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# WEEK 36

FRIDAY 9 SEP 2022

## IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE:

OKADA CHANGES HANDS; US EXPANSIONS GALORE



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DRIVING DIFFERENTIATION



# WEEK 36

FRIDAY 9 SEP 2022

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## THIS WEEK

- CAMELOT DROPS LEGAL CASE
- NOVOMATIC H1 REVENUE
- NEW SURVEILLANCE GM FOR THE STAR
- SCIENTIFIC GAMES SIGNS LATVIAN LOTTERY DEAL
- NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW POKER ROOM FOR CDI
- £50M FUNDING FOR LIVESCORE GROUP

### GUEST INTERVIEW

Callum Sultana, Game Product Owner, Relax Gaming



# UNIVERSAL RECLAIMS OKADA MANILA FROM KAZUO OKADA

## NEW LAUNCHES IN INDIANA, TENNESSEE AND NEW JERSEY



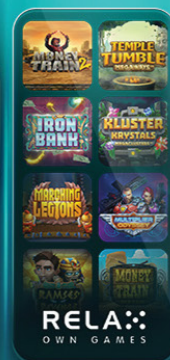
## DRIVING DIFFERENTIATION

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## Universal Entertainment retakes the Okada Manila after Japanese mogul Kazuo Okada held control since April 2022

▶ This week has seen the saga surrounding Kazuo Okada's occupation of the Okada Manila come to a head. Having controlled the casino since April 2022, Okada's rivals, in the form of Universal Entertainment and members of Tiger Resort Asia (TRAL), retook the Okada Manila after posing as casino workers and infiltrating the resort. TRAL members were accompanied by representatives from PAGCOR and police officers when they reassumed control on 2 September. Despite videos and reports clearly depicting violent scenes, Universal claims its reclamation of the casino has been "generally peaceful." Universal was accompanied by Philippines' regulator PAGCOR, which says it is withdrawing its recognition of Okada's party as the legitimate operating partner of the casino.

Below, *Gambling Insider* takes a look at how Okada got into this position, and what is next for him now his control over the casino has been relinquished.

Once an executive at Wynn Resorts and partner to the embattled Steve Wynn, Okada was the Co-Founder and Chairman of Universal Entertainment, the parent company operating the Okada Manila. Although technically controlled by Tiger Resort Leisure and Entertainment (TRLEI), a subsidiary of TRAL, itself a subsidiary of Universal Entertainment, this shouldn't be taken to suggest the Okada Manila was but a cog in Okada's multi-billion conglomerate; after all, he did name the casino after himself. Steve Wynn declined to join Okada in investing in the property, but Okada went full steam ahead anyway – perhaps to prove he could go it alone without casino giant Wynn, or perhaps to create something he could call his own. Regardless, the Okada Manila was unveiled in the summer of 2016, a \$2.4bn integrated resort that represented Okada's biggest investment ever.

It was just a year later, in 2017 when the wheels started to fall off for Okada, not long after they'd just been fitted. Accusations that Okada had misappropriated millions of dollars from Okada Holdings – his holdings company – began to surface. Even as Co-Founder, Okada was not immune to the scorn of his fellow board members, which included members of his family. In fact, it was his son – Tomohiro Okada – who condemned Okada to a quick demise, voting to remove him from the board of Universal Entertainment.

Okada, innocent or not, was incensed by his consignment into exile. He claimed his ouster from the company was "illegal", and that those who removed him acted upon "baseless accusations of a grand conspiracy, perpetrated by detractors who betrayed [his] trust."

The Court of Parañaque, a city in the Philippines National Capital Region, issued a warrant for Okada's arrest in connection with three case files alleging Okada was the recipient of over \$3.1m in unauthorised compensation from TRLEI. Okada's relationship with his lawyers at Dentons broke down after this.

However in 2021, with new legal representation, Okada had his warrant overturned by the Philippines' Court of Appeals, being granted a Status Quo Ante Order (SQAQO) — a legal document ordering the previous make-up of Universal Entertainment's and TRLEI's board be restored. Universal Entertainment, though, was in no mood to welcome back Okada, with legal issues of fraud and embezzlement still whirling over him.

