SCCG Research

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2025 Global Gambling & iGaming State of the Industry Research Report

The Definitive Year-in-Review for Sports Betting, Online Betting, Casinos, Regulation, and Innovation

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2025 Global Gambling Industry Recap

Executive Summary (2025 Year in Review)

- Record Growth: The gambling industry saw continued expansion in 2025. Global online gambling revenue grew by about 10% year-over-year (to ~$117.5 billion) amid surging mobile usage. In the United States, commercial gaming revenue hit another all-time high – totaling $64.3 billion in the first 10 months (8.7% above 2024's pace), keeping the U.S. on track for a record-setting year.
- Regulatory Crackdowns Intensify: Regulators worldwide tightened their grip. Multiple U.S. states moved to ban offshore "sweepstakes" casinos that had operated in a legal gray area; for example, New York's Attorney General issued cease-and-desist orders to 26 illegal sweepstakes casino sites and the legislature passed a law outlawing such operations. A coalition of 38 state Attorneys General urged the U.S. Department of Justice to crack down on offshore gambling websites mid-year. In Europe, countries like Lithuania and the Netherlands implemented strict advertising bans and new licensing requirements, while the UK enforced tougher safeguards (slower online slot speeds, mandatory risk checks) to protect consumers.
- iGaming Stalls in Statehouses: Despite the success of online casinos in states like New Jersey and Pennsylvania, no new U.S. state legalized online casino gaming in 2025. A flurry of early-year legislative proposals for iGaming fizzled due to familiar concerns – cannibalization of land-based casinos and problem gambling risks. Maine came closest, passing an online casino bill with tribal exclusivity, but the governor's late-year hesitation left its fate uncertain. Other states (Illinois, Massachusetts, Ohio) introduced bills only to see them shelved or postponed.
- Sports Betting Matures – Integrity in Focus: 2025 was year three of widespread U.S. sports betting, marked by slower expansion (no huge new markets opening) and a shift toward sustainable operations. Attention turned to integrity issues as a series of betting scandals erupted. Over just five weeks in fall 2025, federal indictments alleged that pro athletes (including an MLB pitcher and an NBA coach) and college players were involved in point-shaving or insider betting schemes. These high-profile cases – unprecedented in their volume – prompted leagues and regulators to consider new limits (MLB swiftly capped bets on single-player props at $200, and the NCAA again pushed to ban betting on college player stats). The bright side: industry advocates noted that detecting these scandals in real time shows legal sportsbooks' data monitoring is effectively uncovering misconduct, reinforcing the value of the regulated market.
- The Rise of Prediction Markets: A disruptive new player emerged in the form of online prediction markets – platforms like Kalshi and Polymarket that offer

yes/no “event contracts” on sports and other outcomes. In 2025, prediction markets exploded in popularity (Kalshi reported over $1 billion traded per week, up 1000% from 2024) and began blurring the line with traditional sports betting. This set off a showdown with state gaming regulators: at least five states (led by Nevada, New Jersey, and Maryland) issued cease-and-desist orders arguing these CFTC-regulated exchanges are offering unlicensed gambling. Kalshi and others fought back with lawsuits, claiming federal jurisdiction. By year-end, the battle was headed toward federal courts – and possibly the Supreme Court – even as major sportsbooks responded by launching their own “free prediction” games to pre-empt the threat. The clash between state gambling laws and federally-sanctioned prediction markets became the year’s most novel regulatory conflict.

- Brazil’s Giant Steps (and Other Global Moves): Latin America’s biggest potential market, Brazil, officially opened its regulated betting market in 2025. A new law took effect on January 1 legalizing online sports betting and casino platforms, and by mid-year Brazil’s government raised the gross gaming revenue tax from 12% to 18% (effective Oct 2025) to bolster revenues. Authorities issued a flurry of regulations – mandating local offices, launching a national self-exclusion register, and even getting Google to allow betting apps in the Play Store – all building toward initial licensing. International operators and local startups raced to enter what could become a multi-billion dollar market. Elsewhere, India shocked the industry with a late-year ban on all real-money online games (including skill games like rummy and fantasy sports), upending a massive market that had been moving toward regulation. Other notable moves included Ireland finally setting up its Gambling Regulatory Authority (paving the way for licensing in 2026), the UAE hinting at opening to casinos and iGaming, and curbs across Africa (e.g. Kenya slashing betting taxes to discourage black-market play and Nigeria imposing new taxes on winnings).
- Advertising Under Scrutiny: Following growing public concern, 2025 saw stricter advertising rules for gambling in several jurisdictions. In Europe, near-total ad bans took effect – Lithuania outlawed virtually all gambling advertising from July 1, and the Netherlands implemented a broad ban on “untargeted” ads. The UK continued to refine advertising standards as part of its Gambling Act review, enforcing rules against targeting young audiences and banning celebrity influencers. In the U.S., advertising became more measured: the American Gaming Association’s marketing code (updated in late 2024) took hold, prohibiting terms like “risk-free” and advertising on college campuses. Operators toned down the blitz of promotions compared to the post-PASPA frenzy, both due to these guidelines and a pivot to profitability. Notably, there were bipartisan calls in Congress to examine or even ban sportsbook ads (drawing parallels to tobacco), though no federal action materialized in 2025. Expect advertising practices to remain a hot-button issue into 2026 as policymakers gauge gambling’s societal impact.

- Consolidation and Profit Push: The gold-rush phase of online betting cooled – 2025 was defined by an industry-wide push for profitability and consolidation. The era of outsized promos and endless cash burn ended as investors demanded results. Major U.S. operators like DraftKings and FanDuel reported their first profitable quarters ever, thanks to cost-cutting and higher hold margins (with same-game parlays boosting revenues). Smaller and less profitable competitors continued to exit or merge: Fubo and MaximBet had already bowed out, and in 2025 Barstool Sportsbook was rebranded under ESPN, TwinSpires abandoned online sports, and PointsBet's U.S. assets were absorbed by newcomer Fanatics. By year's end, the top five sportsbooks controlled an even larger share of the market, and the hefty 50%+ market shares of leaders in states like NY became the norm. Similarly, in Europe, heavyweights like Flutter, Entain, and Bet365 solidified their positions, while a few mid-tier operators explored M&A or strategic exits due to climbing compliance costs and taxes. In short, the field in mature markets narrowed, with scale and efficient operation now paramount.
- Media & Sports Convergence: 2025 underscored the deepening convergence of sports, media, and betting. The splashy launch of ESPN Bet (Penn Entertainment's partnership with ESPN) late in 2023 carried into 2025, symbolizing how mainstream sports media is embracing wagering. While ESPN Bet's market share remained modest in its first full year, the move validated the concept of leveraging media brands and content to acquire bettors. Other media outlets, from streaming platforms to local sports networks, integrated more betting segments and live odds into programming. Across the major leagues, team and league sponsorship deals with betting operators remained robust (the top seven sportsbook brands had 87 deals with pro teams by late 2025, per Sports Business Journal). Athletes and betting companies struck marketing partnerships under new league rules (with proper safeguards). All major U.S. pro leagues continued their official data and integrity partnerships (e.g. NFL and Genius Sports), emphasizing the importance of real-time monitoring to detect any irregular betting patterns. The bottom line: sports betting is now firmly embedded in the sports entertainment ecosystem – a trend likely to grow, though tempered by vigilance on integrity.
- Tech & Innovation – Safer and Smarter Gambling: Technology took center stage in 2025 as operators rolled out innovations to stay ahead. Artificial intelligence moved from theory to practice in responsible gambling: many online platforms deployed AI algorithms to flag problematic play and send automated warnings or cooldown suggestions to players. AI also enhanced customer service (with smarter chatbots handling common queries) and trading/risk management (algorithmic odds-setting and automated fraud checks). Payments modernized with near-instant payouts becoming common, and more players using digital wallets or ACH transfers instead of cards. Account security was a priority after incidents of credential-stuffing attacks – DraftKings, for instance, had to alert users and bolster login defenses following an attack that compromised some

accounts in 2025. Meanwhile, Web3 and blockchain remained buzzwords more than mainstream reality in regulated markets, though a few operators piloted blockchain-based games or NFTs for loyalty. On the B2B side, the industry's tech stack kept evolving toward modular, cloud-based systems that allow rapid integration of new features. In summary, 2025's tech narrative was about using innovation to enhance player protection, user experience, and back-end efficiency, setting the stage for more transformative digital developments in 2026 and beyond.

2025 "In One Graphic" – Timeline of Key Moments and Trends

Top 12 Moments of 2025 (Monthly Highlights):

- January – UK Kicks Off New Protections: The UK Gambling Commission rolled out the first of its Gambling Act Review measures, including mandatory pre-set deposit limits for new online players and testing of "financial vulnerability checks". These early safeguards signaled a year focused on responsible gambling.
- February – Missouri's Voters Approve Sports Betting: A late-2024 referendum to legalize sports betting in Missouri took effect. In Feb 2025, regulators opened applications, and to industry surprise, Circa Sports – a Las Vegas-based niche operator – won one of the first untethered mobile licenses, beating out giants like FanDuel. This highlighted opportunities for smaller operators with unique models.
- March – NCAA Betting Scandal Emerges: An investigation into collegiate sports betting broke wide open. Over 40 Iowa and Iowa State athletes were found to have violated NCAA betting rules (a story that began in 2023 but led to charges in March 2025) – one of the largest college sports betting scandals ever. The case underscored the need for education on sports integrity at the college level and spurred the NCAA to push sportsbooks to halt all college player prop bets.
- April – Italy Completes Gaming License Tender: Italy closed applications (on April 30) for its new 9-year online gambling licenses, each costing a steep €7 million upfront. This marked Europe's priciest licensing regime and will shrink the number of operators in Italy. At the same time, Italy's regulator publicly questioned the country's strict gambling advertising ban as "outdated," hinting at a potential rethink of the 2018 ad ban in light of the new licensing era.
- May – Kenya Slashes Betting Taxes: In response to a thriving black market, Kenya's Parliament cut the excise tax on betting stakes from 15% to 5% (effective May 2025) and shifted the tax point from each bet to deposits. The move aimed to drive bettors back to legal platforms. Simultaneously, Kenya imposed tough new advertising restrictions – banning celebrity endorsements and requiring prominent responsible gambling warnings. These dramatic changes in a major African market were closely watched by other countries grappling with similar issues of taxation vs. channelization.

- June – New York Bans Online Sweepstakes Casinos: New York's legislature passed Bill S5935 in June, outlawing online sweepstakes casinos (social casinos that use virtual coins redeemable for cash) and imposing fines up to $100,000 per violation. This came just days after NY's Attorney General Letitia James announced she had shut down 26 such platforms via cease-and-desist letters. New York became the third state (after Nebraska and Montana) in a month to ban the sweeps model, marking a nationwide shift against unregulated casino-style games.
- July – 38 States Unite Against Offshores: In an unprecedented show of unity, a 38-state coalition of Attorneys General co-signed an amicus brief on July 20 supporting a federal court case (Maryland vs. Kalshi) and urging the DOJ to take action against offshore sportsbooks and casinos. This bipartisan push reflected growing frustration with offshore operators siphoning revenue and ignoring U.S. safeguards. It also highlighted the prediction market dispute, as Kalshi's case was at the center of the jurisdictional fight.
- August – India Enacts Full RMG Ban: The Indian government stunned its booming online gaming sector by enacting the Promotion & Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 in August, which banned all real-money online games nationwide – including previously legal fantasy sports and rummy. The law took immediate effect, forcing major platforms to suspend operations. This about-face (from a patchwork state-by-state approach to an outright national ban) sent shockwaves through one of the world's largest emerging markets and prompted legal challenges from affected companies.
- September – USA's First Sports Betting Data Breach Fine: In September, the Nevada Gaming Commission levied a landmark fine (approximately $10 million) against a major sportsbook operator for failing to prevent a data breach that exposed customer personal information. Coming on the heels of DraftKings' separate credential-stuffing incident, this enforcement signaled that cybersecurity is now a regulatory priority in the gaming industry. Regulators in multiple states started requiring detailed cybersecurity audits as part of operator licensing.
- October – Landmark UK Gambling Tax Reform Begins: The UK government's comprehensive Gambling Tax Reform kicked in on October 1. This reform aligned tax rates across verticals and slightly increased the Remote Gaming Duty (online casino tax) from 21% to 25%, while adjusting retail betting duties. It represented the first major tax structure overhaul for UK gambling in years. Despite higher taxes for online operators, share prices of major firms rose on relief that the increases were modest (and perhaps already priced in). The reform also simplified compliance by unifying how different products are taxed.
- November – Athlete Betting Indictments Rock Sports: A federal grand jury in New York indicted three prominent sports figures – including NBA coach Chauncey Billups and MLB pitcher Emmanuel Clase – on match-fixing and fraud charges related to sports betting. The indictments, announced in November, alleged that these individuals conspired to influence game outcomes (rigging a

poker game and manipulating baseball pitches) for betting gains. All accused parties pleaded not guilty, but the case, alongside separate NCAA player charges the same month, was described as a "watershed moment" by integrity experts. It led a U.S. Senate committee to warn of a "new integrity crisis" and consider federal involvement in sports betting oversight.

- December – FanDuel and DraftKings Launch Prediction Contests: In mid-December, the two largest U.S. sportsbook operators made a bold strategic pivot by launching their own prediction market-style platforms (FanDuel's in 12 states, DraftKings' nationwide free-to-play). These products let users trade on simple yes/no outcomes (mimicking the Kalshi model) and crucially were offered in several states that do not yet allow traditional sports betting. This end-of-year development "put a bow" on 2025's biggest storyline – it showed the industry's determination to compete with or co-opt the prediction market trend, and set the stage for an even more heated battle over the legal status of such markets in 2026.

Five Trends That Defined 2025:

1. Regulatory Tightening & Player Protection – 2025 was defined by governments raising the bar on gambling safeguards. From Europe (mandatory loss limits, ad bans) to the U.S. (sweepstakes bans, stricter advertising codes), the message was clear: protect consumers or face crackdown. This trend reflected heightened public and political scrutiny of gambling's social impact. It forced operators to double down on compliance, invest in responsible gaming programs, and accept a more restrictive marketing environment going forward.
2. Rise of Alternative Models (Prediction Markets & Sweepstakes) – The year saw the collision of old and new forms of betting. Prediction markets burst into the mainstream, growing rapidly and directly challenging state gambling monopolies. Simultaneously, the longstanding "social casino"/sweepstakes model reached a tipping point as states moved to shut down what they saw as unregulated casinos in disguise. These conflicts highlighted the tension between innovation and regulation. How authorities reconcile these alternate models (ban, integrate, or carve-out) will help define the industry's next chapter.
3. Market Maturation & Profitability – If the post-2018 period was about land-grab and hyper-growth, 2025 marked the industry's coming-of-age financially. Leading operators transitioned from chasing market share to focusing on profitability and efficiency. We saw disciplined marketing spend, consolidation of customer bases, and even first-ever profits for some online betting divisions. This maturation brings more stability but also means a less frothy market – expect fewer new entrants and more emphasis on sustainable practices. It's a sign that regulated betting in places like the U.S. has moved out of its infancy and into a more settled, pragmatic phase.
4. Tech-Driven Transformation – Technology underpinned nearly every big story in 2025. AI and automation improved risk detection and personalization, instant payment tech sped up withdrawals, and integrations between streaming data

and betting platforms created seamless “watch and bet” experiences. Even on the security front, high-profile breaches and hacks prompted tech upgrades (e.g. universal 2-factor authentication, advanced fraud algorithms). The trend is the continued digital evolution of gambling – with operators becoming as much fintech and data companies as they are gaming companies. Those that invest in robust tech (from cybersecurity to AI analytics) are poised to lead in 2026 and beyond.

5. Global Divergence – Expansion vs. Caution – 2025 illustrated a split in global gambling narratives. On one hand, expansion continued: new markets like Brazil, Peru, and parts of Africa opened or grew, and North American sports betting revenue kept climbing. On the other hand, caution was evident: some governments pulled back (India’s ban, tighter EU regs), and social concerns (addiction, underage play) gained prominence. This divergence means the industry must navigate a dual reality – pushing into fresh opportunities while tightening compliance in mature regions. The winners will be those adaptable enough to capitalize on growth areas and meet the highest regulatory standards where required. In short, 2025 was a year that expanded the map of legal gambling, but also one that defined the responsibilities that come with that growth.

Section 1 — 2025 Market Snapshot & What Changed

Market Health Check: Global and U.S. Trends

Global online gambling continued its climb in 2025, growing roughly 10.6% year-on-year to an estimated $117.5 billion in revenue. Nearly 80% of online gamblers now use smartphones as their primary device, reflecting the mobile-first shift that is driving industry growth worldwide.

In broader terms, the global gambling market (including land-based and online) showed healthy growth signals in 2025, though with notable regional differences. Major global operators reported rising revenues, especially from online segments and newly regulated markets. However, some traditionally strong markets saw signs of maturity or saturation. Europe, which accounts for about half of the online gambling market, exhibited slower growth rates as markets like the UK and Italy approach maturity and face stricter regulations. By contrast, emerging markets (Latin America, parts of Africa, some Asian jurisdictions) powered much of the incremental growth as new player pools came online.

The United States stood out as a growth engine. Through October 2025, U.S. commercial gaming revenue (including casinos, sports betting, and iGaming) reached $64.30 billion, up 8.7% over the same period in 2024. This virtually guarantees 2025 will set a new annual revenue record for U.S. gaming. Notably, all three major verticals expanded: traditional brick-and-mortar casino revenue was slightly up, sports betting revenue surged with new all-time monthly highs (October handle hit $17.78B with $1.60B GGR, a 57% YoY jump), and online casino (iGaming) revenue climbed nearly 30% year-to-date (reaching $8.78B through October). In fact, iGaming is becoming a larger slice of the pie in states where it's legal – Pennsylvania and Michigan each saw online casino revenue overtake their brick-and-mortar casino revenue in late 2025. Such trends indicate the U.S. market is not only growing, but also shifting towards digital channels in a significant way.

From an investment perspective, 2025 brought a note of optimism. After a volatile 2022–2024 (when many gambling stocks lagged broader markets), investor sentiment rebounded. According to the American Gaming Association's executive survey, industry sentiment turned net positive in Q3 2025 (for the first time since early 2024) amid improving revenue and cost trends. This was aided by the fact that many major operators began demonstrating a clear path to profitability, easing earlier concerns about unsustainable spending.

Maturity Indicators and Consolidation Signals

A key question in 2025 was: how far is the industry along the maturity curve in various markets? In the U.S., signs of a maturing sector emerged. Fewer new states came online with sports betting or iGaming (after the rush of 2018–2023), meaning growth is now driven more by organic increases in established markets and deeper penetration of existing customer bases. The customer acquisition frenzy cooled significantly – in mature states like New Jersey or Pennsylvania, operators shifted focus from aggressive promo wars to retention and cross-sell (e.g. converting sports bettors to iCasino).

Consolidation was another hallmark of a maturing market. Throughout 2025, we saw continued market share concentration. The top five U.S. sportsbook operators (FanDuel, DraftKings, BetMGM, Caesars, and a rotating fifth between Barstool/ESPN Bet or Bet365 in some states) now control an estimated ~85%+ of online betting handle in aggregate. Smaller brands struggled to gain footholds, and many exited. For example, WynnBET pulled back from several states to focus on a few core markets, and PointsBet's U.S. operations were acquired by Fanatics in a deal that closed in summer 2023, with 2025 being Fanatics' first full operational year as a competitor. This left the U.S. with essentially a Big Four or Five and a long tail of marginal players. Similarly, in Europe, large acquisitions in prior years (Entain absorbing brands, 888 acquiring William Hill, Flutter acquiring Tombola, etc.) meant 2025 was more about digesting those deals. No mega-mergers occurred in 2025, but rumors swirled (e.g. MGM was speculated at one point to renew interest in buying Entain – though no formal bids materialized). The general consolidation trend signals a more oligopolistic market structure in many places.

One consolidation signal came via personnel and branding moves. Major European operators streamlined their brands – for instance, Entain began migrating some customers from Ladbrokes/Coral to its flagship "Entain" platform (contemplating a brand phase-out in some digital markets), while 888 Holdings integrated William Hill's online operations. These behind-the-scenes moves aimed to reduce complexity and cost. The supplier side also concentrated: giants like Evolution AB (which provides live dealer games) and Light & Wonder (game tech provider) made select acquisitions to expand content portfolios, further entrenching their dominant positions in B2B segments.

The industry's health in 2025 can thus be characterized by robust revenue growth with an inflection toward profitability, paired with a narrowing field of competitors in each market. Markets like the U.K. and Australia are clearly mature – low single-digit growth, high regulation, and consolidation largely done – whereas markets like the U.S. are in a late growth phase (high growth but entering profitability focus), and places like Brazil are in an early-growth/regulatory infancy phase.

What 2025 Was "About": Key Narratives of the Year

Beyond the numbers, 2025 was defined by several narratives that cut across markets. The industry's storyline for the year can be encapsulated in a set of interlocking themes:

- Regulatory and Social Responsibility Crackdown: If one overarching theme emerged, it was the heavy hand of regulators making its presence felt. From New York's war on sweepstakes casinos to Europe's advertising crackdowns to India's blanket ban, governments worldwide signaled a tougher stance on gambling – prioritizing consumer protection, responsible play, and tax compliance. This narrative kept operators on their toes, requiring nimble adaptation (stricter KYC, new ad strategies, product changes like slower game spins in the UK, etc.).
- Enforcement and the Battle Against the Black Market: 2025 saw unprecedented enforcement actions to corral the unregulated gambling market. The U.S. in particular ramped up efforts against offshore sportsbooks (the 38-state AG coalition), and multiple states targeted unlicensed online offerings (sports betting exchanges, sweepstakes sites, skill gaming parlors). The line between legal and illegal gambling was more sharply drawn in 2025, with authorities using both legislation and litigation to push high-profile examples out of the shadows.
- Innovation in Betting Products: The year brought an explosion of product innovation – not all of it welcome by incumbents. Prediction markets were the poster child, introducing a new way to wager that challenges traditional bookmaking. Simultaneously, traditional books innovated within their domain: micro-betting (betting on tiny in-game occurrences) grew in popularity, and same-game parlays became even more ubiquitous (DraftKings noted parlays, especially those built on player props, hit record levels as a share of bets). Operators rolled out features like live streaming in-app, cash-out and bet editing improvements, and deeper stats integration – all aiming to enhance the in-play experience and differentiate their product.

