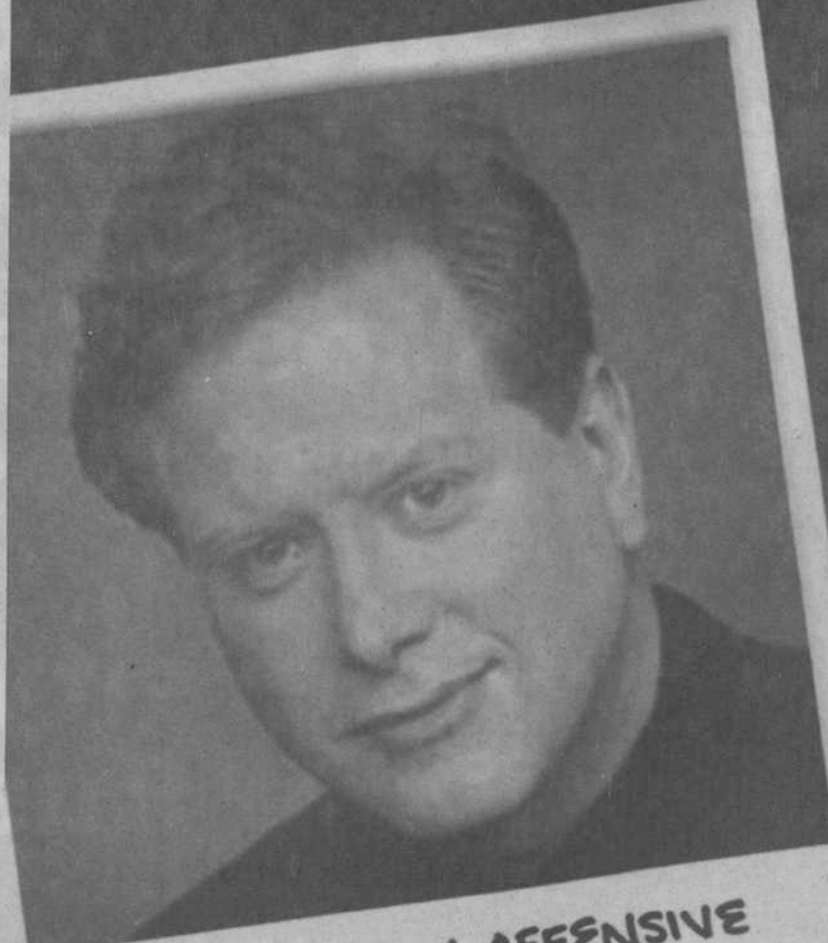
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