This, it seems, was a decision Okada could not abide by. In April 2022, Okada and a party of associates stormed the Okada Manilla, removing existing TRLEI board members and workers from the premises. The tables had turned. Universal Entertainment was thrown for six, its plans to become a US-listed public company with the help of SpringOwl Asset Management were in disarray; it was in control of the Okada Manila but it no longer had access to it. Deposits and withdrawals from the casino's coffers were no longer on record, or at least, on Universal's record. What was unfolding was a scene of archaism in 21st Century business, although, one seemingly within the bounds of the law – a blow for the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR), the country's gaming regulator.


***“Universal Entertainment, though, was in no mood to welcome back Okada, with legal issues of fraud and embezzlement still whirling over him”***


**GI Verdict:** How do you beat Okada? It looks like Universal Entertainment has done so by playing him at his own game, infiltrating the casino and reassuming control from Okada and his associates. It was the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR) that had the legal play, ordering Okada's associates to be removed from the casino – arguing that Okada's SQAQO applied to him only, not his associates – unless they were able to provide "valid authority." Okada will remain on the board of Universal and TRLEI for now, as stated in the SQAQO, until legal issues surrounding his reclamation of the Okada Manila are resolved. Although new legal issues will likely forego further accusations surrounding claims Okada embezzled funds and laundered money – something struck down by the Court of Appeals in its SQAQO – Okada must now face claims of illegal distribution of funds for the casino's gaming cage.


In the saga of the billionaire and the casino, the question remains: what next for Kazuo Okada?

## TAKING STOCK


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**Universal Entertainment**  16%  
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**FuboTV**  5%  
3.70 USD


**The Star Entertainment**  16%  
2.67 AUD

**Churchill Downs**  3%  
201.59 USD

**The Rank Group**  3%  
76.96 GBp

**DraftKings**  3%  
16.36 USD

**Entain**  3%  
1,208.50 GBp

**Flutter**  0%  
10,265.00 GBp

## NEW LAUNCHES IN INDIANA, TENNESSEE AND NEW JERSEY

Hard Rock Sportsbook has launched its mobile app in Indiana and Tennessee, while there were also multiple expansions in the state of New Jersey, for the likes of Fubo Sportsbook, Internet Vikings and Play'n Go.

Tribal operator **Hard Rock** continued its expansion into the US market, as the group plans to engage its players with integrated in-person and online experiences.

Indiana is home to the Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana, while Tennessee has three Hard Rock Cafes (in Nashville, Memphis and Pigeon Forge) and the Bristol Casino.

Hard Rock's entertainment serves as the baseline for the company's mobile products, which are focused on offering all customers the "Hard Rock experience" on the go.

Additionally, the Hard Rock Sportsbook offers promotions and bonuses, fast deposits and withdrawals, and numerous games and props to wager.

The sportsbook has also introduced in-app streaming, as well as the Mystery Wheel, a rewards experience that gives players the opportunity to earn up to \$5,000 in free bets.

Marlon Goldstein, Executive Managing Director & CEO for Hard Rock Digital, commented: "We are excited to offer the legendary Hard Rock experience to our mobile sports betting players throughout Indiana and Tennessee.

"The successful debut of the Mystery Wheel is the latest example of the unique interactive experiences that can only be found at Hard Rock Sportsbook as well

as our commitment to building the most entertaining app in the market."

The Hard Rock Sportsbook mobile app is available for all types of mobile devices (Android or iOS) and can be legally accessed by players over 21 years of age who are physically located within the borders of: Arizona, Indiana, Tennessee, and Virginia, as well as New Jersey and Iowa (through the Hard Rock Sports and Casino NJ, and the Hard Rock Sportsbook Iowa apps).

Elsewhere, FuboTV's subsidiary **Fubo Gaming** has launched Fubo Sportsbook in New Jersey, after completing the soft play phase of the state's regulatory process.

Fubo Gaming is now available across the Garden State and offers wagers on live and future collegiate sporting events on iOS, Android and on its website.