- Media and Entertainment Convergence: 2025 solidified the blending of gambling with media and sports entertainment. The integration of betting content into mainstream sports broadcasts (odds tickers, live odds mentions during games) became routine. The year also saw major media brands operating sportsbooks (ESPN with ESPN Bet, Fox having done similar earlier with Fox Bet, though that venture ended in 2023). Sports leagues themselves continued to embrace betting partnerships, even as they navigated integrity concerns. In short, betting became more deeply woven into the fabric of how sports are consumed, reflecting a new norm where watching and wagering go hand-in-hand for many fans.
- Operational Discipline and Technology: Another narrative was the industry "growing up" in terms of operations. Companies got serious about cost control, data security, and tech modernization. We saw investments in cloud infrastructure and cybersecurity after incidents, and a general shift to using data analytics and AI to drive marketing and product decisions. The razzle-dazzle of endless promos gave way to the behind-the-scenes work of optimizing hold, managing risk, and keeping platforms stable during peak load. Those operators with the best tech and analytics edges clearly outperformed in retention and margin. This narrative is about the professionalization of the gambling business as a tech-driven service.
- Responsible Gambling Front and Center: Finally, a crucial narrative: 2025 was arguably the year responsible gambling stopped being a sidebar and became core to business strategy and public discourse. Not only were regulators mandating changes (affordability checks in the UK, new deposit limit tools, etc.), but operators themselves heavily promoted their responsible gambling credentials in a bid to build trust and pre-empt harsher regulation. The industry launched new initiatives during Responsible Gaming Education Month, funded more research, and rolled out user-facing tools like personalized play dashboards. There's an acknowledgment that for long-term sustainability, operators must be seen as proactively preventing harm, not just reacting to problems. This narrative – while perhaps less headline-grabbing – underpins many regulatory actions and shapes how the industry will be allowed to grow moving forward.

To summarize these narratives and why they matter, the table below lists 2025's Biggest Storylines – what happened, why it mattered, who was affected, and how it sets up 2026:

Storyline	What Happened (2025)	Why It Matters	Who it Impacts	Implications for 2026
Regulatory Crackdown & Compliance	Governments imposed stricter rules	Forced industry to raise	Operators (had to adapt business models),	More regulation incoming (e.g.

Storyline	What Happened (2025)	Why It Matters	Who it Impacts	Implications for 2026
	(ad bans, game design limits, higher taxes). E.g. UK's new mandatory player affordability checks; multiple U.S. states banned sweepstakes casinos.	standards and incur higher compliance costs; weeded out some smaller or non-compliant operators.	Marketing affiliates, Consumers (fewer ads, safer products).	UK further white paper measures); global trend toward formalizing responsible gambling in law. Companies that built strong compliance cultures in 2025 are better positioned.
Offshore and Unlicensed Market Squeeze	Enforcement surged against unlicensed gambling: AGs coalition against offshores; states like NY, NJ, NV issued cease-&-desists to Kalshi & sweepstakes sites.	Marked a turning point in tackling the grey market, aiming to channel players to legal sites and reclaim tax revenue.	Offshore operators (facing legal risk), State regulators, Licensed operators (less competition from illicit sites).	Legal battles likely (prediction market cases, constitutional questions). Potential federal action on offshores. If crackdown is effective, legal operators gain market share; if not, pressure will mount for new approaches (perhaps federal framework).
Profitability & Consolidation	Major operators cut promo spend	Signaled that the market is maturing	Publicly traded operators (investor	The surviving operators will be more

Storyline	What Happened (2025)	Why It Matters	Who it Impacts	Implications for 2026
	and achieved first profitable quarters; consolidation continued (Fanatics took over PointsBet, etc.). Smaller brands exited many markets.	financially – unsustainable spending ended. Consolidation means less consumer choice but potentially more stability.	sentiment improved), Consumers (fewer but more reliable platforms), Employees (some layoffs as cost-cutting happened).	disciplined. 2026 could see one or two big mergers if valuations align. New entrants will need a truly unique angle (tech or media) to break in.
Prediction Markets Disruption	Prediction market exchanges (Kalshi, Polymarket) grew 10x and offered sports-like wagers nationwide, clashing with state laws. By year-end, even FanDuel and DraftKings launched their own prediction-style products.	This development reopened the definition of “betting” in the US. It threatens the state-by-state regulatory model and introduced competition that doesn’t follow the same rules/taxes. The quick uptake highlighted unmet demand in non-sports-betting states.	State regulators and legislatures (facing a jurisdictional challenge), Traditional sportsbooks (new competitor model), Consumers in non-legal states (suddenly have betting options), Federal regulators (CFTC).	A likely court showdown in 2026 to decide if event markets can bypass state gambling laws. If prediction markets prevail or carve a niche, traditional sportsbooks may need to lobby for federal rules or innovate further. Also expect states to either sue, regulate, or partner – the status quo won’t hold.
Integrity and Betting Scandals	A wave of sports betting scandals	Put a spotlight on the risks of expanding	Professional and college sports leagues (integrity	We may see new limits on betting

Storyline	What Happened (2025)	Why It Matters	Who it Impacts	Implications for 2026
	(athletes and coaches betting or fixing games) made headlines. Leagues responded with stricter policies (e.g. NFL reinforced no betting by players, MLB limited certain bets), and Congress showed interest in sports betting integrity oversight.	sports betting – the social trust in sports at stake. Showed legal sportsbooks' data can catch bad actors, but also that leagues' internal controls need bolstering. Raised questions about prop bets and whether some wager types are worth the risk.	of competitions), Athletes/coaches (education and consequences), Sportsbooks (need to monitor and cooperate on investigations), Regulators (could impose new betting restrictions).	markets (e.g. no more college props in some states). Leagues likely to invest more in integrity units. The scandals also arm gambling opponents with fodder, possibly influencing 2026 legislative debates (some lawmakers may push for tighter controls or oversight committees).
Emerging Markets & Globalization	Brazil launched regulated betting, issuing rules and attracting global operators; other LatAm markets (Peru, Chile draft legislation) made progress. In Africa, Nigeria and Kenya revamped	Showed that global expansion is ongoing – big operators now eyeing the next frontiers as North America and Europe mature. Each new market brings unique regulatory models (some more open, some monopolistic).	International operators (new opportunities but also new competition with locals), Local entrepreneurs and governments (new revenue streams, but also need for regulatory capacity), Suppliers and platform providers (demand for tech	2026 will likely see Brazil's first licenses issued and market go live – a major story. Other countries (perhaps Thailand or more U.S. states) could legalize, learning from 2025's examples. However, companies will

Storyline	What Happened (2025)	Why It Matters	Who it Impacts	Implications for 2026
	regulations. UAE and other previously closed markets signaled openness (UAE's lottery operator exploring casino gaming).	Success in Brazil could validate approaches for other large markets (e.g. India, if it reconsiders).	to serve these markets).	be cautious – as seen in India, political risk is real. Expect more diversification by big firms into whichever new markets look promising, balancing the risk of any one region's crackdown.
Technology & AI Integration	Operators widely adopted AI for player analytics and fraud detection; payments technology like open banking saw increased use for instant withdrawals; and platform architectures continued shifting to cloud and modular systems for scalability. Also, cybersecurity incidents (DraftKings	Tech became the key differentiator among operators. Those with superior tech delivered smoother user experiences (faster payouts, personalized offers) and safer environments. AI in responsible gambling potentially reduces harm and pre-empts regulatory backlash. Tech modernization also lowers	Operators' IT and risk teams (bigger budgets, more responsibility), Customers (benefiting from faster service but also subject to more data monitoring), Regulators (increasingly interested in tech standards – e.g. demanding real-time data interfaces).	The tech race will accelerate. 2026 could bring breakthroughs like real-time AI-driven odds or wider adoption of digital identity verification. Regulators might even mandate certain tech (for example, requiring operators to have automated risk monitoring systems). Conversely, tech failures (outages, glitches in AI)

Storyline	What Happened (2025)	Why It Matters	Who it Impacts	Implications for 2026
	hack etc.) prompted investment in stronger account protections.	long-term costs. In short, 2025 proved you must be as much a tech company as a gambling company.		could pose new kinds of risk. But overall, expect the industry to lean in further on tech to solve both business and compliance challenges.

Each of these storylines shaped the industry's trajectory in 2025, and together they set a new baseline for 2026. The common thread is an industry transitioning from unbridled growth to a more regulated, technologically sophisticated, and socially cognizant era. Companies that navigated these changes in 2025 have essentially written the playbook for success in the years ahead.

Section 2 — Regulation & Policy: The Rules That Moved in 2025

Regulatory developments in 2025 were dynamic and far-reaching, as jurisdictions across the globe updated gambling laws in response to market growth and emerging challenges. This section reviews the key legislative and regulatory moves, with an emphasis on the United States, and highlights major changes in other regions. We also examine compliance trends in areas like anti-money-laundering (AML), know-your-customer (KYC) rules, and data privacy – essentially, what "good" compliance looked like in 2025.

United States — Legislative & Regulatory Developments

Online Casino (iGaming) – Momentum vs. Resistance: 2025 began with hope for the expansion of legal online casino gaming in the U.S., but ended largely with status quo. Numerous states floated iGaming bills early in the year – including Maine, New York, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, and others – yet none managed to cross the finish line. In most cases, bills stalled or died in committee amid a mix of lobbying resistance and legislative hesitance. Maine was the notable near-miss: lawmakers passed LD 1164 to authorize online casino games under the control of the state's tribes. The bill made it to Governor Janet Mills' desk, but she "held" it through the summer, and as of January 2026 it still awaits final disposition (Mills had expressed skepticism, suggesting a likely veto). Ohio saw iGaming bills introduced in both chambers – one proposal limited licenses to existing casinos and even bundled a ban on sweepstakes gaming into the measure – but Ohio's governor came out firmly opposed, effectively freezing progress. In Massachusetts, initial hearings on online casino got punted to 2026, with lawmakers extending study orders. And New York, despite Senator Joe Addabbo's annual push, made no headway on iGaming as attention was consumed by downstate casino licensing and combating unregulated online play.

The overarching theme: legislative resistance to iGaming remained strong in 2025, often citing fears of cannibalizing brick-and-mortar casinos and exacerbating problem gambling. Interestingly, this resistance persisted even as those same states enthusiastically embraced sports betting. The cannibalization argument was reinvigorated – several land-based casino interests and even city governments (e.g. in Illinois and Pennsylvania) actively lobbied against online casino bills, worried about losing foot traffic and revenue. And politically, with a few gambling-related scandals in the headlines, lawmakers were cautious about appearing to "expand gambling." The likely outlook is a continued slow crawl: more states will consider iGaming in 2026, but breakthroughs may depend on either a fiscal crunch (needing new revenue) or clear evidence from existing iGaming states that online play can grow overall revenue without harming physical casinos.

Sports Betting Rule Changes (Taxes, Limits, Advertising): By 2025, 35 states plus DC had legal sports betting in operation. With fewer fresh markets to launch, regulators focused on refining rules in existing markets. One area was taxation and fees: several states revisited their sports betting tax rates or considered adjustments. For instance, New York's 51% tax rate (the highest in the nation) remained a sore point; a proposal to lower it (in exchange for adding more operators) was discussed early in the year but did not advance, leaving NY's few operators straining under the hefty levy. In contrast, Ohio moved the opposite direction – implementing an increase in its tax on sports betting revenue from 10% to 20% effective July 2025 (as part of a budget bill), aiming to boost state income after higher-than-expected betting volumes. These tweaks illustrate states calibrating the balance between competitive market and tax maximization.

Another topic: betting limits and permissible bet types. Due to the integrity scandals in pro and college sports, some regulators eyed new restrictions. Notably, a New York assemblymember introduced a bill in late 2025 seeking to prohibit certain in-play bets – essentially banning wagers on individual actions like pitches or plays that could be more easily manipulated. This came after MLB's high-profile incident and subsequent $200 limit on pitch-prop bets. While that NY bill hadn't passed by year-end, it reflects a new regulatory impulse to scrutinize microbets and exotic props. We also saw the NCAA continuing to pressure sportsbooks (and state regulators) to ban betting on college player prop bets altogether, given the unique risks with student-athletes; a few states are considering such bans for 2026.

Advertising remained a flashpoint in the U.S. as well, albeit not to the extent of Europe. Massachusetts and Ohio aggressively enforced advertising rules in 2025: both issued fines to operators for infractions like targeting underage audiences or using prohibited terms. The Mass. Gaming Commission, for example, levied a substantial fine on one DFS operator for running afoul of their strict marketing regulations. Broadly, operators pre-emptively toned down the more extreme marketing practices (gone were “risk-free” claims due to the AGA code update). By the football season, the volume of sportsbook ads on TV had actually decreased from 2022 peaks, as companies optimized spend and responded to rising customer acquisition costs. Still, the U.S. dodged any federal advertising restrictions in 2025 – a mooted bipartisan bill to ban sportsbook ads (likening them to cigarette ads) did not advance. It’s something to watch in 2026 if public sentiment shifts.

DFS and Skill Gaming Updates: The legacy daily fantasy sports (DFS) industry, now largely dominated by DraftKings and FanDuel, mostly coasted under the radar in 2025 in terms of new laws – in part because attention has shifted to sports betting. However, one notable development involved the intersection of DFS and sports betting in states where betting is not yet legal: companies like PrizePicks and Underdog offer fantasy-like props that many regulators view as sports betting in disguise. This year, a few states moved to clarify or restrict these offerings. Wyoming’s Gaming Commission, for instance, formally declared that fantasy prop games (where users pick over/unders on player stats) constitute unlicensed sports wagering, effectively barring those operators. Similarly, a bill in Oklahoma sought to explicitly outlaw fantasy contests that resemble betting, though it remained pending. Meanwhile, traditional DFS was legalized in Louisiana via regulations in 2025, finally implementing a voter-approved measure from a few years prior, showing that DFS can still expand in niches.

“Skill games” – the slot machine-like devices found in gas stations and bars in some states – faced mounting crackdowns. States like Virginia and Kentucky that had earlier banned these gray-market machines continued legal battles with manufacturers (e.g., Pace-O-Matic). In Kentucky, a court lifted an injunction in 2025, allowing Kentucky’s ban on skill games (imposed in 2022) to finally take effect. Georgia and Pennsylvania also debated measures to either regulate or eliminate these machines, given concerns about their proliferation outside of casinos. The trend leaned towards enforcement: more states aligning with the view that many so-called “skill” slot games are essentially unregulated gambling that undercuts the legal market.

Sweepstakes & Social Casinos – Enforcement Breakthrough: A major U.S. regulatory theme in 2025 was the concerted attack on sweepstakes-based gaming platforms. These include social casinos (like Chumba, LuckyLand) and some poker or sportsbook sites that use a dual-currency sweepstakes model to skirt gambling laws. As noted, New York made headlines by shutting down 26 sweepstakes casinos and passing a ban. But New York was part of a wider crackdown: by mid-2025, Connecticut, Montana, and Nevada had enacted similar bans on online sweepstakes casinos, and New Jersey sent a ban bill to its governor as well. Although the governor of Louisiana vetoed a sweepstakes ban in 2025, he simultaneously declared those games illegal under existing law, empowering enforcement without new legislation. Numerous state Attorneys General (e.g. in Mississippi, Arkansas) issued warnings or took action against these platforms.

This flurry of activity effectively put the entire sweepstakes casino model on notice. The view among regulators is that these games – despite their "no purchase necessary" entry option – too closely mimic real gambling (slots, blackjack, etc.) and thus pose the same risks without the oversight. How operators adapted: Some sweepstakes companies began geo-blocking certain states or tweaking their models (for example, emphasizing the free entry method more). A few signaled intent to pursue actual state gaming licenses where possible. But the writing is on the wall that the "sweeps" loophole is closing. Industry lawyers have noted that by blurring distinctions, sweepstakes casinos prompted regulators to "obscure the legal distinction between gambling and true sweepstakes", essentially eroding the legal argument they relied on. Going into 2026, we expect more states – possibly California, which fast-tracked a bill in 2025 – to slam the door on these operations. The implication is that millions of U.S. players will either transition to fully regulated options or potentially seek out offshore casinos, putting pressure on states to consider regulated online casino to meet demand.

Prediction Markets vs. Gaming Regulators: As detailed earlier, a dramatic regulatory conflict unfolded in 2025 over prediction markets (or "event contract" exchanges). To recap the timeline: In late 2024, Kalshi (a CFTC-regulated exchange) won a court ruling allowing its political event markets. By early 2025, Kalshi and others began offering sports-related markets (e.g. trading on the outcome of NFL games, Super Bowl, etc.), asserting federal approval. This encroached on what has been states' exclusive domain – sports wagering. State regulators did not take kindly to it. Nevada was first, with the Gaming Control Board issuing a cease-and-desist to Kalshi in March for operating without a state license. New Jersey and Maryland soon followed with their own orders to both Kalshi and a similar product by Robinhood Markets. The core of the argument: these platforms are offering gambling bets under the guise of commodities, thus flouting state gambling laws.

Kalshi's counter-argument is that it's regulated by the federal Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) and thus preempted from state interference. The legal battle escalated quickly: Kalshi sued the New Jersey and Nevada regulators in federal court, and initially won preliminary injunctions in April blocking enforcement of those cease-and-desist orders. However, in a twist, the Nevada judge reversed his injunction in November, indicating the issues were too complex and leaning towards states' rights pending full trial. Meanwhile, the political momentum swung in favor of the states: an astounding 38 state Attorneys General filed an amicus brief supporting state regulatory authority over these markets, and even Congress members chimed in (Rep. Dina Titus of Nevada wrote to the CFTC urging them to deny sports event contracts).

By December, seeing the winds blowing, FanDuel and DraftKings launched their own prediction market-style products – free-to-play or sweepstakes-based – specifically in states where they couldn't offer real sports betting. This was a strategic move to both enter that space and bolster the argument that if such products are allowed, gaming companies themselves will offer them within legal bounds. It also helps them build a user base that they can convert if/when those states legalize sports betting.

For regulators, the prediction market clash is about maintaining the integrity of state gambling regulations – they argue that allowing a parallel system regulated by the CFTC (which lacks the consumer protections and taxes of state-regulated betting) undermines state policy and could expand gambling without oversight. On the other side, prediction market operators insist these are fundamentally different – exchanges where users trade against each other, not against "the house," and thus more akin to stock markets than sportsbooks. The year ended without resolution: cases are moving through courts (likely to be consolidated at appellate levels). There's even speculation of federal legislation in 2026 to explicitly clarify the legality (or illegality) of certain event contracts.

Implication: If Kalshi and similar platforms ultimately prevail in court or in Washington, it could upend the U.S. regulatory landscape by introducing a federally-regulated alternative to state-licensed sportsbooks. If the states prevail, prediction markets may be forced to exclude sports contracts or shut down their U.S. operations, solidifying the state-by-state regime. This is truly uncharted territory – a rare direct conflict between federal and state approaches to gambling – making it one of the most closely watched regulatory battles going into 2026.

Canada, Latin America, and the Rest of the World – Key 2025 Changes

Outside the U.S., 2025 saw significant regulatory developments in several major jurisdictions:

- Canada: The Canadian market is led by provinces individually. Ontario's regulated iGaming and sportsbook market, launched in 2022, had its first full year of performance. It continued to thrive, with over 100 licensed sites and robust revenue (nearly CAD $2 billion GGR in fiscal 2024-25). In 2025, Ontario's regulator tightened some advertising rules – notably implementing a ban on athletes and celebrities in gambling ads (effective Feb 2024, enforced through 2025). This influenced marketing content, pushing operators to use more generic messaging. Other provinces are watching Ontario's model, but in 2025 none moved to replicate it yet. Alberta made incremental progress toward allowing private operators (beyond its lottery-run site) but hadn't launched anything by year's end. Meanwhile, Canada's federal government faced calls to address illegal offshore sites that still serve many provinces. Expect inter-provincial discussions to continue; Ontario's success may eventually spur provinces like British Columbia or Quebec to consider opening their markets in a similar fashion.

- Brazil: Perhaps the biggest international story. After years of anticipation, Brazil's sports betting legalization (Law No. 14,183/2022, amended by Law 14,790/2023) formally took effect on January 1, 2025. The Ministry of Finance's Secretariat of Prizes and Betting (SECAP, later SPA under Ministry of Finance) spent 2025 issuing detailed regulations to build the framework. Key steps: an initial 12% GGR tax was confirmed, but by June, via a provisional measure, the tax was raised to 18% of GGR (plus additional operator fees) effective October 2025. This tax hike, intended to increase government revenue, caused some consternation among operators but ultimately Brazil's market size makes it palatable. Regulators also mandated a mandatory national self-exclusion system and required banks/payment providers to block unlicensed operators (trying to channel play to forthcoming licensees). By H2 2025, the government opened a pre-registration for companies interested in licenses, and global giants from Europe and the U.S. lined up, alongside local entrants. Additionally, Google and Apple updated their policies to allow real-money gambling apps in Brazil (Google Play allowed licensed betting apps as of June 2025), improving market accessibility. A unique aspect: the law requires operators to have a local Brazilian entity and significant local presence, aiming to generate jobs. Brazil's moves in 2025 set the stage for license awards in early 2026. The significance is huge – Brazil could quickly become one of the world's largest betting markets, and its regulatory approach (fairly high tax, open licensing but strict compliance and local presence) might serve as a template for other Latin nations.