Players will have access to Fubo Sportsbook's proprietary feature Watch & Wager, which leverages FuboTV's first-party data to recommend relevant bets based on sporting events being watched by a customer.

Similarly in the Garden State, **Internet Vikings** has announced it is now able to offer a broader range of customisable hosting services in New Jersey.

The supplier's expansion in New Jersey is strategic, given the Garden State has one of the most lucrative iGaming markets in the US, which has consistently outperformed land-based casinos in the state since the start of the pandemic.

After a long-awaited migration to the US, supplier **Play'n Go** is also now live in the state with PokerStars.

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## CAMELOT AND THE ALLWYN AFFAIR

This week, Allwyn announced that Camelot has dropped its protracted legal challenge against the Fourth Lottery Licence handover, after the former was selected by the Gambling Commission to take over the UK National Lottery.

This marks a drastic change in the legal fight which started in March, following Allwyn's award of the licence by the Gambling Commission. A loss which prompted Camelot and IGT to immediately appeal the decision, leading to both pursuing legal action against Allwyn and the Gambling Commission.

However, now that Camelot has withdrawn its legal challenge, Allwyn has likewise ended its counterclaim against Camelot.

But it is important to note that IGT is continuing with its own challenge, which means the initial transition suspension remains in place. A claim that may cost the UK Government £600m (\$693m) in damages, were it to be successful.

**GI Verdict:** The fact that Camelot has

given up pursuing the retention of the licence speaks volumes about how much the operator believes it will succeed in court, as it finally appears to have conceded long-term control of the UK National Lottery.

However, the fact that Camelot is still pursuing damages from the UK Government could be perceived as desperation from a business that is facing a significant financial hole in its books.

That said, the main problem now lies in IGT's continuing legal action against Allwyn and the Gambling Commission, as it relentlessly chases the overturning of a decision it vehemently disagrees with. Though, with Camelot now out, IGT's challenge has lost some of its weight.

From the side-lines, it doesn't look like Allwyn, or the Gambling Commission will lose in court, as the basis of IGT's continuing legal action appears to be little more than sour grapes. Meanwhile, Camelot's hopes of getting damages from the UK Government appear



intrinsically tied with the outcome of IGT's continuing challenge.

So, while neither of which appear destined to succeed, the result of the petty tantrum from Camelot and IGT could see Camelot sinking like a sword in a lake, its kingdom crumbling, while IGT moves on to pastures new.

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## NOVOMATIC REPORTS REVENUE OF \$1.31BN FOR H1 2022

Novomatic has generated revenue of €1.32bn (\$1.31bn) for the first half of 2022, an increase of 110% from the same period last year.

The casino games supplier also made earnings of €317.7m before EBITDA adjustments, a 128% rise year-on-year.

Net profit stood at €119.4m, a vast improvement on the company's losses of €55.5M in the first half of 2021.

Novomatic says this increased performance was due to reduced Covid-19 measures across all markets and increased demand for its products.

Of all markets Novomatic supplies, Germany made the most significant revenue increase, €175.3m greater than in the prior-year period.

Italy made an additional €120.3m, the UK €108.7m, Austria €98.9m and Spain €28.8m in H1 2022.

Novomatic says the markets in which there were the greatest revenue increases is attributable to income from slot machines, which rose by €447.1m in H1 2022.



Furthermore, the company notes an additional sales revenue of €189.7m is a result of the Ainsworth Group's activity, an Australian-based supplier in which Novomatic recently acquired a 52% majority share. This acquisition is part of Novomatic's strategy to increase its

presence in Asia-Pacific markets.

Overall, the company sold 15,141 gaming devices in H1 2022, an increase of 11,224 devices sold in H1 2021. Novomatic was operating 73,487 units as of 30 June 2022, compared to 63,118 in the prior-year period.

The supplier's gaming technology segment reported revenue of €504.8m, up from €336.5m in the prior-year period. Meanwhile, gaming operations generated revenue of €813.3m, up markedly on the €291.1m made in H1 2021.