- Latin America (beyond Brazil): Several other Latin American countries made news:

- Peru – After legalizing online sports betting and iGaming in 2022, Peru implemented its regulations in 2023. By 2025, Peru's Ministry of Trade reported steady growth in its regulated online market and began issuing more licenses (Peru uses a relatively open licensing system with moderate taxes). The focus in 2025 was ensuring new operators complied with advertising restrictions and contributed to responsible gambling funds as required by law.
- Chile – Chile had a much-watched online betting bill in Congress throughout 2025. Progress was slow: while there is broad interest in regulating online sportsbooks (many European and local companies sponsor Chilean football and operate dot-com sites there), the legislation got bogged down over tax rates and the role of the state lottery. As of late 2025, Chile's bill had not passed, but it's expected to be picked up in 2026 again.
- Argentina – Regulation in Argentina is province-by-province. In 2025, more provinces (like Córdoba) launched online betting under their new regulatory regimes, and Buenos Aires (city and province) continued to add licensees. Argentina's challenge remains its economic instability – high inflation and currency controls complicated operations, but interest in the market remained due to Argentina's strong sports culture.
- Dominican Republic – In June 2025, the D.R. proposed creating a new unified gambling regulator (the DGJA) to oversee all gambling including online. This was part of a draft law aimed at modernizing and legalizing online betting, which previously was not clearly regulated. Movement will continue into 2026.
- Paraguay – Paraguay undertook a "landmark reform" in 2025 to liberalize its gambling market. This included issuing new licenses for sports betting (transitioning from a single-operator model to multiple licenses) and updating casino regulations. The goal was to attract foreign investment and crack down on unregulated offerings.
- Brazil's neighbors like Uruguay and Colombia watched closely. Colombia already has a thriving regulated online market (since 2017), and in 2025 it updated technical rules and increased efforts against unlicensed sites. Uruguay debated an online betting bill but did not pass it in 2025.

Overall in LATAM, the trend is toward regulation and opening (with Brazil leading the way), as governments seek new revenues and consumer protections, while balancing demands from powerful local stakeholders (like lotteries and casinos).

- Europe: Europe saw a mix of tightening regulations and a few instances of easing:
- United Kingdom – 2025 was the first full year of implementing the UK's 2023 Gambling White Paper recommendations. The Gambling Commission introduced new rules such as slower online slot machine spin speeds, a ban on features that speed up play or celebrate losses, and requirements for clear spend trackers for players. More impactfully, the UK began rolling out "financial risk checks" for higher-spending customers – essentially soft affordability checks once a bettor's losses reach certain thresholds (with more enhanced checks at very high levels). These were done in a phased manner starting mid-2025. The industry complied, albeit with concerns about impact on revenue. Additionally, the UK increased funding for problem gambling treatment via a new statutory levy proposal (the government signaled intent to enforce a levy on operators to fund addiction research and treatment). On the tax front, as mentioned, a major tax reform aligned gambling duties across products and adjusted remote gaming duty upward. UK operators in 2025 thus navigated a significantly changing regulatory landscape, with greater oversight of customer well-being and a somewhat higher tax burden, but also perhaps a more stable long-term environment as the White Paper's recommendations become law.
- Ireland – After years of delays, Ireland in 2025 established the Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland (GRAI) and set the stage for a comprehensive licensing regime. The GRAI began pre-licensing consultations and confirmed that licensing of online and retail betting would commence by late 2025, with online casino licenses to follow in early 2026. The new law, Ireland's Gambling Regulation Act, unifies oversight of gambling under one body for the first time. It also includes strict advertising controls (whistle-to-whistle ad ban during live sports, etc.), a ban on credit card gambling, and measures like voluntary opt-out programs with banks (Allied Irish Bank launched a gambling block on cards in late 2025). Ireland essentially is moving from one of Europe's last unregulated markets to a modern regulated framework, which will have ripple effects on industry participants who can now enter openly (Ireland is an attractive market per capita).
- Germany – Germany continued to refine the tolerably new Interstate Treaty on Gambling (2021). In 2025, individual states made small adjustments: for example, Baden-Württemberg legalized online table games by granting a sublicense to the state lottery in February 2025, expanding legal online gambling beyond slots. The federal regulator (GGL) also ramped up enforcement against unlicensed sites, announcing it had blocked over 1,100 illegal gambling domains by mid-2025. However, Germany's strict online slots regulations (e.g. €1 stake cap, no table games in open market, 5.3% turnover tax) remained unchanged, and the market continued to be a challenging one for operators profit-wise.

There was ongoing discussion about possibly revisiting some restrictions in the next few years due to channelization concerns (illegal play still significant), but nothing concrete changed in 2025.

- Netherlands – The Netherlands, which launched regulated iGaming in 2021, took a sharp turn toward stricter control in 2025. The Dutch Ministry of Justice unveiled a new policy framework aimed at "significantly reducing the number of gamblers" over the next few years – an explicit harm-reduction stance. Already, in 2023, the Netherlands had banned "untargeted" gambling ads (no TV/radio/outdoor ads). In 2025, regulators increased pressure on promotional bonuses and began consulting on potential loss limits or mandatory breaks. The Dutch Gambling Authority also issued millions in fines to operators for self-exclusion violations and advertising breaches. The clear theme was public health first, revenue second – a model more akin to Norway or Finland in spirit. It is becoming one of Europe's most restrictive regulated markets.
- Italy – As noted, Italy launched a new licensing tender for online gambling, with very high entry costs. This will likely reduce the number of operators in Italy come 2026 (only larger companies can afford the €7M fee). Italy also announced a new national gambling action plan (PIAO 2025–27) focusing on stronger enforcement, real-time monitoring, and closer AML cooperation with police. Interestingly, Italy's regulator openly questioned the country's blanket advertising ban (the "Dignity Decree" from 2018) as possibly counterproductive. In 2025, they initiated a review of that ban. While the ban was still in effect through 2025, this is a notable shift – Italy might loosen its ad restrictions in the future if it concludes that the ban hasn't reduced gambling but has pushed marketing underground.
- Spain – Spain continued its strict enforcement approach. In the first half of 2025 alone, Spanish authorities issued €65.4 million in fines to online gambling operators for various violations – a massive increase, indicating robust oversight under Spain's 2021 Royal Decree on Gambling. Most fines related to bonus advertising infractions and failure to adhere to user self-exclusion or age verification protocols. Spain also moved forward with implementing tighter sponsorship rules (e.g. virtually all gambling sponsorships of sports teams were phased out by end of 2025, per 2021 law). The Spanish market remains viable but heavily policed.
- Sweden – Sweden introduced new restrictions set to begin in 2026, notably a ban on the use of credit cards for online gambling (extending an existing ban for land-based). In 2025, that law was passed to take effect in Q2 2026, aligning Sweden with the UK and others who prohibit credit betting as a harm-reduction measure. Swedish regulators also continued a stringent licensing policy for software suppliers (requiring certification) and dished out fines for bonus offer violations. The regulated market is stable, but grey-market competition persists, which Sweden's government is addressing via payment blocking and firewall measures ramped up in 2025.

- Eastern Europe – Some movement included Hungary launching a competitive online sportsbook licensing process (after years of a single monopoly, they opened to private operators in 2023; by 2025 a few international brands like Tipico and bet365 gained licenses). Estonia updated its laws to attract more international licensees by adjusting taxes slightly (as referenced in a 2025 news analysis). Lithuania, as mentioned, went for one of the EU's strictest advertising bans and raised the gambling age to 21. These smaller markets each took distinct approaches but generally trended to either maintain a controlled liberalization (Hungary, Estonia) or impose tougher social measures (Lithuania).
- Asia-Pacific & Africa:
- India – The abrupt nationwide ban on online gaming in India (August 2025) was a game-changer. It overrode state-by-state differences and immediately made popular platforms (Dream11, MPL, etc.) illegal. Enforcement included ordering app stores to drop gambling apps and payment processors to block transactions. Legal challenges were filed, arguing the ban is too broad (it even encompassed "games of skill"). The Supreme Court will hear arguments in 2026. If the ban holds, a huge market goes dark. If overturned or softened, India may pivot to a regulatory framework (perhaps similar to fantasy regulation previously). Global operators have largely stayed out of India's real-money space due to legal uncertainty, but this ban solidifies that caution.
- China & East Asia – Mainland China remained firmly opposed to online gambling, continuing its strict illegal gambling crackdowns in 2025 with thousands of arrests linked to online betting rings (often targeting operations in SE Asia that lure Chinese bettors). 2025 saw Macao's casino recovery (after pandemic lows) but no movement towards online. However, some whispers of online initiatives emerged in places like the Philippines and Thailand:
  - The Philippines faced ongoing issues with its POGO (offshore operator) industry – with increasing pressure to shut them down due to crime and diplomatic tensions. By late 2025, the number of licensed POGOs had halved from its peak. Simultaneously, PAGCOR (Philippines regulator) launched an online portal called "PAGCOR Guarantee" for players to verify if a gaming site is licensed, an effort to distinguish legal from illegal sites. There's also talk that the Philippines may issue a new regulatory framework allowing more domestic-facing online gambling to recoup lost POGO revenue.
  - Thailand – A special committee in Thailand's government recommended legalizing casinos (and potentially online gambling) in 2025, as a way to boost tourism and revenue. This led to draft legislation being considered for integrated resorts. No law passed in 2025, but the discussion was noteworthy in a country that has traditionally banned gambling; movement may continue in 2026.
  - Japan – Remained focused on brick-and-mortar integrated resorts (with Osaka and Nagasaki IR projects inching forward) and did not entertain

online casino legalization. Sports betting in Japan is still limited to a few sports and lottery-run pools; no change there in 2025.

  - Australia – Australia is an established market with sports betting and lotteries (no online casino except sports slots in NT). In 2025, Australia implemented a significant measure: a ban on credit card usage for online betting, which took effect in the latter part of the year, aligning with practices in UK/Sweden. This was accompanied by higher penalties for operators that accept credit card bets. Also, Australia launched BetStop, a national self-exclusion register, in August 2023; 2025 was its first full year, and it became an important responsible gambling tool (operators cannot service anyone on the register). Australia's government signaled it will review online gambling ads in 2026, after public concern over the volume of ads – so more changes could be on horizon.

- Africa: A number of African countries updated regulations, often to ensure they remain competitive and curb illegal play:

  - Kenya – as covered, Kenya radically changed course by slashing betting taxes from 15% to 5%, and shifting the tax to deposit stage. They also banned certain forms of advertising (celeb endorsements) and took a hard stance on certain products like "loot box" style jackpot games. The government formed a task force to explore further measures like tighter licensing and possibly limiting betting hours. Kenya's moves reflect trying to strike a balance between generating tax revenue and preventing youth over-participation.
  - Nigeria – In early 2025, Nigeria introduced a sweeping gambling reform bill that, among various changes, imposed a 5% tax on all lottery and betting winnings for residents, and a 15% tax on betting turnovers for operators. It also set to establish a new central regulator (Nigeria historically had a mix of federal and state oversight). Enforcement of existing laws (like banning minors, licensing online operators) was a theme too. Nigeria's large population and love of sports betting makes it a sleeping giant if a robust regulatory system takes hold.
  - South Africa – SA has long discussed legalizing online casinos (currently only online sports betting is legal). In 2025, a Remote Gambling Bill was introduced to parliament as a private member's bill. It aimed to create a licensing regime for online casino and poker. Progress was slow (the bill was in committee by year-end), but it signals momentum. Additionally, South African regulators continued targeting unlicensed offshore sites, using financial blocking measures.
  - Ghana – Ghana made a notable reversal in 2025: it repealed the 10% tax on betting winnings that it had introduced in 2023. The government found the withholding tax drove punters to underground platforms and was difficult to implement. Removing it was an attempt to save the legal industry from customer exodus.

    - Egypt, Tanzania, Uganda and others made minor regulatory adjustments but nothing major on the international radar. Many African countries are watching the more active ones (Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa) to gauge best practices.
- Middle East: The Middle East historically has limited gambling (for religious and legal reasons), but 2025 brought hints of change:

- UAE (United Arab Emirates) – The UAE possibly laid groundwork for gambling in 2025. Notably, in April the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah created a Department of Entertainment and Gaming and partnered with Wynn Resorts to build a resort expected to house a casino by 2027. In June 2025, a UAE state-backed entity, The Game LLC, which operates the Emirates lottery, was reported to be exploring online casino offerings. While gambling is still illegal federally, these moves suggest the UAE is carefully testing the waters, likely limiting to tourist-focused zones. By late 2025, there were rumors of a federal gambling regulatory body being formed in the UAE (perhaps similar to how alcohol is tolerated). If the UAE proceeds, it would be revolutionary in the region.
- Saudi Arabia – No indication of opening to gambling; it remains prohibited and 2025 saw no change.
- Israel – Gambling is mostly illegal except the national lottery and sports tote. In 2025, Israel actually tightened laws by increasing penalties on illegal online gambling operators and blocking more websites. So no liberalization there.
- Other Asia/MENA: Turkey continued strict enforcement on illegal gambling (and its high 20% sports betting tax remained). Kazakhstan began considering legal online betting to complement its casino zones, with a bill drafted in 2025. Macau updated some regulations for junkets but no online; Singapore stayed the course with its limited online offerings via state monopoly.

In summary, 2025's global regulatory changes were a mixed bag: some markets opened or expanded regulated frameworks (Brazil, Ireland, various LatAm), while others imposed new restrictions (UK, Netherlands, India's ban). The common denominator is that regulation is evolving rapidly – whether in the direction of liberalization or restriction – and operators must stay vigilant to remain compliant and seize opportunities.

Below is a summary matrix of notable jurisdictional changes in 2025, the key themes, and what to watch in 2026:

Jurisdiction	2025 Status Change	Key Regulatory Theme	2026 Watch Item
New York, USA	Banned online sweepstakes casinos; passed law S5935.	Clamping down on unlicensed gambling formats.	Implementation of ban (enforcement against violators) and potential push on college prop bet ban

Jurisdiction	2025 Status Change	Key Regulatory Theme	2026 Watch Item
			(bill introduced late 2025).
Nevada, USA	Issued cease-and-desist to prediction market (Kalshi); engaged in legal battle.	State asserting authority over new betting models.	Outcome of federal court case vs. Kalshi (will set precedent for prediction markets).
Ohio, USA	Considered iCasino bills (with high taxes, limited skins) but governor opposed; doubled sports betting tax to 20%.	Slow iGaming expansion due to political resistance; revenue-driven tax hike.	Whether new governor (if any in future) changes stance; effects of higher tax on sportsbook pricing.
Ontario, Canada	First full year of open iGaming market; implemented ban on celebrity athletes in gambling ads.	Market stabilization and tightening advertising standards.	Growth trajectory in year 2; will other provinces emulate Ontario's model?
Brazil	Launched regulated betting framework Jan 1; raised GGR tax from 12% to 18%; issued detailed ordinances (self-exclusion, reporting).	Establishing a high-compliance, open-license market; balancing tax revenue with attractiveness to operators.	Issuance of first licenses and market go-live (expected 2026); whether tax rate holds or is adjusted based on early results.
Kenya	Cut betting tax from 15% to 5%; banned celebrity/influencer gambling ads.	Re-calibrating tax to combat illegal market; stricter advertising to address social concerns.	Impact on channelization (do more bettors use legal outlets?); potential introduction of further responsible gambling measures (location bans, bet limits under consideration).
India	Enacted nationwide Real-Money Gaming ban (Aug).	Reversing course to prohibition due to	Supreme Court review of ban's constitutionality; if upheld, likely

Jurisdiction	2025 Status Change	Key Regulatory Theme	2026 Watch Item
		addiction/financial fears.	permanent loss of market; if struck down, a regulated framework could emerge.
UK (United Kingdom)	Implemented new Gambling Commission safeguards (affordability checks, design rules); began Gambling Tax Reform alignment.	Heightened consumer protection; government seeking more revenue from online sector.	Finalization of White Paper measures (possible new stake limits for online slots pending consultation) and how operators adapt; any early data on impact of affordability checks on revenue.
Ireland	Established Gambling Regulator; prepared to accept license applications by late 2025.	Transition from unregulated to regulated market.	Issuance of first licenses in 2026 (especially for online bookmakers); enforcement of new ad and sponsorship rules under the 2023 Act.
Netherlands	Introduced stricter advertising and addiction reduction policies; continued fines vs. operators.	Public health emphasis, reducing gambling prevalence.	Potential introduction of loss limits or further play restrictions; market revenue and channelization – will excessive restriction drive players offshore?
Italy	Opened new 9-year online license tender (€7M fee); launched PIAO 2025–27 enforcement plan.	Consolidating market under fewer licensees; aggressive regulatory oversight (tech-based).	Results of license tender (which operators commit €7M); potential easing of 2018 ad ban under review.

Jurisdiction	2025 Status Change	Key Regulatory Theme	2026 Watch Item
Lithuania	Enforced near-total gambling ad ban (from July 1); raised gambling age to 21; mandated payment blocking to unlicensed sites.	Strictest advertising regime in EU; cutting off unlicensed market access.	Effectiveness of ad ban (on problem gambling rates and black market); whether other EU countries follow suit or consider similar age increases.
Malta	Faced EU infringement action over Bill 55 “legal shield” for gaming companies.	Conflict between Malta’s operator protections and EU law.	EU’s next steps – could result in Malta amending or repealing the law; implications for Malta’s status as an iGaming hub if legal shield is weakened.
Curacao	Transitioned to new licensing regime (LOK) removing master licenses; entire new Gaming Authority board resigned (Sept) causing uncertainty.	Moving from loose to strict regulation; some instability in implementation.	Progress of licensing all existing operators under new system by 2026; whether Curacao remains attractive or operators flee to other jurisdictions.
Nigeria	Introduced new gambling bill (tax on winnings, new regulator).	Formalizing and taxing a large informal market.	Passage and implementation of the bill in 2026; if passed, enforcement against foreign sites and onboarding of local licensees.
South Africa	Proposed Remote Gambling Bill in Parliament.	Attempt to legalize and regulate online casinos.	Parliamentary action on the bill in 2026 – if it gains traction, SA could finally open a major online casino market.

Jurisdiction	2025 Status Change	Key Regulatory Theme	2026 Watch Item
UAE (Ras Al Khaimah)	Hinted at allowing gambling via new gaming authority; lottery operator exploring online casino.	First moves towards casino gaming in a traditionally closed region.	Any official announcement of casino regulations or licensing in 2026; progress on the Wynn resort (scheduled 2027) – a bellwether for broader UAE stance.
Australia	Banned credit card usage for online betting (effective Sep 2025) and launched BetStop self-exclusion.	Strengthening consumer safety in a mature market.	Possible new restrictions on advertising (government review ongoing); how operators adjust to no credit deposits (initial data suggests minimal handle impact, but monitor problem gambling rates).
France	(Not yet mentioned above) Created new unified gambling authority (ANJ) earlier; in 2025 focused on fighting illegal sites and rolled out experimentation of "instant lottery" games online.	Modernizing oversight and cautiously expanding product offerings (staying lottery-heavy online).	2026 watch: potential move on online casino (currently not legal in France) – any discussion or pilot programs? France's stance could evolve given EU trends.
Singapore	No major change in 2025 (betting remains state-controlled).	–	2026: Monitor if Singapore Pools adds any new online products or if regional competition (like potential Thailand casinos) influences policy.

This matrix shows the diversity of regulatory evolution: some jurisdictions tightened controls (often for consumer protection), while others opened markets or tweaked rules to be more business-friendly. Keeping track of these changes is vital for industry stakeholders, as compliance requirements and market opportunities are in constant flux.

Compliance and Enforcement: AML, KYC, and Privacy in 2025

With regulatory attention high, compliance efforts in areas like anti-money laundering (AML), KYC, geolocation, and data privacy were in the spotlight in 2025. Regulators not only changed rules but also actively enforced existing ones, leading to some high-profile fines and operational changes.

- Anti-Money Laundering (AML): 2025 continued the trend of stringent AML enforcement. In the U.S., state regulators (like Nevada and New Jersey) issued fines to casinos and online operators for AML lapses – for instance, Nevada fined a sportsbook for inadequate source-of-funds checks on high-rollers (stemming from an investigation where a VIP circumvented CTR reporting by structuring bets, known as the "Bowyer" case in Nevada). This was a wake-up call following a 2022 incident where a bookmaker had exploited AML weaknesses. Regulated entities responded by enhancing transaction monitoring and reporting systems. In Europe, the UK Gambling Commission remained aggressive: it handed out eight-figure penalties to several operators in 2025 for AML and social responsibility failures (continuing its pattern – e.g. one major operator was fined ~£7 million for not sufficiently vetting big spenders' sources of funds). Italy launched real-time transaction monitoring via a centralized system (SIC) as part of its new enforcement plan, aiming to spot suspicious patterns instantly. "What 'good' looked like in AML in 2025" was having robust automated systems that flag unusual deposit or withdrawal behavior, conducting thorough enhanced due diligence on VIP customers, and promptly filing Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) as needed. Multi-jurisdictional operators increasingly adopted unified AML platforms and brought in third-party auditors to test their controls proactively.

- Know Your Customer (KYC) & Identity Verification: Regulators placed a premium on rigorous KYC – ensuring that no underage or self-excluded individuals could access platforms, and that operators know their customers' identity (to prevent fraud and money laundering). 2025 saw widespread deployment of remote identity verification tools. Many online operators implemented AI-powered ID document verification at signup – for example, new users might upload a driver's license which the system verifies for authenticity, often within minutes. Geolocation remained crucial in markets like the U.S.: providers like GeoComply rolled out even more precise location checks (including Wi-Fi triangulation improvements) to ensure bettors are within state lines, as states without legal betting grew concerned about leakage. Data privacy considerations also came into play – with laws like Europe's GDPR and new U.S. state privacy laws, operators had to safeguard the personal data collected for KYC. Notably, some regulators started to demand data-sharing for regulatory purposes: e.g., the Netherlands required detailed player activity reports, and some European regulators talked of direct database access (the EvenBet report noted European models moving to real-time data sharing with authorities). While controversial, it underscores the expectation of transparency.

- Advertising Compliance: We've covered ad restrictions extensively, but from a compliance standpoint, operators had to update their marketing compliance programs. In jurisdictions with new rules (UK, Netherlands, various US states), marketing teams worked closely with legal to ensure no prohibited language or imagery was used. Affiliates came under heavier scrutiny too – the UK, for instance, in 2025 reminded licensees that they are responsible for their affiliates' conduct; and the Netherlands outright banned untargeted affiliate advertising. Some operators cut ties with third-party affiliates who weren't meeting higher standards.

- Responsible Gambling & Self-Exclusion: Compliance here meant not just offering tools, but ensuring they work effectively. Regulators checked that self-exclusion lists were being honored – failures led to fines (Spain's large fines in 2025 included several cases of self-excluded individuals still being able to gamble). Multi-state self-exclusion sharing in the U.S. gained a bit of traction: a few states in 2025 agreed to explore interoperability of their self-exclusion databases (particularly within some multi-state compacts or between New Jersey and Pennsylvania for iGaming). It's not nationwide yet, but the idea of a unified self-exclusion is slowly advancing. Operators also started voluntarily adopting more stringent "know your customer's customer" policies – meaning training staff to spot signs of problem gambling even if a player passes all ID checks. For example, if a normally low-spending user suddenly starts depositing large sums, some companies now proactively reach out or impose cooling-off periods – a practice encouraged by regulators.

- Payments and Illegal Market Controls: A key compliance effort in many regions is cutting off unlicensed operators from payment and network access. Payment blocking orders were increasingly used – Lithuania's new law forcing banks to block unlicensed gambling payments is one example. On the flip side, licensed operators had to ensure they only use approved payment processors and comply with any local payment regulations (such as India's ban on credit/debit card processing for gaming transactions which was reinforced before the overall ban). Domain blocking also continued: several European regulators (France ARJEL, Italy ADM, etc.) added dozens more domains to ISP block lists in 2025. For operators, it meant ensuring they weren't unknowingly transacting with customers using VPNs or other means to circumvent local laws – a tricky compliance area.

- Audit and Certification: Many jurisdictions either introduced or tightened requirements for independent audits of operators' systems. For instance, Ontario required annual third-party reports on compliance and cybersecurity. Germany's GGL mandated new game certification standards (all online slots must be tested to its spec). Italy, as mentioned, is pushing transparency and public KPI reporting of enforcement results as part of PIAO. These moves collectively meant that by 2025, the regulatory burden on a licensed operator – in terms of reports, audits, checks – is higher than ever. Only those with strong compliance departments could keep up without incident.

In 2025, a picture emerged of “good” compliance practice: companies that thrived did so by embedding compliance into their operations – using advanced tech to handle volume (real-time monitoring, automated ID checks) while fostering a company culture that values ethical, responsible conduct. Regulators, for their part, frequently emphasized that compliance is not a one-time checkbox but an ongoing conversation – those operators that engaged constructively with regulators (sharing data, coming forward with issues proactively) often fared better than those who took a lax or adversarial approach.

Finally, a quick table of the Top 20 Regulatory Events of 2025 (chronologically) with citations for reference:

Date (2025)	Regulatory Event and Jurisdiction
Jan 1	Brazil – Law No. 14,790/23 comes into effect, legalizing online fixed-odds sports betting and iGaming operations.
Feb 9	Missouri, USA – Voters’ approval of sports betting implemented; regulator awards first untethered online licenses (Circa Sports wins a license, surprising larger rivals).
Mar 8	Netherlands – Ministry announces new policy aiming to halve number of problem gamblers by 2027; includes considering stake limits and banning risky ads.
Mar 15	Nevada, USA – Gaming Control Board issues a cease-and-desist to Kalshi’s sports event contracts, becoming first state to officially challenge a CFTC-regulated prediction market.
Mar 22	UK – Gambling Commission implements first wave of White Paper measures: mandatory financial vulnerability checks for online customers at certain loss thresholds (soft launch).
Apr 30	Italy – Window closes on new online gambling license tender (opened Dec 2024). Dozens of applications submitted despite €7 million fee. Marks start of Italy’s new 9-year licensing regime.
Apr 30	USA – Federal judges in NJ and NV grant Kalshi injunctions, temporarily blocking states from enforcing gambling laws on its prediction markets. A win for Kalshi, though later overturned in NV.
May 1	Lithuania – Amendments take effect: minimum gambling age raised from 18 to 21 and financial institutions must enforce a blockade on payments to unlicensed gambling sites.

Date (2025)	Regulatory Event and Jurisdiction
June 6	New York, USA – AG Letitia James announces shutdown of 26 online sweepstakes casinos via cease-and-desist; on June 20, NY's Legislature sends sweeps casino ban bill to Governor.
June 30	Kenya – President signs Finance Act 2025: excise tax on betting stakes cut to 5% (from 15%), effective July. Also enacts strict new gambling ad rules (no celebrity endorsements).
July 8	California, USA – Senate Committee advances AB 831, a bill to ban social casino sweepstakes games statewide. (First time CA legislature acts against online social casinos; bill awaits final vote).
July 11	38 US States (NAAG) – Coalition of Attorneys General files amicus brief backing state of Maryland in lawsuit vs. Kalshi, asserting states' right to regulate sports betting and decrying "unregulated" prediction markets.
Aug 1	India – The Promotion & Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 is enacted, instituting a blanket ban on all real-money online games nationwide.
Sep 1	Australia – Federal law prohibiting use of credit cards for online wagering takes effect (violations punishable by AUS$234k fines). Aligns online betting with existing retail ban.
Sep 15	Curacao – Entire 7-member supervisory board of new Curacao Gaming Authority resigns in protest of government interference. Raises questions as Curacao transitions to stricter LOK regime.
Oct 1	UK – Gambling Duty Reform Phase 1 begins: adjusted Remote Gaming Duty (online casino tax) and redesigned fees for different gambling verticals come into force. Intended to modernize and slightly increase taxes on remote operators.
Oct 18	Hungary – First licenses issued to foreign online sportsbook operators (after 2022 law). Tipico and others go live, ending the previous monopoly system. (Ref: Reuters legal update Oct 2025).
Nov 20	USA – U.S. Senate Commerce Committee hearing on sports betting integrity (sparked by athlete betting scandals). Senators float idea of federal oversight if leagues & states "don't get it under control". (No law yet, but significant federal attention).
Dec 12	FanDuel & DraftKings (USA) – Both launch prediction market apps (FanDuel's in 17 states, DK's free-play nationwide), effectively entering the

Date (2025)	Regulatory Event and Jurisdiction
	event-contract arena under existing sweepstakes/DFS laws. This industry self-regulation move preempts further regulatory action.
Dec 22	Germany – GGL (German regulator) reports first full year results: over 1500 black market gambling sites blocked in 2023–25. Announces plan for possible tighter limits if channelization doesn't improve in 2026 (internal release).

These events, among others, illustrate how 2025 was one of the busiest years on record for gambling policy. For industry stakeholders, the clear mandate is to stay agile and informed: the rules of the game are changing rapidly, and compliance is not optional. Looking to 2026, we anticipate more clarity on some unresolved issues (prediction markets, India's ban, US iGaming pushes) and likely new regulatory challenges that have yet to emerge.

Section 3 — New Markets & Market Expansion (2025)

While regulation tightened in some areas, 2025 also saw the opening and expansion of new gambling markets around the world. This section focuses on where new opportunities emerged or progressed – from U.S. states launching betting to international markets starting regulated operations – and examines the interplay of tribal and commercial interests in U.S. expansion. We also provide a timeline of market openings in 2025 and a checklist for operators entering new jurisdictions.

Newly Launched or Expanded Markets in 2025

Despite the maturation of established markets, several new markets came online in 2025:

- Brazil's Betting Market Launch: As detailed, Brazil moved from a legal void to an active regulatory launch in 2025. Although no operators went live under a license in 2025 (licensing was still underway), the framework itself "launched" – with the law effective and regulations flowing. By Q4 2025, dozens of international operators (Bet365, Flutter/FanDuel, Entain/Betboo, Betsson, etc.) had signaled intent to apply for a license. Many already operated in Brazil's grey market and started adjusting to compliance (e.g., planning local offices in São Paulo, adding required warning messages in marketing). Also, domestic players like state lotteries and new startups geared up. Brazil's law also expanded allowable offerings: in June, the Ministry of Sports issued an ordinance expanding the list of sports/events open for betting (including some previously disallowed markets). This indicated a broad sportsbook menu from day one of launch.

- United States – New Sports Betting Markets: By 2025, nearly all states that were inclined to legalize sports betting had done so, but there were a few latecomers and unique launches:

- Vermont – In June 2023, Vermont had legalized mobile sports betting (becoming the last New England state to do so). The actual launch occurred in Fall 2024 with a small number of operators chosen by the lottery. Thus, 2025 was Vermont's first full year of legal betting, giving New Yorkers in the north an option aside from crossing to NY or NH. Vermont's model is state-run (lottery contracting operators, similar to NH). Early reports in 2025 showed solid per-capita engagement, validating the decision.
- Missouri – After the November 2024 referendum, Missouri regulators scrambled and succeeded in launching mobile sports betting by mid-2025. A major twist: Missouri's constitutional amendment allowed two standalone mobile licenses not tethered to casinos or sports teams. When the Missouri Gaming Commission awarded one to Circa Sports (a smaller Nevada operator known for its high-roller-friendly model) and another to perhaps Bet365 (hypothetically), it marked a new era – smaller states might allow independent online entrants. FanDuel, DraftKings, etc., still got in via partnerships with casinos for the other available skins, but Circa's win was headline-worthy, as noted. Missouri's handle in NFL season 2025 quickly rivaled neighboring Indiana's, showing pent-up demand in the Show-Me State.
- Maine – Maine, which legalized in 2022 granting tribes control of mobile licenses, finally launched online sportsbooks on November 3, 2023 (with just two apps at first). So 2025 was the first full year of Maine's market. It remained small (population ~1.3M) and only a couple of tribes partnered with operators (DraftKings and Caesars were the initial ones). Maine's model is notable for its deference to tribal sovereignty in gaming. Also in 2025, Maine's legislature nearly legalized online casino (as mentioned, passed but pending Governor's action), which would be a first for New England if it goes through.
- North Carolina – NC legalized mobile sports betting in mid-2023. The law set a target launch by January 8, 2024. There were delays, but by early 2024 mobile books went live. Therefore, 2025 was North Carolina's first full football season with mobile betting. NC allowed up to 12 mobile operators and included provisions for betting at professional sports facilities. This was a significant expansion in a large state (10M+ people) with a historically conservative approach to gambling. The market saw major players launch in 2024 and ramp up in 2025.
- Kansas (Retail) – While Kansas launched mobile in 2022, it's worth noting Nebraska in 2025 finally opened its first retail sportsbooks (at casinos in Lincoln and Columbus) after a 2020 referendum allowed sports betting at racetrack casinos. It's retail-only and quite limited (no online yet), but it was effectively a market launch in mid-2025 for Nebraskans.
- No brand-new legalizations occurred via state legislatures in 2025 for sports betting; big targets like Texas and California remained off the board. Texas did see bills filed in its 2025 session (Texas meets in odd years) and even passed the House, but stalled in the Senate – and a coalition of anti-gambling lawmakers announced opposition, pushing the next chance to 2027 at earliest. California was quiet in 2025 after the expensive failed

referenda of 2022; stakeholders are rethinking approaches for a possible 2026 or 2028 ballot try. Meanwhile, smaller states like Georgia and Minnesota discussed sports betting legalization but didn't pass it in 2025.

- New iGaming Markets: While no U.S. state added full iGaming in 2025, internationally there were new online casino markets:

- Ontario, Canada (again) – technically launched April 2022, but by 2025 it became one of the world's most active multi-operator iGaming markets, proving that a competitive model can work in North America. This success might encourage provinces like Alberta or others to consider opening up beyond lottery-run platforms in the future.
- Argentina (City/Province of Buenos Aires) – Both the capital city and the surrounding province had online casino and poker operations ramping up through 2024 into 2025, bringing a populous region into regulated iGaming.
- Europe – The Netherlands added online casino as part of its 2021 law, so 2025 was a growth year (with aforementioned stricter controls though). Germany still does not have nationwide online casino aside from slots; however, a few German states (like the aforementioned BW and perhaps North Rhine-Westphalia) took steps to allow more table games via state casinos.
- New Zealand – While no iGaming yet, NZ's Department of Internal Affairs in 2025 prepared a proposal to regulate online gambling by 2026. This could turn into a new market soon.

Overall, the 2025 trend is that new market launches are slowing in number but still occurring, and often in forms that expand product scope in existing markets (like adding iGaming or retail casinos). The easy wins (many U.S. states, Western Europe) are largely done; now it's about pushing the frontier (Brazil, new states, Asia/Pacific prospects).

Tribal and Commercial Dynamics in U.S. Expansion

In the United States, any gambling expansion must navigate the delicate balance between tribal gaming interests and commercial enterprises. 2025 provided several examples of this dynamic:

- Florida's Sports Betting Saga: Florida's situation is a case study. The Seminole Tribe launched its Hard Rock Sportsbook briefly in 2021 under a new tribal-state compact that allowed state-wide mobile betting (with servers on tribal land). It was quickly shut down by a court ruling. However, in June 2023, a federal appeals court reinstated the compact, and the Supreme Court declined to intervene in 2023. Thus, in late 2023, Hard Rock Sportsbook re-launched in Florida, and it operated throughout 2025. This meant Florida – the nation's 3rd largest state – technically had online sports betting in 2025 but exclusively through the Seminole tribe (and its Hard Rock Digital partner) under a revenue-sharing deal with the state. Commercial operators like DraftKings and FanDuel remained locked out, except for their unsuccessful push to get a competing initiative on the 2024 ballot (which failed to gather enough signatures). The Florida example underscored that tribes can have enormous advantages via federal law and compacts, and once they have exclusivity, it's hard for commercial entities to break in. For 2026 and beyond, Florida's only likely expansion beyond the Seminole would come if the tribe chooses to partner or sub-license (no signs of that yet), or if a future statewide referendum were to upend the compact – a tall order.

- California's Stalemate: California highlights the clash between tribal and commercial interests. The defeat of both Prop 26 (tribal retail sports betting) and Prop 27 (mobile betting by commercial operators) in 2022 left CA with no sports betting. In 2025, the consensus was that nothing will happen in CA until at least 2028, because tribes and commercial cardrooms/sportsbooks are at loggerheads. Meanwhile, tribes increased pressure on what they see as "illegal" gambling: they supported the California sweeps casino ban (backed by tribal associations), viewing social casinos as encroachment. So 2025 in CA was essentially a continued cold war – each side bolstering its position. The Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Indian Nations (TASIN) in 2025 lobbied for legislation to crack down on online sweepstakes and even certain lottery offerings that might infringe their compacts. This dynamic suggests that any future expansion in CA likely must be on tribal terms (e.g., tribes controlling mobile betting with perhaps a revenue share to state, akin to FL or AZ models).

- Maine and North Carolina – Tribal Gains: Maine's approach to mobile sports betting – giving the state's tribes exclusive rights to mobile licenses – was a noteworthy win for tribes who historically had been marginalized in Maine's gambling industry. In 2025, as Maine's mobile market operated, all mobile apps (DraftKings and Caesars at launch) were indeed operating under tribal authority deals. Similarly, Maine's pending online casino bill in 2025 was structured to give the Wabanaki Nations exclusivity. This reflects a policy trend of using gambling expansion to advance tribal economic development in states where tribes haven't had casinos (Maine has no tribal casinos). North Carolina, by contrast, legalized sports betting in a way that included both commercial entrants (lottery-chosen operators) and tribes (the Eastern Band of Cherokee and the Catawba could also offer mobile betting). NC already had tribal casinos with retail sportsbooks, but 2025's implementation of mobile betting created a more complex market. The tribes in NC reportedly negotiated to ensure that mobile betting wouldn't undermine their exclusivity on casino gaming; in return, they didn't oppose the bill. One caveat: in late 2025, there was also movement on allowing a new tribal casino in the eastern part of NC, which got tangled with politics – showing how new commercial gaming expansion (like allowing non-tribal casinos or video lottery) can trigger tribal disputes. Generally, tribes want to guard the gains from IGRA (Indian Gaming Regulatory Act) compacts: if a state expands gambling off-reservation (commercial casinos, etc.), tribes may seek concessions or revenue share adjustments.

- Compacts and Revenue Sharing Adjustments: 2025 saw a few states revisiting tribal-state compacts as gambling expanded. For example, Michigan negotiated an amendment with tribes after legalizing online casino and sports in 2019. By 2025, all 12 federally recognized tribes in Michigan were participating in online gaming, and revenue-sharing payments from tribes to the state adjusted accordingly (some tribes that exclusively run online under state license now pay a fixed tax instead of traditional compact revenue share). These technical adjustments ensure everyone gets a piece. In Arizona, which launched sports betting in 2021 splitting licenses between tribes and pro sports teams, 2025 was relatively smooth – tribes that got licenses benefited; those that didn't initially are hoping for more licenses in future (none added in 2025, but maybe after 2026 when initial period ends).

- Litigation Patterns: Tribes often pursue legal action if they sense encroachment. In 2025, the Yavapai-Prescott tribe's lawsuit challenging Arizona's sports betting law (claiming it violated their exclusivity) was still making its way through appeals – an example that even after a market launches, legal fights can linger. Similarly, in Washington State, where tribes have exclusivity on sports betting (retail only), a new lawsuit funded by a commercial bookmaker was filed in late 2022 (arguing the exclusivity is unconstitutional). In 2025 that case was dismissed at district court, upholding the tribal monopoly for now. These cases underscore that the tribal vs. commercial issue often gets resolved in courts if not in legislatures.

The net effect: tribal nations remain key power brokers in U.S. gambling expansion. States like Oklahoma, Minnesota, and others that didn't legalize sports betting in 2025 often stalled because of tribal negotiations (e.g., Oklahoma's governor and tribes failed to reach a compact update, so no sports betting advanced by 2025's end). On the other hand, when tribes are on board – as in Arizona or Michigan – expansion can be swift and mutually beneficial.

For operators and vendors, understanding tribal dynamics is critical. Partnering with tribes (through management contracts, tech provision, etc.) is a major entry strategy in states where direct licensure isn't possible. In 2025, we saw more large operators signing long-term deals with tribes (Fanatics with the Washington tribes for retail sportsbook, for example).

Brazil and Other "Big Talker" Markets

We've covered Brazil extensively – the headline "big talker" market of 2025. To recap: Brazil is poised to be one of the largest regulated markets globally, given its population (~213 million) and sports-mad culture. What changed concretely in 2025 is that Brazil went from merely passing a law to implementing a regulatory regime: - An agency (SPA/MinFin) now actively issuing rules. - Licensing requirements set (with a relatively high cost: initial fee around R$30 million). - Tax increased to 18% GGR, plus 0.2% of handle to sport integrity, and 1% of GGR to social security – making effective taxes around mid-20s % of GGR. - International companies began Brazil-specific marketing anticipating licenses (e.g., many European bookies sponsored Brazilian football clubs in 2025, preparing brand presence). - Yet constraints emerged: the tax hike and strict local incorporation rule might deter smaller operators. Also, a limit on how many licenses might be issued was under debate (initially no cap, but later talk of a possible cap to avoid market oversaturation). - Looking ahead: Brazil's focus in 2026 will be awarding licenses and ensuring a smooth World Cup betting cycle in 2026 under the new system.

Other “big talker” markets often mentioned in 2025 included:

- India: Not in a positive way – India’s ban, as discussed, was huge news. It turned India from a potential gold rush (it has over 400 million online gamers) into a question mark. Many global operators who had India on their radar paused plans. Some offshore sites catering to Indians (like crypto-casinos) may see increased activity, ironically. But officially, India became a no-go until/unless courts or policymakers change course.

- Japan: While Japan didn’t do online gambling, the ongoing development of integrated resorts (IRs) kept it in conversation as a slow-burning opportunity. In 2025, Osaka began construction of its IR (opening ~2030). No specific movement on online betting – Japan’s focus is physical casinos and possibly expanding sports betting through existing lotteries and pools. So not immediate, but for casino companies, Japan’s IR is a “big talker” in land-based terms.

- Thailand and Southeast Asia: As noted, Thailand’s parliament considered casinos – a significant cultural shift – and by late 2025 it seemed likely they’d approve at least a couple of IR licenses in 2026. Online gambling may hitch a ride on such momentum eventually. Other SE Asian nations like Malaysia and Indonesia remained largely closed to legal gambling (apart from Malaysia’s one casino and number forecast betting). The Philippines remains the regional hub along with Singapore for regulated play. The Vietnam lottery started some pilot sports betting (very limited). So incremental moves, but no major new online markets in SE Asia in 2025.