**GI Verdict:** Although Novomatic's significant financial improvement is mostly a reflection of world markets reawakening following a two-year Covid slump, the supplier's attempts to improve its presence in the Asia-Pacific region show its goals remain expansive and growth-focused. The Austria-based firm aims to remain a tier-one supplier, consolidating its position by expanding into different markets. Asia may be a significant source of future growth.



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## THIS WEEK IN NUMBERS

**46.6 million**



American adults plan to bet on the upcoming NFL season, according to the American Gaming Association

**\$8.7m**

Funding agreement for Bragg Gaming from Lind Global Fund II, a New York-based investment entity



## THE STAR ENTERTAINMENT GROUP APPOINTS ZHAN SPALDING AS GM SURVEILLANCE QUEENSLAND

The Star Entertainment Group has appointed Zhan Spalding as General Manager Surveillance Queensland, a newly created role.

She commenced her duties on 5 September, and will divide her time between the group's two Queensland properties.

She will play a key role in the transition from the Treasury Brisbane surveillance team to a new model in preparation for operations commencing at the Queen's Wharf Brisbane precinct, which has a planned staged opening for the second half of 2023. And she will also commence immediate oversight of the existing surveillance operating model at The Star Gold Coast.

"We are thrilled to have been successful in attracting Zhan to this new and critical role for the business," said The Star Gold Coast COO Jess Mellor.

"She has extensive expertise in surveillance technology implementation, multi-site management, restructuring and streamlining processes, which we will be relying on as we further cement

our position as the Gold Coast's premium tourism and entertainment destination.

"Her appointment underpins The Star's growth and investment in Queensland as well as bolstering our female leadership ranks. The Star has a target of 45% female and 45% male representation in leadership roles while the remaining 10% recognises the need to create space for non-binary gender identities."

Spalding has over 30 years' experience leading surveillance and security operations for both national and international gaming venues, and said the promotion of gender equality was an attractor to the role.

**GI Verdict:** After the recent revelations from the inquiry into The Star, which among other issues found that the operator wasn't being entirely truthful with Queensland regulators, it is unsurprising the group has gone out of its way to create a new position overseeing surveillance. But perhaps more than one new face is needed to oversee operations in Queensland, given just how many issues the group faces.



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## ABOUT US

SCCG Management is a consultancy that specializes in sports betting, iGaming, sports marketing, affiliate marketing, technology, intellectual property protection, product commercialization, esports, capital formation, M&A, joint ventures, casino management, and governmental and legal affairs for the casino and iGaming industry.



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# 25%

Likelihood of new UK Prime Minister Liz Truss to be replaced before the end of 2023, according to Smarkets

# 3-and-a-half

Year ban for US tennis player Adam El Mihdawy due to match-fixing



# 11+

Years of experience in online casino and gaming for new High Roller Technologies CEO Idan Levy

## SCIENTIFIC GAMES EXTENDS LATVIAN LOTTERY PARTNERSHIP

This week, Scientific Games signed a new long-term contract with Latvijas Loto to operate the Latvian National Lottery.

As part of the driven expansion, which aims to fund the national budget and other youth programmes, Latvijas Loto will now meet its targeted growth objective of 50% in retail points of sale.

The new deal will go live in Spring 2023 and see Scientific Games' AEGIS gaming system implemented alongside the Wave X point of sale terminals in Latvia.

Edgars Lediņš, Chairman of the Board for Latvijas Loto, said: "After a thorough evaluation, Latvijas Loto chose to modernise our systems technology with Scientific Games so that we may continue to deliver outstanding player experiences and meet our growth potential.

"We look forward to the efficiencies

this technology advancement will bring to our entire operation, and our retailers will be delighted with the new terminals and support they will receive."

Meanwhile, Pat McHugh, CEO of Scientific Games added: "Scientific Games is honoured by the longstanding partnership and trust Latvijas Loto has placed in our company, our people and our products to support its mission of responsibly maximising growth over the next 10 years."

**GI Verdict:** Scientific Games has added another country to its ever-growing list of lottery partners through Latvijas Loto, for which it will now give its technology as part of the agreement to drive responsible growth and funding.

The partnership between the two entities goes back 20 years, so an extension isn't a surprise given this history.