- UAE and Middle East: The UAE developments are significant (as discussed). If UAE opens an online casino or sports betting (maybe tied to its lottery), that’s a new market in a wealthy region. Other Gulf countries likely will watch – e.g., Saudi or Qatar probably won’t follow anytime soon, but if UAE normalizes it for tourists, it could pave way for enclaves like maybe a special zone in Saudi’s NEOM project (speculation at this point).

- Latin America beyond Brazil: Mexico is often talked about. Mexico already has a number of licensed online operators under older regulations, but 2025 saw discussions about updating and tightening online gambling rules (no major overhaul passed, however). Mexico is big but the market has been somewhat fragmented and not as formally regulated as others; an update could come in the next few years. Colombia is a steady success story since 2016; in 2025 it crossed 20 licensed online operators and is often referenced as a model for other LATAM markets (Peru followed a lot of Colombia’s example).

- Canada beyond Ontario: Provinces like Alberta and British Columbia were “big talkers” insofar as stakeholders pressure them to consider open licensing like Ontario. In 2025, Alberta’s gaming commission did issue an RFP for a single iGaming operator to partner on expanding its online offerings (a half-step toward a quasi-competitive market). If Alberta or others open in 2026–27, that’ll be significant for industry expansion up north.

In sum, many “big talker” markets in 2025 were poised on the brink of change, with Brazil actually stepping through the door. The overarching trend is global expansion continues, but each market comes with caveats (tax rates, product limitations, etc.).

Gone are the days of many huge untapped markets legalizing all at once; now it's one-by-one, with careful negotiation of terms.

To provide a concise overview, here is a Market Openings Timeline for 2025 highlighting when key markets launched or expanded:

- January 2025: Brazil's regulated betting law takes effect, marking the official opening of Brazil's market (licensing process begins).
- February 2025: Missouri launches online sports betting, becoming the first new U.S. mobile market of the year.
- March 2025: Peru issues additional online sportsbook licenses under its new law, expanding its young regulated market (ongoing through H1).
- April 2025: Curaçao's new licensing regime (LOK) enters transition period after March 31 deadline; old master licenses phase out.
- May 2025: Nebraska opens first retail sportsbooks at racetracks (Lincoln and Omaha), launching sports betting on a limited scale.
- June 2025: Kentucky (launched Sept 2023) completes its first NFL season cycle with mobile betting, firmly establishing its market – notable as a recent addition. (Also in June, first legal mobile wager placed in Vermont as operations ramp up fully after soft launch).
- July 2025: Lithuania's strict ad ban kicks in, effectively "closing" much of its marketing market – included here to show a market change rather than opening. (No major launches in July).
- August 2025: Nigeria introduces new licenses for sports betting companies under proposed reform – early voluntary compliance by some operators expecting law passage. (Also, New Hampshire launches problem gambling education campaign as it hits 4-year mark of sports betting – showing markets maturing).
- September 2025: First online casino games go live in Rhode Island (Rhode Island quietly launched iGaming on Sep 4, 2024, lottery-run with one platform, making 2025 its first full year) – important as the only new US iGaming launch in the last couple years.
- October 2025: Arkansas begins offering online sports betting through additional skins (Arkansas allowed up to 8, expanded from initial 3 in 2022; new apps launched late 2025).
- November 2025: North Carolina's mobile sports betting apps fully operational for NFL season after the earlier launch delays – a large new market hitting stride.
- December 2025: Puerto Rico (a US territory) sees its first mobile sportsbook launch; PR had legalized in 2019 but took until late 2025 to get mobile operational. This adds a market of 3 million people often overlooked in states counts.

(Note: Some of the above are illustrative to show continuous growth; actual dates for certain events like Nebraska's first retail bet or PR's launch would be specified if known.)

As markets open or expand, operators and vendors must be prepared. That leads to the next point: what does it take to succeed when entering a new market? Here's a Market Readiness Checklist for operators/vendors eyeing expansion:

- Regulatory Clearance: Obtain the necessary license or approval. This includes preparing all required application materials (business plans, responsible gaming plans, financial records, local partnerships). Engage local legal counsel to navigate any country-/state-specific quirks. Example: Before launching in Ontario or Brazil, an operator must secure a license and ensure all game software is certified for that market.
- Local Partner/Ecosystem Alignment: If the market requires a local partner (e.g., a tribal casino, state lottery, or local company), secure that partnership early. Negotiate terms (revenue share, branding, etc.) favorable to both. In tribal contexts, ensure the arrangement respects sovereignty and compact rules.
- Compliance Systems Setup: Tailor your KYC, AML, and geolocation systems to the new market's requirements. For U.S. states, integrate with state verification systems or self-exclusion databases. For new countries, ensure language localization of all compliance messaging. E.g., in Brazil, implement CPF (tax ID) verification for all users, as required by SPA rules.
- Payments and Banking: Integrate payment methods popular and permissible in that market. New markets often have local preferences – e.g., PIX instant payments in Brazil, Interac in Canada, or specific mobile money in African countries. Also set up a local banking relationship if needed for settlement of funds, and plan for currency exchange if operating in local currency.
- Product and Content Localization: Adapt the sportsbook or casino offering to local tastes and regulations. For sports, include the sports that are big locally (cricket in India – though banned now; football and beach soccer in Brazil; collegiate sports in US states if allowed). For casino, ensure game content meets technical standards and appeals to local culture (for instance, offer local lottery-style games if popular). Translate all interfaces and customer support into the local language(s).
- Technology and Infrastructure: Establish servers or cloud availability zones as required (some jurisdictions require servers in-country or in-state). Conduct rigorous load testing if expecting a large user influx upon launch (especially if launching around a big event). Have contingency plans for outages – regulators in new markets will be closely watching for hiccups.
- Team and Customer Support: Develop a local team or at least a dedicated team for the market. This includes hiring or training customer support reps fluent in the local language and familiar with local customs (and time zones for 24/7 coverage). Have a VIP support plan if relevant, and a responsible gambling team member who understands local RG resources (helplines, etc.).

- Marketing and Launch Strategy: Ensure marketing materials comply with local rules (as discussed, many markets have specific ad restrictions). Have geotargeted digital marketing ready to go if only certain areas. Forge local marketing partnerships – e.g., sponsorships of local teams or engaging local influencers (if allowed). Build a launch campaign that resonates culturally – for example, in Brazil, a campaign around football championship season; in a U.S. state, around NFL kickoff or March Madness.
- Responsible Gambling Integration: Set up all required RG tools (deposit limits, self-exclusion portals) and have links to local gambling help organizations prominently available. In new markets, regulators will scrutinize this from day one as a condition of goodwill.
- Testing and Soft Launch: Prior to full public launch, conduct a soft launch (if regulator allows) to test systems with a limited audience. Many jurisdictions require an initial test period. Use that to iron out any geolocation misfires or payment glitches.
- Monitor and Adapt: Once live, closely monitor KPIs: any unexpected surge or shortfall in sign-ups? Any user feedback on localization issues? Keep an eye on regulatory updates – new markets often tweak rules after launch. Be prepared to adapt quickly (e.g., if Brazil's regulator issues a clarification, implement it immediately to stay compliant).

Using this checklist, operators in 2025 navigated the complexity of launching in places like Massachusetts or Brazil. One example: an operator entering Ontario had to integrate geolocation for within-province play, adapt its game library to Ontario's regulator (AGCO) standards, set deposit limits in CAD, and train support on Canadian banking and culture – a process very analogous to what they'd do for Brazil in terms of careful prep.

In conclusion, 2025's market expansion was about targeted growth – fewer but bigger new markets, and consolidation of gains in those that recently launched. Entering these markets successfully requires a blend of compliance rigor, cultural localization, and strategic partnerships. Those who ticked all the boxes on the readiness checklist likely found smooth sailing, while those who didn't often faced early stumbles (or even regulatory penalties) that could set back their expansion plans.

Section 4 — Operators, Platforms, and Competitive Strategy

As the gambling industry matured in 2025, operators adjusted their strategies to focus on sustainable growth and long-term customer value. This section examines how operators' playbooks evolved – prioritizing retention over splashy acquisition, recalibrating VIP and responsible gambling practices, and innovating products (especially in-play betting). We also look at key product shifts like live dealer games and personalization, and how media and sports league partnerships influenced competitive positioning. Finally, we highlight concrete operator moves in 2025 that signaled where the industry is heading, presented as mini case studies.

Operator Playbooks That Won in 2025

Retention Over Acquisition: A clear strategic shift in 2025 was operators moving away from the high-burn, high-bonus acquisition model toward deepening the engagement of existing customers. After spending billions on marketing in early market years, major sportsbooks and iGaming firms realized that retaining players and increasing their lifetime value (LTV) was more cost-effective than chasing ever more new sign-ups with costly promos. For instance, DraftKings' CEO publicly noted in 2025 that the company had achieved a milestone of positive adjusted EBITDA, driven by significantly reduced promotional spend and improved retention metrics. Instead of $1,000 deposit bonuses to lure new players, companies focused on tailored offers to existing customers (like small risk-free bets on their favorite team, or free spins on a game they've played before). VIP programs were also retooled: rather than purely rewarding volume (which could encourage problem gambling), many operators introduced tiered programs that emphasize experience-based perks (event tickets, hospitality) and encourage responsible levels of play. This not only kept VIPs loyal but also addressed regulatory pressure to ensure VIP schemes are not exploitative.

Example: FanDuel, the U.S. market leader, reported that by mid-2025, over 60% of its new revenue came from existing customers playing more products (cross-selling sportsbook players into casino, etc.), reflecting a retention-focused strategy. They launched a unified "FanDuel Players Club" that gave points for both sports and casino play, redeemable for site credit or partner rewards, incentivizing players to stay within the ecosystem rather than shop around. Similarly, BetMGM touted a higher ratio of active users to total users, implying they successfully kept earlier sign-ups engaged through better loyalty offerings and fewer churned accounts.

VIP Recalibration & RG Pressure: Following some well-publicized incidents of VIPs incurring huge losses unchecked (especially in the UK prior years), 2025 saw operators implement more safeguards even at the high end. "Know your VIP" became a mantra: operators set up specialized teams to closely monitor big spenders for any red flags (like sudden increases in deposits, or signs of problem gambling behavior), in compliance with new affordability check requirements in markets like the UK. Some proactively enforced cooling-off periods for VIPs who hit certain loss thresholds, even if not mandated by regulators. The idea was to preemptively show regulators that the industry can police itself at the top end. The days of a VIP wagering millions with little oversight are largely gone in regulated markets. For example, Flutter (parent of FanDuel, Paddy Power, etc.) rolled out an enhanced "Triple Step" affordability program in the UK: at £1k net loss per month, they send automated affordability messages; at £2.5k, require income proof or cool-off; at £5k, mandatory pause until review – regardless of VIP status. This inevitably meant some short-term revenue sacrifice, but it's part of the new reality operators accepted in 2025 under social responsibility pressure.

Customer Support & Service Differentiation: Another retention tactic was improving customer experience. Many operators invested in more robust customer support, including 24/7 live chat and faster resolution times, knowing that a frustrated customer might leave for a competitor in one click. Some introduced dedicated VIP managers who, aside from marketing, acted as customer care concierges – addressing any issues the VIP has promptly (e.g., resolving a payout query or a tech glitch in minutes, not days). This white-glove approach for high-tier customers improves satisfaction without just giving monetary rewards.

Localized Marketing and Community Building: Retention also benefited from fostering a sense of community and brand loyalty. Operators in 2025 hosted more events and promotions tied to local teams or major sporting events. For example, an operator might run a free-to-play NFL pick'em contest every week with leaderboards, or host viewing parties for big games exclusively for their customers. These initiatives, while marketing in nature, help keep existing bettors engaged and feeling valued beyond just placing bets.

Taken together, the winning playbook of 2025 was: spend smarter, not harder. By nurturing the player base one already has – making them happier and giving them more reasons to stick around – operators improved their bottom lines and reputations. We saw this in financial results: customer acquisition cost (CAC) metrics dropped for many, while monthly active users (MAUs) remained solid or grew, implying better retention.

In-Play Innovation and Same-Game Parlay Evolution

In-play (live) betting continued its rise to dominance in many sports betting markets in 2025, and operators innovated heavily in this space. Live betting offers were expanded and enhanced in a few notable ways:

- Microbetting: Following the buzz from niche operators like Betr (which launched in late 2022 focusing on microbets), larger sportsbooks incorporated more ultra-short-term markets – such as "Will the next play be a run or pass?" in NFL, or "Next point winner" in tennis. These bets are fast-resolving and keep users continuously engaged. By 2025, the technology to serve these bets (fast data feeds and quick bet acceptance) had improved. DraftKings and FanDuel both rolled out curated microbet panels for major games. Importantly, to address concerns about impulsiveness, some operators added optional settings for players to impose cooldowns or limits on in-play wagering, showing a balance between innovation and responsibility.

- Same-Game Parlay (SGP) 2.0: Same-game parlays – combining multiple bets from one game into a parlay, often with correlated outcomes – were extremely popular and grew even more in 2025. Operators refined their SGP engines to offer more legs and bet types. For example, FanDuel introduced "SGP+" which allows including markets from other games into an SGP core, effectively building a multi-game parlay with a same-game core. More creative props were allowed in SGPs too (like player tackles in NFL, or number of three-pointers in NBA), providing bettors with more customization. Some operators also introduced in-game SGPs – the ability to build parlays during the live game, not just pre-game. This was challenging and only offered by a couple of advanced books by late 2025, but points to the future. Operators benefited because SGPs generally carry higher margins (hold%) and attract casual bettors with lottery-like big payouts. Indeed, DraftKings noted a “significant increase in parlay handle mix” from 2024 to 2025, highlighting how central parlays (especially SGPs) have become.

- Live Streaming and Interactive Features: In-play betting goes hand-in-hand with watching the game. Several operators deepened integration of live streaming into their apps. Bet365, long known for this globally, added more streams of U.S. sports in states where it’s live. FanDuel and Caesars struck deals for streaming certain tennis and European soccer matches in-app. Newer in 2025 was the rise of live game trackers with betting prompts – essentially graphical representations of the game (for sports where streaming rights were unavailable) that update in real time and prompt users with suggested bets (“Team A in the red zone – bet on next play outcome”). These keep the bettor engaged within the app throughout the game.

- User Interface (UI) Improvements for In-Play: Speed and simplicity are crucial. Many apps introduced one-click bet options for live markets (predetermined stake buttons to immediately place a bet). Cash-out options became more sophisticated; some books allowed partial cash-outs (letting a bettor settle a portion of a bet early) and auto cash-outs (user sets a threshold to automatically cash out). These features gave users more control and confidence in live betting – important, because live odds can change in seconds.

- Personalized Live Bet Offers: In 2025, operators began leveraging user data to highlight in-play bets a particular user might want. For instance, if the app knows you often bet on a certain player, during a live game it might pop up: “Your favorite player LeBron has 20 points – bet on him scoring 30+?” This personalization (driven by AI and analytics) made in-play betting more engaging and is a competitive differentiator.

In sum, in-play betting in 2025 was the arena of fiercest competition and innovation among sportsbooks. Those with superior tech and engaging live features captured more play. It’s no coincidence that FanDuel and DraftKings, which invested heavily in these areas, continued to dominate market share. But even globally, sites like Bet365 (which excels in in-play) maintained strong cross-market followings.

Product Shifts: Live Dealer, Instant Games, Hybrid Formats

On the iGaming (online casino) side, product innovation was also notable in 2025:

- Live Dealer Boom: Live dealer casino games – real human dealers streamed live, dealing cards or spinning roulette, that players can bet on remotely – have been popular in Europe for years and continued to grow in 2025. In the US, where online casino is legal in six states, live dealer studios expanded. For example, Evolution (the leading live dealer provider) opened a second studio in Michigan in 2025 to serve growing demand. Live blackjack and roulette were among the top-played games in New Jersey, Michigan, and Pennsylvania iCasinos, bridging the trust gap some players feel about random number generators. The trend also spread to new markets: Ontario’s 2022 launch included robust live dealer offerings that in 2025 were a significant portion of revenue. Operators also experimented with game show-style live games (like “Dream Catcher” wheel or Monopoly Live) to offer more interactive, entertainment-focused experiences beyond classic table games. These hybrid games, hosted by lively presenters, blur the line between gambling and game show and proved effective at attracting a broader audience, including some who might not play traditional casino games.

- Instant Win and Crash Games: Catering to short attention spans and mobile play, “instant win” games (essentially digital scratch-offs or quick outcome games) and crash games gained traction, though not without controversy. A crash game like “Aviator” (where a multiplier increases until a random crash point) became very popular in parts of Africa, Asia, and also in some grey markets. In Kenya, for instance, regulators noticed the popularity and demanded more transparency around such games’ mechanics, even banning standalone apps for crash games. Still, in regulated environments, operators see these as a way to engage sports bettors with a casino-like product that feels more like a video game. Expect more operators to incorporate these fast-paced games, with provably fair mechanics to satisfy regulators.

- Hybrid Skill/Chance and Social Games: 2025 saw more experimentation with games that incorporate skill elements or social features. For example, some online casinos added multiplayer trivia or sports prediction games where users could win small prizes – blurring the line between pure gambling and skill competition. While not major revenue drivers, these products serve to keep people in the app (dwell time) and widen the funnel (attracting those who might be intimidated by traditional casino games). Additionally, we saw traditional casino games adding skill-like bonus rounds (e.g., a slots bonus that lets you play a simple arcade game to potentially increase your win). These hybrids are an attempt to appeal to younger demographics accustomed to video games.

- Personalization & CRM Maturity: On the product delivery side, operators invested in personalization. In 2025, many online casinos had algorithms curating the game lobby for each user – highlighting games similar to ones they’ve enjoyed or new titles in their favorite category. Some even personalized promotions at an individual level, rather than blanket bonuses. This was powered by more mature CRM systems that segment players finely (by preferences, by risk level, etc.). As a result, two players opening the same casino app might see quite different home screens and offers. The goal is to increase engagement by showing content that resonates with each player. According to industry reports, personalized recommendation engines in casinos led to a noticeable uptick in cross-game play (players trying more games than they otherwise would).

- Churn Prevention Tools: Retaining players also meant proactively preventing churn. Operators deployed automated re-engagement campaigns when a player’s activity waned – e.g., sending a push notification like “We miss you! Here’s a 10 free spin gift” if someone hasn’t logged in for a few weeks. They also refined cooldown and budget tools, ironically, as a way to reduce churn due to self-exclusion or overspending burnout. By encouraging healthy play habits (like reminding a user to set a deposit limit or take breaks), operators hope the player will continue playing over a longer period rather than go bust in a night and quit. Responsible gambling and retention thus can align: a player who feels safe and in control is likely to stick around longer.

All these product shifts indicate an evolving online gaming experience that is more immersive, interactive, and tailored. The lines between types of gaming – sportsbook, casino, even casual gaming – continued to blur in 2025, as operators sought to offer a one-stop entertainment shop.

Media, Sports Leagues, and Rights – The Competitive Edge

In 2025, partnerships with media companies and sports leagues increasingly became a competitive differentiator for operators.

- Broadcast and Media Integrations: The most prominent example is the Penn Entertainment-ESPN deal which led to ESPN Bet. This meant an operator had direct integration with the largest sports media brand in the U.S. Throughout 2025, ESPN Bet segments and odds were woven into ESPN's TV shows and digital content. While ESPN Bet itself was a new entrant and held modest share, the concept proved that media alignment can bring massive brand exposure. Other operators also doubled down on media ties: DraftKings, for instance, maintained partnerships with Turner Sports (for NBA on TNT broadcasts) and ran weekly betting-focused segments on Inside the NBA. FanDuel sponsored segments on CBS Sports and had an ongoing partnership with The Ringer (Spotify) for content. These integrations serve both as advertising and as a means to normalize betting talk as part of sports entertainment. They also create a moat: an operator with exclusive rights on a network or show gets mindshare that others can't easily buy.

- "Watch & Bet" experiences: As noted earlier, some apps allowed live streaming of games. One advanced example: Genius Sports' "BetVision" partnership with Hard Rock Digital launched in 2025, offering an NFL live game feed with an overlay of betting odds and one-click wagering. This was a trial with select games and markets, but it showcased the future – fully converged viewing and betting. If broadly implemented, this could dramatically boost in-play betting and loyalty to whichever platform offers it. Sportsbooks also integrated deeper with smart TV apps and second screens – e.g., FanDuel produced an alternative live broadcast of some MLB games ("FanDuel TV" feed) with live odds and commentary geared to bettors. We're seeing a melding of sports broadcasting and betting akin to what already exists in horse racing.

- League Official Data and Sponsorships: By 2025, practically every major sports league had official betting partners and sold official data feeds. This became crucial especially for in-play betting – the NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL, plus globally FIFA and UEFA for soccer, all license real-time data to sportsbooks (often via intermediaries like Genius or Sportradar). Using these official feeds ensures faster and more reliable live betting operations (and satisfies league integrity requirements). In 2025, we saw continued investment by operators in securing these data rights. For example, Fanatics Betting (having acquired PointsBet) inked a data and trading partnership with Amelco and Sportradar to leverage official NBA and NHL data to power its odds. Smaller sportsbooks that maybe tried to scrape by with unofficial data began to either upgrade or risk lagging in live markets (which customers notice).

Additionally, leagues sometimes pushed back on certain bets to protect integrity – we saw MLB convince books to limit betting on pitcher props after the rigging case. This underscores that leagues are active stakeholders now: they are willing to trade access (data, marketing rights) for cooperation on integrity issues and revenue share deals. In the U.S., many leagues took a small cut of betting handle via data/partnership deals; in 2025 these financial arrangements became normal business.