## THE WEEK IN QUOTES

*“Duelbits is delighted to be an online regional betting sponsor of the Argentine Football Association. This is a landmark deal for us, and we are very excited to work closely with the team over the next 12 months. Also, this is a great year for Argentina, and we want to wish them the best of luck in Qatar.”*

**Duelbits SportsBook Head Ross Haffie on the company becoming an Online Betting Regional Sponsor of the Argentine Football Association**

*“Playgon has successfully developed a unique live dealer product with well-designed gameplay features that use cutting-edge technology to deliver a unique playing experience that particularly appeals to a different demographic. It is great to welcome Playgon to the Fusion platform, where its blend of live dealer casino and eTable games will entertain players all over the world.”*

**Pariplay Director of Partnerships Callum Harris speaking about Pariplay adding the games portfolio of Playgon to its Fusion offering**

## CHURCHILL DOWNS ACQUIRES CHASERS POKER ROOM IN SALEM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Churchill Downs has completed its previously announced purchase of Chasers Poker Room in Salem, New Hampshire.

The purchase has been made official following approval from the New Hampshire Lottery Commission.

Chasers, located near downtown Boston, is a charitable gaming operator offering poker among a variety of table games.

Churchill Downs says it plans to construct an expanded charitable gaming facility in Salem, installing up to 800 gaming positions which will include historical racing machines as well as table games.

The company’s expansion plans, including the purchase price, are expected to cost approximately \$150m.

New Hampshire will represent the fourth state in which Churchill Downs will operate historical horseracing games.

Other states where the company operates historical horseracing include

Kentucky and Louisiana. The company plans to operate historical horseracing in Virginia too, upon the close of its pending Peninsula Pacific Entertainment acquisition.

**GI Verdict:** Churchill’s latest acquisition highlights its shifting focus as a business focusing on land-based ventures. The company not only purchased Chasers Poker Room, but earlier this year earmarked \$200m for a new redevelopment project in the Paddock area – giving it its own racetrack. Shrewd salesmanship has made this possible. Churchill sold 49% of its United Tote to NYRA Content Management Solutions earlier this month, while selling excess land near Calder Casino in Florida for \$291m in June this year. Despite economic turmoil over the last few years as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Churchill is showing the industry it has a strategy and it is in the process of executing it. One would think Churchill has further plans in the works.



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*“We have a shared passion in the fight against cancer and we are thrilled that our new game Slingo Gems can support this mission. Our Slingo game format is one of the world’s most well-known real money and social gaming formats, and thus we hope our many loyal players globally will enjoy playing Slingo Gems and in the process raise funds to help end cancer as we know it.”*

**Craig Falciglia, Director of Business Development North America at Gaming Realms, on the group’s collaboration with American Cancer Society to support cancer victims**

*“IGT PlayDigital’s multi-year agreement with SKS365 Group, one of the largest operators in the market, combines two powerhouse gaming companies with deep roots in Italy to deliver market-attuned themes to Planetwin365 casino players.”*

**IGT President of iGaming Gil Rotem commenting on IGT PlayDigital furthering its partnership with SKS365 Group through an expanded multi-year content agreement in Italy**

## LIVESCORE RECEIVES £50M INVESTMENT FROM RINGIER AG

LiveScore has signed a partnership to receive £50m (\$57.5m) of investment from media and technology company Ringier AG.

LiveScore says this investment will help accelerate global expansion plans for its brands LiveScore, LiveScore Bet and Virgin Bet.

The sports media company adds that the investment from Ringier will supplement the share gains it has made, by leveraging its customer acquisition funnel with gaming integrations across all assets.

Ringier’s investment will fund LiveScore’s growth across Central and Eastern European territories, with expertise in funding businesses in these regions.

Following the investment, Senior Partner at Ringier Stilian Shishkov will join the Supervisory Board at LiveScore. Shishkov is the Founder and CEO of Ringier’s Sports Media Group in Bulgaria.

LiveScore CEO Sam Sadi said: “This is a hugely significant day for LiveScore Group, as we take a significant step forward following a £50m strategic investment from Ringier which values our business at £500m.