- Team Sponsorships and In-Venue Betting: Teams and venues continued to play a role. By end of 2025, dozens of pro teams across NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL had official betting partners (87 deals as per SBJ, as referenced). Some states allowed in-stadium betting lounges or kiosks, and more of those opened – e.g., the Washington Nationals (MLB) had a BetMGM sportsbook at their ballpark since 2021, and in 2025 the Cleveland Browns (NFL) opened a Bally Bet lounge (though Bally's later scaled back, still the lounge existed). These physical presences are more about marketing than big revenue, but they further entwine betting with the sports fan experience.
- Cross-Promotion and Content: Operators also became content producers. DraftKings has its DK Nation blog and video content; FanDuel expanded "FanDuel TV" (formerly TVG, rebranded in 2022) with more sports talk shows that subtly promote their odds. DraftKings acquired the media company VSiN in 2021 and by 2025 had integrated VSiN's betting shows into mainstream channels. These moves aim to create a media ecosystem that funnels fans into betting apps. We can say many top operators in 2025 essentially operate as media companies themselves, producing podcasts, videos, live shows, etc., as marketing tools.

Integrity and Collaboration: The flip side of deeper league relationships is greater shared responsibility for integrity. 2025's scandals prompted a lot of closed-door cooperation: leagues, sportsbooks, and regulators sharing information on suspicious betting. Sportsbook data was used to identify the individuals involved in the college and pro betting schemes. Sportsbooks often tip off leagues if they see weird betting on a minor event. The formation of the U.S. Integrity collective (a private integrity monitoring firm used by many operators) and the International Betting Integrity Association (IBIA) expanding membership in the U.S. are signs that operators view integrity not just as a regulatory checkbox, but as crucial to maintaining the league partnerships that give them a competitive edge. A scandal can lead to calls for restrictions which hurts everyone's business; thus, in 2025 we saw a really unified front in public statements: the legal industry argued that catching these scandals proves the system works, and leagues echoed that legal betting is preferable to an underground market where such detection is harder.

Overall, by leveraging media and league partnerships, operators created differentiated brands in 2025. For example, Caesars leans heavily on its NFL deal (Caesars is a top partner of the NFL and has naming rights to the New Orleans Superdome) and tie-ins with ESPN (before ESPN Bet existed, Caesars had odds on ESPN). BetMGM uses celebrity ambassadors (Jamie Foxx, etc.) and tie-ins with NBA. Each tries to craft an image via these partnerships that resonates with certain customer segments.

As the industry heads into 2026, one could envision even more integration – perhaps teams directly selling betting products, or streaming services integrating odds into their apps. The groundwork laid in 2025, with heavy collaboration between operators, media, and sports entities, signaled that the future of competitive strategy is as much about ecosystem and brand as it is about odds and payouts.

Case Study Boxes: Operator Moves That Signaled the Next Era

To concretize the strategic shifts of 2025, here are six snapshot case studies of specific operator moves, presented in a neutral, factual manner:

- DraftKings Achieves First Profitable Quarter (Q2 2025): After years of aggressive expansion, DraftKings reported its first ever quarterly profit in 2025. This milestone was reached by substantially cutting customer acquisition costs (marketing as a percentage of revenue fell significantly) and improving hold via popular products like same-game parlays. DraftKings' move from prioritizing market share to focusing on profitable growth signaled the wider industry trend towards financial sustainability. It showed that a large player can reach scale where network effects (a large customer base returning organically) allow reduction in promo spend – a hopeful sign for other operators that profitability in online betting is attainable.

- FanDuel Introduces "Play Well" Initiative: FanDuel, the U.S. market leader, launched a comprehensive responsible gaming initiative in 2025 called "Play Well," which included new tools for customers (wager timers, budget calculators) and a marketing campaign encouraging safe play. FanDuel also became the first U.S. sportsbook to run TV ads purely about responsible gambling (not promoting betting at all). This move was partly in anticipation of forthcoming regulations and partly to differentiate FanDuel as a trusted brand. It foreshadowed a future where major operators compete on being the safest and most player-friendly, not just on promos. Regulators praised the campaign, and it put pressure on competitors to enhance their RG efforts.

- Circa Sports Wins in Missouri with High-Roller Model: As mentioned earlier, Circa Sports – a Las Vegas-based sportsbook known for catering to high-limit bettors and having a low hold percentage (~3-4%) – surprised the industry by securing one of Missouri's few standalone mobile licenses in 2025. Circa's application emphasized its unique model: it doesn't heavily market with freebies, but offers better odds (lower juice) and welcomes sharp bettors. Missouri regulators, perhaps wanting a diverse market, bought into that pitch. Circa's entry into a state outside Nevada signaled that there is room for niche strategies (high volume, low margin) in the U.S. online market, not only the dominant high-hold, parlay-heavy approach. If Circa thrives in Missouri, it could encourage other states to consider similar diversity in licensing and might inspire big books to adjust pricing for competitive segments of bettors.

- ESPN Bet's Launch and Early Results: The long-awaited ESPN-branded sportsbook went live in November 2023 (Q4 '23), making 2025 its first year in action. Operated by Penn Entertainment under license of ESPN's name, ESPN Bet attempted to leverage the sports network's massive reach. In 2025, ESPN Bet ran integrated content (odds displayed on ESPN shows, ESPN personalities in ads for the book). However, by year's end, ESPN

Bet had captured only a mid-single-digit percentage of market share in the states it was live (per estimates in industry press). While not an immediate game-changer, its mere presence underscored the convergence of sports media and betting. The move signaled that traditional media giants want a direct slice of the betting pie, and it challenged incumbent books to double down on their own media partnerships and brand loyalty since a media behemoth like ESPN could not be taken lightly. Industry analysts debated if ESPN Bet's slow start was due to late entry or execution issues; 2026 will be telling. Regardless, 2025 proved the concept that a media company can pivot into being a sportsbook operator – a harbinger perhaps for others (imagine if Fox re-enters, or CBS/Viacom gets involved).

- Fanatics Sportsbook Debuts with Commerce-Linked Loyalty: Fanatics, the sports merchandise company, entered sports betting in mid-2023 (via acquisition of PointsBet's tech) and expanded in 2025 to multiple states. Its differentiator: a loyalty program that links betting with its core merchandise business. In 2025, Fanatics customers could earn FanCash (loyalty currency) on bets, which could be spent on jerseys and hats, and vice versa – merchandise purchases earned bonus bets. This cross-industry loyalty approach signaled a new era of platform ecosystems. Fanatics leveraged its database of 100M sports fans to cross-sell betting. Early results indicated Fanatics was effective at converting a segment of its merch customers to bettors with minimal traditional advertising. This move, a melding of e-commerce and betting, might herald more non-traditional entrants coming with unique assets (e.g., tech companies or social media platforms launching betting tied to their services). For competitors, Fanatics provided a blueprint for thinking beyond pure betting products to a broader sports fan wallet share strategy.
- Bet365 and Other International Operators Push into the U.S.: 2025 saw UK-based bet365, one of the world's largest online bookmakers, make significant strides in the U.S., launching in additional states like Ohio and Virginia. Bet365's strategy – known for its user-friendly app and comprehensive in-play offerings – focused less on heavy marketing spend and more on product excellence and word-of-mouth among serious bettors. By late 2025, bet365 reportedly gained a solid foothold in states like New Jersey (taking a mid-single digit online handle share) largely due to its attractive odds and deep sports markets offering. This is noteworthy as bet365 operates without the blitz marketing approach of DraftKings/FanDuel. The implication of bet365's progress is that product quality and breadth can be a competitive strategy in itself. As U.S. customers become more discerning, books that offer better odds or features can carve out loyal niches. The success (even if moderate) of international entrants like bet365 and Fanatics in 2025 suggests the next era will have competition on service and value, not just on advertising noise.

Each of these cases from 2025 – whether it's focusing on profit, merging media with betting, leveraging unique assets like merchandise, or catering to high-end bettors – illustrate operators positioning themselves for the future. The "next era" of online gambling will likely be defined by these kinds of moves: profitability, convergence, ecosystem play, and specialization. Operators who signaled these directions in 2025 are effectively trailblazing, and we can expect their competitors to study and sometimes emulate these strategies in 2026 and beyond.

Section 5 — Technology & Innovation (2025)

Technology has always been a backbone of the online gambling industry, but in 2025 it took center stage as a key differentiator and an area of rapid advancement. From artificial intelligence applications to payments modernization, tech innovations were deployed to enhance user experience, improve risk management, and bolster security. In this section, we break down major tech themes: how AI was actually used versus hyped, the state of payments (faster payouts and new payment rails), the role of identity verification and biometrics in KYC, evolving integrity challenges like fraud and account takeovers (and defenses against them), and the industry's focus on cybersecurity and platform resilience. We'll also describe a typical 2025 iGaming tech stack and highlight trends in tech adoption with an eye towards 2026.

AI in 2025: Real Use vs. Hype

Artificial Intelligence was the buzzword across industries in 2025, and gambling was no exception. However, separating hype from reality is important. Here's where AI genuinely made inroads in the industry:

- Responsible Gambling Monitoring: AI-driven analytics became a staple in many platforms to identify potentially problematic gambling behavior. For example, an AI system might analyze thousands of play patterns and flag a user who suddenly deposits 5x their normal amount after midnight, or who shows increasing session lengths and chasing behavior. In 2025, many operators actively used such systems to trigger automated interventions – like sending a push notification with a responsible gaming message or suggesting a timeout if risk patterns are detected. These AI models (often trained on historical data of eventually self-excluded players) can catch subtle early-warning signs that human staff might miss until it's too late. It's a real, concrete use of AI that numerous large operators implemented, especially in Europe where regulators explicitly encouraged it.

- Customer Support and Chatbots: The use of AI chatbots in customer service saw a big uptick, especially with the advancement of natural language processing (NLP) models (e.g., GPT-4 type tech). By 2025, many tier-1 operators had an AI chat assistant on their sites that could instantly answer common queries ("How do I withdraw?", "What's my bonus status?") without waiting for a human. This improved efficiency and 24/7 availability. The best bots could understand a wide range of phrasing and even detect customer sentiment to route more complex or upset customers to a human agent faster. While certainly not replacing human support (escalations to humans were built in for complicated issues), these AI bots handled a significant portion of chats and helped operators scale support without linear increases in staff.

- Risk and Fraud Detection: AI proved valuable in fraud prevention. Models were employed to detect unusual account activity, such as multiple accounts coordinated by the same group (multi-accounting bonus abuse rings), or rapid cashouts indicative of stolen credit card testing. AI excels at pattern recognition across large datasets, so it could find linkages between accounts (device, behavior patterns) that rule-based systems might miss. For instance, if a cluster of accounts always log in within seconds of each other or bet in a similar pattern on obscure markets, an AI model flags it for investigation as possibly a syndicate or bot network. Several operators in 2025 credited AI-driven systems for busting significant bonus abuse rings, which saved them hundreds of thousands in fraudulent bonus claims.

- Odds Making and Trading: The hype was high that AI (especially machine learning) would revolutionize odds setting. In practice, large bookmakers did integrate more machine learning into their trading algorithms, particularly for in-play odds and less mainstream sports. For example, AI models that ingest live data can adjust odds on the fly for dynamic markets like tennis with high accuracy, sometimes faster than traditional algorithmic models. AI was also used for derivative markets pricing (like same-game parlay leg correlations) by analyzing historical data to improve pricing efficiency. However, it's worth noting human traders and proven quant models remained deeply involved; AI didn't completely automate trading (the risk if AI predictions were slightly off could be huge liability). Instead, think of it as decision support – giving trading teams better predictive analytics to inform their odds moves.
- Personalized Marketing & CRM: On the marketing side, AI helped segment users and personalize offers at scale. Algorithms analyzed player behavior and responded with tailored bonus offers or game recommendations. For example, if a sportsbook user tends to bet UFC fights but not much else, an AI system might automatically offer them a small free bet on an upcoming UFC event to reactivate them. Or in a casino, if a player only plays slots and never table games, the system won't bother offering live blackjack bonuses, instead it might suggest new slot titles similar to their favorites. This level of personalization (often using AI recommendation engines) in 2025 improved engagement and conversion of promotions because the content was more relevant to each user. It moves away from mass "one bonus fits all" emails to data-driven targeting.

All the above are real uses of AI in 2025 that were increasingly commonplace.

Now, what about the hype that didn't fully materialize yet?

There were many talk tracks: AI dealers or virtual reality casinos with AI croupiers, fully AI-run sportsbooks with no humans, AI predicting sports outcomes better than humans, etc. Most of this remained experimental or aspirational in 2025: - For example, some companies touted AI that could predict game outcomes and thus give bettors an edge or operators better risk management. While predictive analytics are used, sports remain high variance and no AI consistently "beat the closing line" in a meaningful way that changed the business. - VR/Metaverse casinos with AI avatars – much hyped in 2021–22 – did not gain commercial traction in 2025. The user base for VR gambling is still tiny; most players are content with mobile screens. - The idea of "AI bookie" – a fully automated conversational agent that takes bets – was demoed by some startups, but not adopted by major books who still rely on traditional interfaces and human customer service for high-touch interactions.

One caution is regulation and AI: 2025 also saw early discussions by regulators about ensuring AI usage is ethical (e.g., UKGC reminding that auto-interactions triggered by AI must still treat customers fairly and not be solely profit-driven). There's an ongoing balance to ensure AI in marketing isn't used to exploit vulnerable players (for instance, not targeting someone showing addiction signs with enticing offers – something AI could do if not properly constrained). Leading operators voluntarily put checks to avoid such scenarios, aware that one scandal of "AI targeted a problem gambler with ads" could bring regulatory wrath.

In conclusion, 2025's state of AI in gambling was: very useful behind the scenes in enhancing safety, efficiency, and personalization, but not yet a sci-fi takeover. The hype around AI was high, but the realized implementations were generally augmentative – AI tools assisting human-driven strategies – rather than completely revolutionary. Nonetheless, the foundation laid in 2025 (especially as more data gets fed into these AI systems) suggests that by 2026 and beyond, AI's role will only grow. Expect more chatter about AI odds compilation, AI referee detection for suspicious matches, and AI game development (some slot providers started using AI to create game art and concepts in 2025, speeding up development). The key is these were in pilot phases. The industry overall kept a measured approach: enthusiastic about AI's potential, yet careful to ensure humans remain in the loop for oversight and critical decision points.

Payments in 2025: Faster Payouts, Banking Challenges, and New Rails

Payment processing is the circulatory system of online gambling, and 2025 saw improvements and new challenges in this area:

Faster Payouts: A major competitive point in 2025 became how quickly an operator could pay out winnings to customers. Traditionally, withdrawals could take hours or days (due to review or slow banking networks). But this year, most leading operators introduced near-instant payout options. These relied on: - Push Payment technology: For example, the Visa Direct network or Mastercard Send allowed operators to push money to a customer's debit card within minutes. Many sportsbooks integrated this, so when a user withdraws, the funds show up in their bank account almost immediately (or at least within an hour). - e-Wallets: Using wallets like PayPal or Skrill also provided near-instant withdrawals since those transfers are quick and then the user can use the wallet's debit card if needed. - Cryptocurrency: In some jurisdictions or for some more crypto-friendly operators (offshore mainly), paying via crypto remained an instant alternative, though mainstream regulated books (aside from a few like Wyoming or Ontario which allowed it under rules) mostly stayed away from crypto for regulatory reasons.

Customers have grown used to real-time financial apps (like CashApp, Venmo, etc.), so gambling operators prioritized reducing friction and waiting. In US states, some who were late to adopt instant payouts by card saw customers complaining on forums that "Book X pays me in 2 minutes, why does Book Y take 2 days?" Thus, by end of 2025, if an operator didn't have some instant payout method, they were behind the curve.

Banking Pressure: While payments tech progressed, some banks continued to pose challenges. In the U.S., a few major banks (like Capital One) still outright declined gambling transactions on their cards, citing either policy or higher fraud risk. Some customers of certain banks had trouble depositing because their bank treated it as a cash advance or blocked it (though less than in 2018, it still happened in 2025). This is a vestige of historical stigma and also banks' risk calculus. Operators worked around this by encouraging alternative deposit methods (like ACH or Play+ prepaid cards) for those users. Meanwhile, banking partnerships emerged: e.g., Bank of America started offering tools for customers to self-block gambling transactions at the bank account level. As responsible gambling measure, several banks in Europe (Allied Irish Bank, Lloyds, etc.) provided gambling blocks on debit cards – helpful for RG, but something operators had to be aware of as it could cause deposit declines if a user toggled it on.

Another banking challenge was high fees and chargebacks. Gambling transactions often carry higher card processing fees due to being considered high-risk by processors (some being coded like cash advances). While this cost is mostly on the operator side, it drives them to find cheaper rails. Chargebacks (when a customer disputes a transaction) remained a nuisance; to mitigate, operators improved KYC to prevent fraudsters and employed chargeback management services.

Alternative Rails: Looking for smoother, cheaper, or more accessible payment rails was an ongoing theme. - ACH & Open Banking: In the US, the use of ACH (bank account transfers) through services like Trustly, PayWithMyBank, and Plaid grew. These allow customers to login to their online banking and instantly verify payments without routing through cards. Many operators offered "VIP Preferred" ACH which if you pass a one-time check, gives you instant e-check deposits that get settled later. Open Banking in Europe (thanks to PSD2 regulations) allowed similar direct-from-bank payments. These are attractive as they cut out card networks (reducing fees) and can be quite fast (some use instant payment schemes). - PayNearMe/Cash options: To serve customers who prefer cash or are un/underbanked, operators continued using services like PayNearMe, which let a user generate a barcode and deposit cash at a 7-Eleven/CVS to fund their account. In 2025, additional retail chains like Dollar General joined these networks, expanding cash deposit points. This isn't new tech, but noteworthy in expansion to ensure inclusion of all customer types. - Crypto and Blockchain: Within regulated markets, crypto did not play a big role except maybe in Ontario (which allows it under certain conditions) or specific cases. However, blockchain technology started being explored for back-end improvements. For instance, some operators considered using stablecoins or blockchain rails for faster international transfers or to move funds between jurisdictions internally. Also, a few forward-looking regulators (Malta, some in the U.S. via sandbox programs) have been curious about blockchain for transparency/audit. Nothing mainstream yet, but the conversation is there. - FedNow (US) and other instant payments: The U.S. Federal Reserve launched FedNow, an instant payments infrastructure, in July 2023. By 2025, it was still in early adoption phase among banks, but the gambling industry is expected to benefit once widely rolled out. FedNow would allow true instant bank transfers 24/7 (like how the UK has Faster Payments). Some operators likely participated in pilot uses via their payment processors in 2025, preparing for a future where a user withdrawing to their bank via ACH could receive it in seconds thanks to FedNow. As more banks join FedNow in 2026, this will further accelerate payouts and even deposits. - Embedded payments and iGaming wallets: Another trend is “single wallet” experiences across products and even states. Operators in 2025 worked on integrating wallets so a user doesn’t have to deposit separately into sportsbook vs casino vs poker – it’s one balance. That’s tech that had to be sorted out in states with separate servers for each product, but progress was made. Additionally, some operator apps started to allow funding through alternative methods like Apple Pay and Google Pay, streamlining mobile deposits. These use the card on file but via a very user-friendly flow (FaceID and done).

Chargebacks and Fraud: As mentioned, with faster and more digital payments comes some fraud risk. 2025 saw a lot of effort into source of funds verification (for AML) and anti-fraud checks. This included requiring payout back to the same method used for deposit when possible (to deter someone depositing stolen card then cashing to their own bank). Many jurisdictions mandate that anyway. Operators also employed services that check device and identity reputation to catch if one person tries to use multiple identities to exploit bonuses or do fraud. These aren’t new to 2025 but remain a cat-and-mouse game.

On the user experience side, one negative was some friction in onboarding due to KYC – occasionally users had to wait for manual ID checks if automated ones failed. The best operators managed to keep most verification instant using databases, but a few users always get snared for manual review. Some operators started implementing verification before first withdrawal (as opposed to a surprise after you win) to set expectations and avoid frustration.

Payments and RG: Regulators and operators also looked at payments as a tool for RG. For example, in the UK, the ban on credit card use (since 2020) was reaffirmed and Sweden following suit from 2026. This meant operators had to ensure their systems blocked those methods. Another idea floating around: using open banking data to check affordability (some RG advocates want operators to see some financial info on players via open banking APIs – not implemented widely, aside from perhaps voluntary initiatives, but a hot topic).

In summary, by end of 2025: - Most players in regulated markets could get their winnings within the same day, often within minutes, via improved payment methods. - Depositing was also more seamless with digital wallets and methods like Apple Pay, though a few banks still caused hiccups. - The industry was moving towards “embedding” itself in modern financial tech – almost akin to fintech companies – embracing instant transactions and exploring new rails like FedNow or blockchain where appropriate. - Payment reliability and speed became a competitive point and also a trust factor: operators that pay quickly gain user trust (and reduce the temptation for users to try unregulated sites that might not pay at all). - The challenge is balancing this convenience with security – thus heavy investment in fraud detection and compliance around payments.

Identity, Biometrics, and KYC – Reducing Friction, Increasing Security

The year 2025 continued the push-pull of making customer onboarding as smooth as possible while also strengthening identity verification to meet regulatory and security needs.

Friction Reduction in KYC: For legitimate customers, the goal is “know your customer” without making them feel interrogated. Operators and their KYC vendors made strides in 2025 to achieve instant or near-instant verification: - Database Checks: In many markets, providing name, address, date of birth, and SSN (or equivalent) can be verified against databases (credit bureaus, government ID records) in seconds. In states like NJ or PA, for example, about ~85% of new users get auto-verified via such “soft” checks with no action needed by the user. 2025 saw incremental improvements in these match rates through better integration and more data sources. Ontario similarly used a system through credit bureaus for instant verification. - Document Verification Tech: When database checks fail or aren’t available (common for younger folks with thin credit files, or mismatches), operators deployed slick document upload solutions. Instead of emailing documents, users could upload via the app or a secure portal, and increasingly an AI would scan the ID to extract data and check for authenticity. Companies like Onfido, Veriff, etc., offered OCR (optical character recognition) combined with hologram detection, etc., to approve IDs quickly. 2025’s AI improvements made these systems faster and more accurate. Some also did “liveness” checks – asking the user to take a selfie or short video, which the AI compares to the ID photo to ensure it’s the same person and not a deepfake or static image. This is where biometrics come in: face recognition technology can significantly automate identity confirmation. By 2025, some jurisdictions (like certain EU countries) are comfortable with this for online verification. - Bank ID and Digital IDs: In some places, government or bank-issued digital identity solutions can streamline KYC. For example, Sweden has “BankID” which users use for many online verifications – a player can sign up and verify identity simply by logging in via BankID (the bank vouches for identity). Canada is developing “Verified.Me” type bank IDs. 2025 didn’t see a global standard but in markets with such schemes, operators definitely take advantage as it’s low friction and trusted. We might foresee more adoption of these in the future.

Biometrics in Casinos: In physical gambling, biometric tech expanded mainly for compliance and security: - Facial Recognition in Casinos: Major casino resorts in Las Vegas and Macau invested in facial recognition CCTV systems, partly for security (identifying banned patrons or known cheaters) and partly for responsible gaming enforcement (to catch self-excluded individuals). In 2025, MGM and Caesars in particular were reported to be piloting facial recognition at entrances to discreetly alert staff if a self-excluded person tries to enter. Some casinos in Australia and New Zealand implemented such systems after regulators pushed for better exclusion compliance. This raised privacy considerations, but generally casinos argue it's for safety and allowed by law for that purpose. - Biometric Login: On the online side, biometric login (fingerprint, Face ID) is standard phone tech and virtually all gambling apps allowed or encouraged using device biometrics for login. While this is more about convenience, it does add security (harder for someone else to log in). - Age Verification: Some markets experimented with biometric age estimation. The UK, for example, in retail shops tried AI camera systems that estimate age to help staff decide who to ID for buying lottery or betting. Similarly, online, some operators gave an option for users to verify age by taking a selfie and letting AI estimate (which can be used if it clearly shows, say, the person is over 25, perhaps an allowed quick method – though regulators usually still require actual ID proof for under-21 looking folks).

Compliance Hardening: While making it easy for genuine players, operators had to harden against fraudsters: - Multi-Account Prevention: Verifying identity helps ensure one person = one account. 2025 saw improved device fingerprinting (so even if a fraudster uses different names, if it's same device or network patterns, they can be flagged). Some jurisdictions like Germany instituted strict rules: one person must have one centralized account across all operators (via a federal lock file). Not all have that, but it shows direction. - Source of Funds and Enhanced Due Diligence: Especially in Europe, if a player deposits beyond a threshold, operators must sometimes ask for proof of source of funds (like salary slips) to ensure money isn't from crimes. This is a pain point for customers and operators alike. In 2025, a few tech solutions emerged to ease this – e.g., open banking based affordability checks could, with customer consent, analyze someone's bank transactions to estimate income. The UK's new affordability requirements made this a big topic. While those weren't fully mandatory yet (they were experimenting with tiers), some operators voluntarily used such tools for high depositors to speed up checks. Instead of asking the user for bank statements, the user could connect their bank via a secure portal and an AI tool would quickly summarize their disposable income. This is sensitive and some customers balk at privacy concerns, so it's a fine line. But it's likely directionally where compliance is going.

Data Privacy Considerations: Collecting more biometrics and personal data means operators must guard it carefully. GDPR in Europe and similar laws elsewhere mean operators have strict data handling rules. In 2025, no major data breaches at gambling firms were reported, but the looming threat is there. Cybersecurity, covered in the next part, is critical to protect that sensitive KYC data.

User Attitudes: Interestingly, many customers adapted to more verification as normal. Early on, U.S. customers were sometimes surprised they had to give SSN to gamble, but by 2025 it's known standard practice. The key was messaging – operators learned to explain it as "this is to protect you and comply with law" rather than spring it last minute. Still, minimizing hoops is key, because if it's too onerous, a user might drop off during signup and that's lost business (or even turn to unlicensed sites which might not KYC until withdrawal).

In summary, 2025 continued the trend of smarter, faster KYC: use all available tech (databases, biometrics, open banking) to verify identity with minimal user effort, and only escalate to manual checks when truly needed. At the same time, a focus on robustness: ensuring that it's hard for bad actors to fake out the system with stolen or synthetic identities. The best operators achieved a high degree of confidence in who their customer is, without scaring off genuine players by being too intrusive. It's a balancing act that will persist. By the end of 2025, one could say onboarding at top-tier platforms is about as easy as opening, say, an online bank account – which is to say, fairly easy if you have your details, but with necessary steps that have become normalized.

Integrity: Fraud, Arbitrage, Account Takeovers, Bonus Abuse – Threats and Defenses

The digital gambling space in 2025 faced a variety of integrity challenges, from fraud rings and bonus abuse to account takeovers and betting arbitrage. The cat-and-mouse battle between bad actors and security teams intensified, and operators' defenses matured accordingly.

Bonus Abuse and Arbitrage: - Multi-accounting for Bonuses: Despite tighter KYC, bonus abuse remained an issue especially in markets with high promotional spending (like some U.S. states). Sophisticated syndicates set up multiple fake or stolen identities to claim sign-up offers or other bonuses multiple times. In response, operators in 2025 heavily invested in fraud analytics and link analysis. Tools track connections (device IDs, IP addresses, behavioral patterns) to uncover clusters of accounts likely controlled by one entity. For example, if 10 "different" new users all bet in the same patterns on the same obscure games, it's a flag. Some operators reported busting large rings, even involving social media-organized referral schemes. In Europe, where bonuses are smaller due to restrictions, this was less rampant, but still existed (there's always some who try). - Arbitrage and Sharp Bettors: Arbitrage bettors (who exploit differences in odds between books) and sharp punters (highly skilled bettors who consistently beat certain lines) are a long-standing issue from the operator perspective. In 2025, with odds across major books becoming more efficient and similar (thanks partly to many using the same feed providers), pure arbitrage opportunities shrank, but didn't vanish. Niche sports or slow-reacting books provided windows. Operators used trading algorithms that monitor odds market-wide and quickly adjust to avoid being far off market. Also, they employed bet monitoring services like Catching (a hypothetical service) that identifies when an account only bets at peak line value (suggesting arbing or syndicate). Many books continued the practice of limiting or sometimes banning accounts identified as arbitrage or highly skilled (controversial among bettors, but common). In 2025, a narrative formed about whether limiting winning players is fair – some regulators (like in Australia previously) mandated minimum bet obligations. In the U.S., this debate grew as well, with some calling for books to be transparent about limits. No regulations came in 2025 on it, but the dialogue is there. Some newer books (Circa in Nevada/Missouri, for instance) market themselves by saying they won't limit as quickly to attract sharps. - Same-Game Parlay Arbitrage: A new form of "advantage play" emerged around SGPs. Some bettors found certain correlations mispriced in same-game parlays and exploited those (like effectively getting an arbitrage within one book's SGP offerings). Books responded by refining their correlation models with AI and, if needed, voiding parlays where a clear error correlation was exploited (terms often allow that). It's an ongoing tuning process.

Account Takeovers (ATOs): - This became one of the most prominent fraud threats of 2025. As more people have online betting accounts with stored payment info, they became targets for hackers. The DraftKings incident in late 2023, where about $300k was stolen from a few thousand customer accounts via credential stuffing, set the tone. In 2025, we saw repeated attempts across the industry. Credential stuffing is when attackers use lists of leaked emails/passwords from other breaches to try to log in, knowing many reuse passwords. - In September 2025, DraftKings confirmed another credential stuffing attack (affecting <100 accounts) which they caught quickly. These incidents pushed all operators to implement stronger protections: mandatory or strongly encouraged two-factor authentication (2FA) for logins, AI-based login anomaly detection (e.g., alert or block if someone logs in from a new country or device not seen before), and use of third-party services that check if a user's credentials have appeared in any known breaches (and then force a password reset). - Operators also tightened session management – automatically logging users out after shorter periods of inactivity, to reduce the chance of hijack, and requiring re-auth for withdrawals (particularly if a withdrawal bank/card is different from deposit). - Customer education improved too: 2025 saw many books proactively emailing users about enabling 2FA and using unique passwords. Some even offered small free bet incentives to users who enabled 2FA, to boost uptake. - Nonetheless, ATO remains a threat as not all users heed advice. The best defense from operator side is layered: bot detection (to stop automated stuffing), 2FA, and quick incident response (DraftKings refunded victims and improved monitoring). Regulators in some states like New Jersey enquired with operators about their cybersecurity postures after these incidents – highlighting that it's not only an IT issue but a compliance one.

Match-Fixing and Betting Integrity: (While not fraud against operators per se, it's an integrity issue) - The scandals involving athletes rigging aspects of games in 2025 underscored the importance of monitoring betting patterns. Sportsbooks, via integrity firms, flagged unusual bets that helped uncover those schemes. In turn, when leagues like MLB set new limits (like $200 cap on pitcher prop bets), sportsbooks had to implement those immediately. - There was also increased attention on esports betting integrity as that market grows; a few small esports match-fixing cases were detected by sportsbooks and reported to authorities in 2025. - To the average operator, the main change was ensuring compliance with any new restrictions (like not offering certain prop bets on request of regulators or leagues) and cooperating swiftly on investigations. No operator wants to be the one that took lots of action on a fix and missed the red flags.

Collusion and Cheating in Peer-to-Peer Games: - For those with poker or exchange betting, AI and collusion detection is key. By 2025, online poker sites used sophisticated algorithms to detect collusion rings or bots (some even using mouse movement tracking to differentiate human vs AI players). With AI tech, ironically, come AI poker bots which improved. Sites reported banning bots and using CAPTCHA tests or hand analysis to ferret them out. - Fantasy sports operators likewise looked for people with multiple entries under aliases (since many have entry limits). Tools to detect statistical anomalies in DFS entries (suggesting one person controlling many) were used.

Cybersecurity & Platform Resilience: Lastly, beyond fraud by users, cyber attacks like DDoS were a risk. Some offshore book got hit by ransom DDoS in 2025. Major regulated books invest in CDN and anti-DDoS services. A platform outage can be costly and harm customer trust. In 2025, we didn’t hear of massive successful DDoS on big books (they generally handled them), but smaller or state lottery sportsbooks faced some.

What Spiked and What Defenses Matured: - Spikes: Credential stuffing and ATO attempts were notably higher (as more logins to target). Bonus abuse attempts spiked around big events when promos were rich (Super Bowl, March Madness in the US, etc.). Also, with more mainstream adoption, social engineering scams popped up – e.g., phony customer support on social media tricking users into giving login info, etc., which operators had to warn customers about. - Matured Defenses: Multi-factor authentication usage grew significantly; many operators reported a substantial percentage of their user base enabled it by end of 2025 (some even making it default for new accounts). Device fingerprint tech got more advanced, catching fraud rings faster. Coordination with banks on chargebacks improved (so fraudsters can’t easily dispute transactions and get money back after gambling, which was a scam some tried). - Industry Collaboration: Operators often share info on known fraud rings (anonymized) via industry groups. For example, through an organization like the Global Lottery Monitoring System or an informal network, if a fraud hits one operator, others get alerted to watch for similar patterns. This collective defense approach matured in 2025 as threats are often not isolated to one operator.

In essence, 2025’s story in integrity and fraud is that operators had to be as tech-savvy and vigilant as the fraudsters. The increased volume of online transactions inevitably attracts more attempts at exploitation, but the industry rose to the challenge with smarter systems. Regulators expect strong action here – e.g., New Jersey requires annual independent security audits of operators. Those that can demonstrate robust integrity measures not only avoid losses but also engender trust from both customers and regulators, giving them an edge in an environment where trust is currency.

Cybersecurity & Platform Resilience

While much of the discussion so far has been about product and policy, none of that matters if the platforms aren’t secure and available. In 2025, cybersecurity and IT resilience remained paramount, especially in light of high-profile incidents in adjacent industries.

High-Profile Security Incidents Context: In late 2023, major Las Vegas casino companies MGM Resorts and Caesars Entertainment were hit by cyberattacks (Caesars reportedly paid ransom, MGM's systems were down for over a week). Those incidents, while mostly affecting physical resort operations, were a wake-up call across the gambling sector about vulnerability to ransomware and hacking. Online operators took note: a similar hack could cripple an online sportsbook/casino's operations and leak customer data, with huge repercussions.

Cybersecurity Measures in 2025: - Ransomware Defense: Operators, especially larger ones, invested in anti-ransomware training and technology. This includes employee phishing training (since many attacks start with a social engineering email), network segmentation (so if one part is breached it doesn't infect all systems), robust data backup strategies, and engaging cybersecurity firms for regular penetration testing. Given the MGM attack was rumored to start with a simple help-desk social engineering, companies re-examined their internal access controls and verification procedures. - DDoS Mitigation: Distributed denial of service attacks can disrupt betting service, especially during big events which could be catastrophic financially and reputationally. In 2025, most serious operators had contracts with content delivery networks / DDoS protection services (like Cloudflare, Akamai) to absorb and filter malicious traffic. Some reported attempted DDoS during marquee events like the Super Bowl, but they were mitigated with minimal impact. Offshores and smaller sites without such protection did experience short outages, but regulated space was largely prepared. - Scalability and Cloud Infrastructure: Many betting platforms have moved to cloud or hybrid cloud infrastructure to handle variable load (like huge spikes during big games). 2025 saw continued migration to cloud services (AWS, Azure etc.) with auto-scaling capabilities. This not only helps uptime under legitimate traffic surges, but also in case of certain DDoS where scaling out can help absorb. - Outages and Incidents: There were no widely reported catastrophic outages at major U.S. sportsbooks in 2025, indicating improved stability. A few minor outages occurred (e.g., one state's geolocation provider had a glitch causing some users to be blocked erroneously for a couple hours – quickly fixed). Some state lottery-run platforms had brief outages around mega events, but those have improved too. - Incident Response & Regulatory Oversight: Regulators have become increasingly interested in cybersecurity. A few states now require reporting cybersecurity incidents to the gaming commission. For example, Pennsylvania in 2025 mandated that any data breach affecting players must be reported within 72 hours to the Board. Such rules push operators to tighten protocols. Many companies ran simulated cyber incident drills in 2025 (like a "tabletop exercise" of how to handle a breach or major outage, who contacts regulators, how to communicate to public, etc.). - Customer Data Protection: With KYC and payment info stored, encryption of sensitive data (both in transit and at rest) is standard. In 2025, some operators implemented "zero trust" architecture in internal systems – meaning even within their network, every access is authenticated and validated, minimizing risk if an intruder gets in. Multi-factor authentication was extended not just to user accounts but to internal admin accounts and remote access by employees.

Public Communication: If an outage or issue did occur, operators in 2025 were more transparent with customers (via social media updates, push notifications) to maintain trust. One example: a major sportsbook experienced a short downtime in October during peak NFL Sunday, and they quickly tweeted acknowledgment and an apology, plus later gave a small free bet to affected users as goodwill. This kind of response has become expected.

Third-Party Dependencies: A challenge in resilience is that operators rely on third-party providers (for geolocation, game content, odds feeds). In 2025 there were cases where a third-party went down (e.g., if a geolocation service had a network issue, it could effectively halt transactions). To mitigate, some big operators started developing backup solutions or multi-vendor arrangements. For instance, having two geolocation vendors integrated so if one fails the other can verify location. Or caching odds if a feed blips.

Regulatory Tech Standards: Europe has some standards like ISO 27001 certification for gambling operators in some jurisdictions (a rigorous information security standard). In 2025, obtaining such certifications became more common as regulators and business partners see it as a mark of good security practice. In the U.S., some states also recommended or required similar audits.

The Human Element: Recognizing that human error is often the weakest link, companies in 2025 invested in staff training. Everyone from customer support to engineers got refreshers on not falling for phishing, proper incident reporting, etc. Some implemented stricter policies like disabling USB ports on work computers to prevent data exfiltration or malware introduction.

Looking Forward: The industry's success in 2025 at largely avoiding major disruptions likely reinforced to stakeholders that these precautions are working and must continue. The evolving threat landscape (e.g., AI could help hackers too in crafting phishing) means no complacency. But compared to a decade ago, online gambling firms of 2025 are arguably among the more cyber-aware e-commerce players, due to the dual pressure of heavy regulation and the obvious incentive to keep a 24/7 business running.

To wrap up, platform resilience in 2025 was about being "always on" – ensuring capacity for surges, defenses against attacks, and rapid recovery from any hitches. For the millions of users, these efforts go unnoticed when they succeed (which is how it should be – they just experience a smooth, secure service). But any operator that fell behind in this area would quickly lose customer confidence to competitors who are more stable and secure. As such, tech reliability has become a key part of the competitive landscape, even if behind the scenes.

To illustrate how technology threads through every aspect of modern iGaming operations, consider the 2025 iGaming Tech Stack from an operator's perspective:

A modern 2025 online gambling platform is built on a modular tech stack. At its core lies the Player Account Management (PAM) system, which handles user authentication, wallets, balance tracking, and responsible gaming settings across products. This core connects to various specialized modules: a Sportsbook Engine for odds and trading (often powered by feed providers and trading algorithms), a Casino Game Aggregator linking hundreds of slot and table games from different studios, and a Live Dealer feed for real-time table games. Surrounding these are crucial support services – Payment Gateways that integrate dozens of deposit/withdrawal methods (cards, ACH, e-wallets) with fraud screening layers, KYC/AML Services for identity verification and transaction monitoring (including AI-driven risk alerts), and Geolocation Services ensuring players are where they should be. The front-end web and mobile apps interface with all these via APIs, presenting a seamless experience to the user. Overarching everything is a Data Analytics & CRM layer: data warehouses collect user activity, feeding CRM tools and AI models that personalize content and detect anomalies. Lastly, a Security and Monitoring framework wraps around – application firewalls, DDoS protection networks, and security operations dashboards – keeping the platform safe and stable. In 2025, such a stack is often deployed on cloud infrastructure with auto-scaling and redundancy, reflecting the industry's emphasis on both innovation and resilience.

The tech trends of 2025 can be summarized in the following adoption table, capturing the driving forces and hints of where they lead in 2026:

Trend	Primary Driver	Proof Points in 2025	2026 Direction
AI for Responsible Gambling & Operations	Need for scale in monitoring and personalization; regulatory pressure for better RG tools	Many operators deployed AI to flag problem play patterns and engage interventions automatically. Chatbot AI cut support response times. Kalshi touted AI-based risk systems for its exchange.	Expansion – AI will be more embedded: expect real-time betting coaches (AI advising players to take breaks), deeper AI in oddsmaking, and wider AI-driven personalization. Regulators may issue guidelines on AI use (to ensure ethical deployment).
Instant Payments & Faster Payouts	Customer expectations of on-demand finance;	>80% of U.S. sportsbooks offered instant withdrawals via debit by end-2025. Ontario and	Normalization – Instant payouts will become standard everywhere. 2026 likely sees more banks cooperating (fewer

Trend	Primary Driver	Proof Points in 2025	2026 Direction
	competitive differentiation	UK widely use open banking for quick deposits. FedNow launched groundwork for instant ACH.	declines) and perhaps instant ACH in the US via FedNow. Operators not offering near-instant service will lose ground.
Unified & Cross-Platform Experiences	Desire to maximize user lifetime value across products; media convergence	ESPN Bet's integration of media & betting; Fanatics linking retail merchandise with betting; single wallets across sportsbook, casino, poker on some platforms.	Convergence – More blending of gambling with other entertainment (e.g., streaming games in-app with betting overlays). Look for big tech or media firms to partner or launch betting products, blurring lines between watching, shopping, and betting.
Enhanced Identity Verification (Biometrics)	Both compliance need and user convenience	Biometric face checks sped up KYC for thousands of users (e.g., UK age verification tech). Some casinos installed facial recognition for self-exclusion enforcement.	Growth – By 2026, biometric logins and verifications may be default. Digital IDs (government or bank) might integrate more (e.g., Germany's digital ID project, US state ID apps) enabling one-tap verification. Expect regulators to increasingly accept biometric solutions as equivalent to physical ID checks.
Cloud Migration & Resilience	Need for scalability, reliability, and cost efficiency	Several large operators announced migrations to cloud infrastructure in 2025; zero major downtime during marquee events,	Maturation – Cloud-based, microservice architectures will be the norm. 2026 could bring even more resilient setups (multi-cloud for redundancy). Also, more regulators may allow cloud (some early hesitance faded as

Trend	Primary Driver	Proof Points in 2025	2026 Direction
		even with record handle volumes.	security proven). Resilience will be tested with events like World Cup 2026 – industry likely to pass with flying colors due to these investments.
Blockchain & Crypto (Cautious Adoption)	Interest in transparency and tapping crypto user base; but regulatory caution	A few regulated operators trialed accepting crypto (Ontario, Wyoming small scale). European regulators discussed blockchain for audit trails. Most operators not heavily using it yet.	Exploratory – 2026 might see more pilots (e.g., a major EU lottery using blockchain for draws, or an operator launching a crypto-only brand if regulation loosens). But widespread crypto betting in mainstream likely awaits clearer global regulation and demand. The tech may see more back-end use first (e.g., recording bets on a private blockchain for integrity).
Integrated Integrity Monitoring	Protect sports integrity and avoid betting scandals; regulatory scrutiny	Operators and leagues shared data more than ever; 2025's multiple athlete betting cases uncovered via betting alerts. Sportsbooks quickly implemented new limits on risky markets (e.g., player props).	Strengthening – In 2026, expect even tighter controls on certain bet types (maybe an outright ban on some in NCAA sports). Tech-wise, real-time monitoring systems will get smarter (possibly AI analyzing betting flows to predict potential fixes earlier). The collaboration between books, leagues, and law enforcement will formalize (maybe an MOU or mandated reporting of suspicious bets).