“Ringier, with its Sports Media Group, is the perfect partner as we look to accelerate our expansion into Central and Eastern European territories, given their outstanding expertise, assets and relationships.”

**GI Verdict:** LiveScore has increasingly become a well-known name for sports fans over the last few years, particularly in the UK. It’s successful 2021 More Than A Score advertisement campaign featuring famous footballer Cristiano Ronaldo has expanded its presence greatly. Now, the investment from Ringier AG suggests LiveScore will further spread its wings, as it attempts to accelerate growth in Central and Eastern European markets.

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## JUNE REVENUE REPORTS: ARIZONA

Fantini Research partners with *Gambling Insider* to provide weekly gaming industry data. This week, we look at June revenue from sports betting and fantasy sports in Arizona, comparing the state's performance to May.

For the majority of operators, both sports betting revenue and handle were down for June. The one significant exception is Digital Gaming, which saw a 727% rise in revenue for June compared to May.

In terms of revenue, Seminole Hard Rock was the only other operator to post significant gains of 155%, while most operators reported significant sports betting revenue falls.

SPORTS BETTING REVENUE	JUNE REVENUE (M)	CHANGE (%) MONTH-ON-MONTH
Digital Gaming (Super Group)	\$0.065	+727.44
Seminole Hard Rock	\$0.078	+154.99
BetFred	\$0.126	+1.41
SuperBook	\$0.126	-6.12
Barstool (PENN)	\$0.800	-9.13
Rush Street Interactive	\$0.339	-9.84
SaharaBets (IGT)	\$0.003	-35.63
Bally Interactive	\$0.019	-42.89
BetMGM (ENT, MGM)	\$5.253	-47.45
TwinSpires (CHDN)	\$0.014	-56.21
FuboTV	\$0.021	-63.64
FanDuel (FLTR)	\$7.375	-70.21
Caesars	\$0.976	-71.94
WynnBet	\$0.143	-82.43
Desert Diamond (Kambi)	\$0.007	-85.25
Unibet (Kindred)	\$0.002	-95.05
DraftKings	nil	-100.00
<b>Total Gaming</b>	<b>\$15.347</b>	<b>-72.15</b>
Retail	\$0.041	-94.73
Mobile	\$15.306	-71.83
Fantasy Sports	\$220,513m	-46.29



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SPORTS BETTING HANDLE	JUNE REVENUE (M)	CHANGE (%) MONTH-ON-MONTH
Digital Gaming (Super Group)	\$0.127	+137.73
Desert Diamond (Kambi)	\$0.593	+16.78
Seminole Hard Rock	\$0.922	+15.65
SuperBook	\$2.664	+9.94
FuboTV	\$0.459	+2.04
Bally Interactive	\$0.154	-8.15
BetFred	\$1.054	-12.99
Golden Nugget (DKNG)	\$0.208	-22.76
WynnBet	\$6.824	-23.06
Rush Street Interactive	\$3.011	-28.81
BetMGM (ENT, MGM)	\$59.701	-29.09
FanDuel (FLTR)	\$106.288	-30.24
Caesars	\$33.577	-30.69
DraftKings	\$92.823	-34.20
Unibet (Kindred)	\$0.601	-35.64
Barstool (PENN)	\$9.325	-35.92
SaharaBets (IGT)	\$0.037	-48.70
TwinSpires (CHDN)	\$0.230	-64.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$318.596</b>	<b>-30.93</b>



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**INTERVIEW**
**CALLUM SULTANA,**  
RELAX GAMING,  
GAME PRODUCT, OWNER

*Relax Gaming's Sultana discusses the release of the supplier's Money Train game*

### How has your Money Train slot game evolved?

Money Train 3 (MT3) is all about taking the best elements of our legendary Money Train series and evolving that in line with player feedback, as well as the fantastic creative work from our development teams. We've got a whole load of new features to be excited about, including the Max Win Cap, which has progressed from 20,000x with MT1, 50,000x with MT2 and now a whopping 100,000x in MT3. With that comes a higher chance of winning, which will no doubt delight lucky players with anything between 20,000x to 50,000x. Special symbols are also a key part of the game. We started out with only five in MT1, expanding to 9 in MT2 and now 13 in MT3. Last but not least, we've boosted the variations in bonus buys, where players will have more options with their cash, as well as more affordable selections to win with the two-spin and one-spin reset options.

### What is your release strategy for Money Train 3?

Money Train 3 will be released for everybody on the same day of its launch. This was a key aspect for us, given MT3 is a real flagship release for 2022; we really wanted to give everyone the best. Of course, there will be some variations of the game to meet the likes of German regulation with 90% RTP, as well as the UK and bonus buys. Being a great supplier is all about being flexible enough to deliver across every major market – so we're sure it won't diminish other elements.

### Can you predict the markets in which certain games are more popular?

The gaming world is a rich tapestry of diverse player preferences so, of course, there are certain markets that prefer a certain style of game over others. Norway is a great example of this, where Joker/Jester-themed slots are hugely popular due to the prevailing nostalgia for land-based games in the market. Italy, meanwhile, tends to prefer darker-themed games and Germany has a strong preference for Egyptian and classic-themed games. To gain better insights, we do plenty of work with data, which we have religiously compiled over the years. This enables us to make better-informed decisions on which themes to use and build on existing popularity for certain features. For us, we tend to see our games perform strongly across multiple jurisdictions, as long as the mechanic for the game is solid. As a result, we expect MT3 to perform very well across our major markets, especially in jurisdictions where the feature-buy option is available.

### Why are Wild West-themed games so popular?

Most classic-themed games tend to launch very successfully for multiple reasons. We need to remember that slots are entertainment – and, just like Netflix or anything else, a chance to exit the 9-5 and enter an exotic/exciting environment that can capture their imagination. Of course, given we're talking slots, they also come with a chance to win substantial sums of money. One could also argue that the Wild West has always been a high-octane, action-packed setting with money trains and bank robbers; as well as large amounts of cash available for the brave, so perhaps that has spilled over into the world of slots!

Also taking a wider cultural look, Wild West games and movies have a special place in most players' hearts, due to the theme's prevalence in retro movie culture, which resonates especially well with multiple demographics. Ultimately, though, the theme will only take a game so far, and you still need a great mechanic for players to keep coming back to the game, and that's what we believe is so special about our Money Train series. Not only is it super familiar, but it's also comes with a set of easy-to-understand and innovative mechanics.

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# GI **THE** FRIDAY **DEBRIEF**

## ARE WORKERS INCREASING THEIR STRIKE RATE?

Over the last few months, we've had the threat of casino worker strikes in both Atlantic City, New Jersey and Ontario, Canada. After tough negotiations, a breakthrough eventually prevailed in both cases to prevent strike action.

In the UK, the sector may not be so lucky. Not only have increasingly frequent train strikes caused disruption for the nation – while showing no signs of abating either – this week the threat of striking casino workers hit London.

Rank Group, which owns Grosvenor Casinos, is at the time of writing facing strike action from its workers over the next few days. It is scheduled to go ahead unless any last-minute developments change proceedings.

There were strong words from Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham when the strike was announced: "Here we go

again: Grosvenor Casinos is another big-money company that is raking it in but refusing to pay its workers a wage they can live on. It's just not acceptable and this huge vote for action underscores the sense of anger across this workforce. Our members at Grosvenor Casinos will have Unite's full backing in this fight for a fair deal."

It is worth noting that Unite is the same trade union behind the much-maligned recent train strikes. Is it just Unite that is stepping up its industrial action, or are UK workers changing tack altogether?

Rank Group provided its side of the story, emphasising to *Gambling Insider* that it has raised the average pay of workers across Grosvenor Casinos' London properties by an average of 11% in the last 12 months, prior to then offering employees retention bonuses of £600 (\$690) and £800 on top of this.

A spokesperson said: "We are disappointed that the Unite union has brought about strike action over the coming weekend. Against the backdrop of an extremely challenging trading environment for Rank, and for the sector as a whole, we have made a strong offer which we believe fairly addresses the current cost of living crisis."

Unfortunately, this probably isn't the last we'll hear of union strikes this year – in the gambling industry or otherwise.

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