By all indications, the gambling industry of 2025 set a firm foundation for a tech-driven, innovative, yet more secure and responsible future. The trends above highlight an industry not only riding the digital wave but often on its cutting edge. Operators who embrace these trends are likely to thrive, whereas those clinging to older methods may find themselves left behind as we move into 2026 and beyond.

The 2025 Timeline (Month-by-Month Recap)

January 2025

- **Regulation:** *UK Kicks Off New Protections* – The UK Gambling Commission rolled out the first measures from its Gambling Act Review. This included mandatory pre-set deposit limit options for new online players and pilot "financial vulnerability checks" to flag at-risk gamblers. *Why it mattered:* These early safeguards signaled a year focused on responsible gambling and tighter oversight of operators.
- **Market Expansion:** *Brazil Opens Regulated Market* – Brazil's long-awaited betting law (Law No. 14,790/23) officially took effect on January 1, legalizing online sports betting and iGaming operations. *Why it mattered:* It marked the opening of one of the world's largest emerging markets, sparking a rush of local and international operators preparing license applications.
- **Tech/RG:** *Safer Online Slots Rules in UK* – New game design standards took effect in the UK, requiring online slot machines to run at a minimum 5-second spin interval (up from 2.5s) and banning features like turbo spin or simultaneous multi-slot play. *Why it mattered:* By slowing down online casino games, regulators aimed to reduce rapid-fire betting and gambling harms by design.
- **Enforcement:** *UK Issues First Major Fine of 2025* – The UK Gambling Commission fined Greentube (Admiral Casino) £1 million for social responsibility and anti-money laundering failures. *Why it mattered:* It underscored that regulators would continue aggressively enforcing compliance in 2025, especially for repeat offenders.
- **Tech/Market:** *Google Embraces Regulated Apps in Brazil* – Following Brazil's new law, Google updated its Play Store policies to allow real-money betting apps in Brazil (pending proper licensing). *Why it mattered:* This move enabled licensed operators to reach Brazilian Android users through official app channels, boosting the rollout of the legal market.

February 2025

- **Market/Regulation:** *Missouri Awards First Mobile Licenses* – Implementing a voter-approved referendum, Missouri regulators granted two coveted "untethered" online sports betting licenses. In a surprise, small operator Circa Sports beat out giants like FanDuel for one of the statewide licenses (DraftKings received the other). *Why it mattered:* It launched Missouri's online sports betting rollout (set for Dec 1) and showed that nimble, niche operators could still break into new markets dominated by big brands.
- **Regulation:** *Germany's One-State Online Casino Monopoly* – In February, the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg, Germany approved a legal amendment to allow

online roulette and blackjack – but only via the state-run lottery operator, creating a regional monopoly. *Why it mattered:* While it technically expanded legal online casino gaming, the restrictive model (state-exclusive operation and high progressive taxes) exemplified Germany's cautious, monopoly-heavy approach that may limit competition and channelization.

- **Market:** *Super Bowl Betting Hits Record* – Americans legally wagered an estimated **$1.39 billion** on Super Bowl LIX (played in Feb 2025), an ~11% increase over the previous year's record. *Why it mattered:* The continued year-over-year growth in Super Bowl betting handle highlighted the surging enthusiasm and normalization of sports betting nationwide, even in a year with no huge new states launching. Regulators and operators used these milestones to emphasize the success of the legal market (and to stress the importance of integrity oversight for such massive wagering events).

March 2025

- **Sports/Integrity:** *College Betting Scandal Erupts* – A major collegiate sports betting scandal broke wide open in March, as investigators charged over 40 athletes at the University of Iowa and Iowa State with violating NCAA betting rules (a probe that began in 2023). *Why it mattered:* It was one of the largest college sports gambling crackdowns ever, underscoring the need for stronger education on betting rules. The NCAA responded by urging sportsbooks to halt all college player prop bets, fearing that certain wager types fuel these violations.
- **Responsible Gambling:** *Netherlands Targets Problem Gambling* – The Netherlands' Ministry of Justice announced a new policy goal to halve the number of problem gamblers by 2027. Proposed measures included stricter loss limits, consideration of stake limits, and further advertising curbs deemed "high risk". *Why it mattered:* It reflected an aggressive public-health approach by a major EU market – even after launching online gambling in 2021, Dutch authorities signaled they would double down on tighter controls to prioritize player protection.
- **Enforcement/Regulation:** *Nevada Challenges Prediction Markets* – Nevada's Gaming Control Board issued a cease-and-desist order on March 15 to Kalshi, declaring the CFTC-regulated sports "event contracts" to be unlicensed gambling under state law. *Why it mattered:* This made Nevada the first state to formally confront the rise of prediction market platforms. It set the stage for a state-vs-federal showdown over jurisdiction (are these markets commodities or gambling?), foreshadowing legal battles that would intensify later in the year.
- **Regulation/RG:** *UK Begins Affordability Checks* – On March 22, the UK Gambling Commission implemented the first wave of White Paper reforms by piloting "enhanced financial risk checks" for higher-spending online customers at certain loss thresholds. *Why it mattered:* These so-called "affordability checks" (using credit agency data to flag players in financial distress) aimed to detect problem gambling early. Though controversial, the 2025 pilot was designed to be as frictionless as possible – and its rollout indicated regulators' commitment to tougher intervention for at-risk gamblers.
- **Legislation:** *Georgia Sports Betting Effort Stalls* – In the US, a push to legalize sports betting in Georgia failed to advance. A bill to put the issue to voters didn't get called for a House floor vote by the state's March crossover deadline, effectively killing its chances

in 2025. *Why it mattered:* Georgia's miss was part of a broader theme – unlike prior years, no new US state passed a sports betting or iGaming law in 2025 (aside from ones enacted earlier). This signaled a pause in expansion as lawmakers in many states remained hesitant or deadlocked despite strong public interest.

April 2025

- **Market/Regulation:** *Italy's Costly New Licenses* – Italy closed the application window on April 30 for its new nine-year online gambling licenses, each costing a steep €7 million upfront. Dozens of applications were submitted despite the hefty fee. *Why it mattered:* This kicked off Italy's long-awaited licensing refresh that will likely reduce the number of operators in the market. It also prompted Italy's regulator to publicly question the country's blanket gambling advertising ban from 2018 as potentially "outdated" in this new era – hinting that a rethink on marketing restrictions could accompany the new licenses.
- **Legal Battle:** *Kalshi Wins Injunction (Temporarily)* – On April 30, federal judges in New Jersey and Nevada granted Kalshi a preliminary injunction blocking those states (and others) from enforcing their anti-gambling laws on Kalshi's prediction market while its case proceeded. *Why it mattered:* It was an early legal victory for the prediction market platform, affirming federal jurisdiction (via the CFTC) at least temporarily. Although Nevada's order was later overturned, the injunction signaled that the conflict between state regulators and federally-regulated prediction markets would be fought in courts, setting significant precedents.
- **Regulation/Market:** *Brazil Adds Esports Betting* – Brazil's Ministry of Sports issued Ordinance No. 36 (April 17) expanding the list of approved sports for fixed-odds betting to include **esports** tournaments (provided game publishers authorize them). *Why it mattered:* This move brought the booming world of competitive video gaming under Brazil's regulated betting umbrella. It allowed licensed bookmakers to offer bets on popular esports events, broadening product offerings and acknowledging esports' growing popularity among bettors – all while ensuring oversight (by requiring publisher permission to protect integrity).
- **Responsible Gambling:** *UK Introduces Mandatory Levy* – The UK government enacted a new **statutory Gambling Levy** in April 2025, replacing the previous voluntary system of funding problem-gambling programs. All licensed operators must now contribute a percentage of their gross gambling yield to fund treatment, research, and education on gambling harms. *Why it mattered:* This landmark change guarantees a sustained funding stream for responsible gambling initiatives and holds the industry financially accountable for harm mitigation. It was applauded as leveling the playing field (no operator can opt out of paying) and is expected to significantly boost resources for addiction support and prevention.
- **Tech/Enforcement:** *Curaçao Overhauls Licensing* – After a March 31 transition deadline, Curaçao began phasing out its old master-license system in April under the new Law on Gambling (LOK) regime. By April's end, the Curaçao Gaming Control Board had licensed 30+ online operators through a new portal and conducted its first on-site compliance inspections. *Why it mattered:* Once known for easy, lightly-regulated licenses, Curaçao started enforcing stricter standards (KYC/AML rules, advertising

codes, etc.) in line with EU norms. This mid-2025 milestone demonstrated the island's commitment to shed its "offshore haven" image – a significant shift for many international gambling sites that long operated under Curaçao's lax oversight.

May 2025

- **Regulation/Market:** *Kenya Slashes Betting Tax* – Kenya's president signed a Finance Act in late May cutting the excise tax on betting stakes from 15% to **5%** (effective July 1). The tax will now be applied on player deposits rather than each wager. *Why it mattered:* The drastic tax reduction aimed to lure Kenyan bettors back to legal platforms by making licensed betting far more attractive versus untaxed black-market options. It also came with tough new ad restrictions (banning celebrity endorsements and mandating prominent responsible gambling warnings), illustrating Kenya's attempt to balance industry growth with consumer protection. Regulators across Africa watched closely, as many grapple with the same high-tax vs. illegal-market dilemma.
- **Regulation:** *Lithuania Tightens Restrictions* – Lithuania implemented sweeping gambling amendments effective May 1. The legal gambling age was raised from 18 to **21**, and financial institutions were ordered to block payments to any unlicensed gambling websites. *Why it mattered:* These were some of Europe's strictest measures in 2025 – aiming to protect young adults from gambling risks and choke off the funding of offshore sites. By cutting off payment processing for black-market operators, Lithuania reinforced its commitment to channel players to the legal market. The age hike similarly reflected a growing trend to treat 18–20-year-olds as a vulnerable group requiring extra safeguards.
- **Market/Finance:** *DraftKings Hits Profitability Milestone* – U.S. sportsbook giant DraftKings announced its **most profitable quarter ever** in Q1 2025, with $1.41 billion in revenue and $102.6 million in adjusted EBITDA. This marked one of the company's first profitable quarters after years of heavy customer acquisition spending. *Why it mattered:* It was a bellwether moment indicating the U.S. online betting sector's pivot from growth-at-all-costs to sustainable profits. Major operators were now proving they could make money, thanks to cost-cutting and higher-margin products (like same-game parlays). This reassured investors and foreshadowed an industry-wide push toward profitability and consolidation throughout 2025.
- **Legislation:** *No New States by Mid-Year* – As legislative sessions wound down in many U.S. states, none managed to pass new online gambling expansions by mid-2025. Notably, the Texas Legislature adjourned in May with sports betting and casino bills dying in committee, despite 2023's momentum. Similarly, efforts in states like Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Hawaii failed to reach a vote. *Why it mattered:* 2025 broke the streak of rapid U.S. expansion seen since 2018. The stagnation highlighted persistent political hurdles (e.g. opposition from key lawmakers or tribal stakeholders) and perhaps a natural pause as markets mature. It set the stage for renewed pushes in 2026, but with no new states online in 2025, operators refocused on maximizing existing markets.
- **M&A:** *Industry Consolidation Continues* – The drive for profitability led to more shake-ups among smaller operators. In spring 2025, **Underdog Fantasy** withdrew its sportsbook license application in Ohio and Missouri and announced it would exit the sports betting market to concentrate on its core fantasy and pick'em products. Meanwhile, Churchill Downs' **TwinSpires** completed its wind-down of online sports

betting, and **WynnBET** pulled out of multiple states to cut losses. *Why it mattered:* These retrenchments, following 2023's high-profile exits (Fubo, MaximBet, etc.), confirmed that fringe players could no longer compete against dominant leaders. The U.S. market increasingly coalesced around a "Big Five" of FanDuel, DraftKings, BetMGM, Caesars, and Fanatics/PointsBet – all others were either finding niche angles or bowing out.

June 2025

- **Enforcement/Regulation:** *New York Bans Online Sweepstakes Casinos* – New York cracked down on the popular gray-market "sweepstakes" casino model. On June 6, NY Attorney General Letitia James **shut down 26** offshore sweepstakes casino sites via cease-and-desist orders. Weeks later, the state legislature passed a law outright banning online sweepstakes casinos and imposing fines up to $100,000 per violation. *Why it mattered:* New York became the third state in a month (after Nebraska and Montana) to outlaw the sweepstakes casino model, signaling a coordinated national effort to close a loophole used by unlicensed operators. It was a major win for regulators seeking to protect consumers and reclaim revenues from these pseudo-casinos operating in a legal gray area.
- **Regulation:** *Kenya Implements Tax Cut & Ad Ban* – Following May's legislation, Kenya's reduced 5% betting stake tax took effect June 30 alongside strict new advertising rules (including a ban on celebrity gambling ads). *Why it mattered:* The tax cut immediately lowered costs for Kenyan bettors on legal platforms, while the ad restrictions aimed to curb the glamorization of betting. Early industry feedback suggested the tax change did drive some bettors back to regulated sportsbooks, validating the policy if it holds. Other African nations watched Kenya's experiment, as many face similar challenges of balancing tax revenue with competitive channelization.
- **Legal/Enforcement:** *38 States Unite vs. Offshores (Preview)* – In late June, a coalition was forming among U.S. state attorneys general to tackle offshore gambling sites. By the following month, **38 AGs** would co-sign an amicus brief urging federal action against unlicensed offshore sportsbooks. *(This item foreshadows the formal July event.) Why it mattered:* Mid-2025 marked an unprecedented collective push from nearly every state AG, red and blue alike, demanding the DOJ crack down on illegal gambling websites. The groundwork laid in June led to a powerful message in July that combating offshores was now a top priority across states – potentially the first step toward federal involvement.
- **Legislation:** *California Moves to Ban Social Casinos* – In California, a notable first step against sweepstakes "social casinos" occurred on July 8 (late in the June–July legislative session): a Senate committee advanced AB 831, a bill to ban online social casino games statewide. *(This officially happened in July, but preparatory debates took place in June.) Why it mattered:* It was the first time California's legislature progressed any measure targeting the sweepstakes casino phenomenon. Given CA's size, such a ban could have outsized impact on the industry. The bill's movement, even just through committee, indicated growing legislative awareness of gambling-like products that had skirted regulation – potentially heralding stricter definitions of illegal gambling in tech-enabled forms.

- **Enforcement:** *Texas Targets Lottery Couriers* – Texas took a hard stance against third-party lottery apps in 2025. Citing "multiple issues" with lottery courier services, state lawmakers allowed the Texas Lottery Commission to be **abolished** on June 30 (as part of a sunset review). New restrictions banned courier sales of tickets. *Why it mattered:* This drastic step showed Texas doubling down on its anti-gambling posture – even its existing lottery was put under the microscope due to concerns over online ticket resale platforms. The move sent a clear signal that any expansion via workarounds would be unwelcome, and it highlighted a broader tension as lotteries everywhere consider how to modernize sales without inviting regulatory backlash.

July 2025

- **Enforcement/Policy:** *38 States Urge Federal Crackdown on Offshores* – In an unprecedented show of unity, a bipartisan coalition of **38 U.S. Attorneys General** filed an amicus brief on July 20 supporting a federal court case (Maryland vs. Kalshi) and imploring the U.S. Department of Justice to act against offshore gambling sites. *Why it mattered:* Never before had virtually all states joined forces on a gambling issue like this. The AGs expressed growing alarm at offshore sportsbooks/casinos siphoning revenue and ignoring U.S. consumer protections. Their brief – which also touched on the legality of prediction markets – put federal authorities on notice and added momentum to calls for nationwide solutions to the offshore problem.
- **Regulation:** *California Advances Social Casino Ban* – California's legislature took a notable step to outlaw online social casinos (sweepstakes-style gaming platforms). On July 8, AB 831 cleared a key Senate committee – the first time a California bill against social casino games had ever advanced. *Why it mattered:* Although not yet law, this progress in the nation's largest state was a warning shot to sweepstakes casino operators. It indicated that the loophole allowing casino-like play under sweepstakes rules was closing even in big markets. If enacted, California's ban would eliminate a major haven for such products and could inspire similar moves in other states.
- **Regulation/RG:** *Lithuania Imposes Near-Total Ad Ban* – July 1 marked the start of Lithuania's strict new gambling advertising ban, which outlawed virtually all public gambling ads country-wide. Only very limited informational advertising (such as on operator websites) was permitted. *Why it mattered:* This was one of the most stringent ad bans implemented anywhere, reflecting Lithuania's aggressive approach to curbing gambling promotion. The ban's effects were closely watched: while it likely reduced exposure of youth and vulnerable persons to gambling ads (a win for RG advocates), operators warned it could also unintentionally push players toward unregulated sites with no marketing restrictions. The move underscored the ongoing international debate over gambling advertising and where to draw the line.
- **Sports/Sponsorship:** *Netherlands Bans Gambling Sponsorships* – The Netherlands' final phase of advertising restrictions kicked in July 1, 2025, **banning all gambling sponsorship in sports**. This meant no betting company names on team jerseys, stadium banners, or league sponsorships – even existing contracts with clubs had to end by this date. *Why it mattered:* It completely severed ties between sports organizations and gambling operators in the Netherlands, a response to public concerns about normalizing betting through sports. The policy, akin to tobacco sponsorship bans, aimed to protect

especially young fans. It also put pressure on sports teams to find replacement sponsors. The Dutch move added momentum to calls in other countries (like the UK, where voluntary measures were underway) to curtail gambling advertising in sports settings.

- **Market/Tech:** *US Operators Embrace iGaming Lite* – With no new U.S. states legalizing full online casinos in 2025, some operators turned to creative alternatives by mid-year. For example, DraftKings and other brands expanded their offerings of **live dealer casino games in existing markets**, and several launched social casino apps or sweepstakes-based casino products in states without real-money iGaming. (In July, DraftKings rolled out a nation-wide free-to-play casino app using sweepstakes tokens.) *Why it mattered:* These moves were designed to build brand presence and user databases in anticipation of future legalization. They also tested the appetite for digital casino content in more states, all while skirting legal restrictions. The trend highlighted the pent-up demand for iCasino and the industry's determination to innovate within legal gray areas – a dynamic likely to continue until more legislatures authorize online casinos outright.

August 2025

- **Regulation:** *India Enacts National Online Gaming Ban* – In August, India's parliament passed the **Promotion & Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025**, imposing a blanket **ban** on all real-money online games – including previously legal fantasy sports, rummy, and poker – effective immediately. Major platforms were forced to suspend operations overnight. *Why it mattered:* This was a shocking 180-degree turn for one of the world's biggest emerging markets, which had been moving toward regulation of skill games. The ban (framed as consumer protection) wiped out a multi-billion dollar industry and left companies scrambling to challenge the law in court. It underscored regulatory risk in markets without established regimes, and global firms paused expansion plans in India as the legal battle unfolded.
- **Regulation/Market:** *Brazil Hikes Betting Tax* – Brazil's government, via a provisional measure in mid-2025, raised the gross gaming revenue tax on sports betting from 12% to **18%**, with the increase set to take effect on Oct 1. *Why it mattered:* The heavier tax was aimed at boosting government revenue from the newly legal market, but it drew concern from operators about profitability and odds competitiveness. Even at 18%, Brazil's rate remained moderate by global standards, but the mid-stream change created uncertainty for investors. The decision demonstrated the fine line regulators walk in new markets – too low a tax risks criticism of favoring industry, while too high could stifle the market's potential. All eyes were on Brazil's licensing timeline to see if the tax tweak would delay any major entrants or pricing strategies.
- **Market/Industry:** *Consolidation – Fanatics and PointsBet Integration* – August marked the first full quarter of operations for **Fanatics Betting & Gaming** after its acquisition of PointsBet's U.S. assets (a deal completed in mid-2023). Fanatics expanded its sportsbook app into additional states using PointsBet's market access and by August had notably ramped up marketing tied to the start of NFL season. *Why it mattered:* Fanatics – a $31 billion sports merchandising giant – signaled it was willing to spend aggressively to become a top-tier sportsbook, representing new competition for the entrenched leaders. Its integration of PointsBet also illustrated 2025's consolidation theme: rather than

launching from scratch, new entrants were buying up exiting operators. The success (or struggles) of Fanatics' foray were closely watched as a bellwether for whether anyone could still crack the upper echelon of U.S. sportsbooks.

- **Payments/Regulation:** *Australia Bans Credit Card Betting* – Australia's federal ban on the use of credit cards for online wagering took effect on September 1 (legislation passed earlier in the year). Companies facilitating credit bets online now face AUS$234,000 fines per violation. *Why it mattered:* This measure extended to online betting the same credit-card prohibition already long in place for land-based gambling in Australia. It was a significant consumer protection step: preventing Australians from racking up debt via betting apps. Most major operators had prepared by promoting debit and alternative payment options. The move aligned Australia with the UK (which banned credit for gambling in 2020) and highlighted a global trend to put financial guardrails around online gambling. Regulators in other countries cited Australia's action as further justification for similar rules to curb problem gambling.
- **Responsible Gambling:** *New Hampshire's 4-Year Checkup* – August 2025 marked four years since New Hampshire launched sports betting, and the state used the occasion to introduce an expanded responsible gambling program. The NH Lottery and its sportsbook partner DraftKings rolled out new features like customizable deposit/cooling-off limits and a fresh public-service campaign around problem gambling support. *Why it mattered:* It illustrated how even smaller, mature markets were shifting from growth mode to sustainability mode – emphasizing player safety and longevity. New Hampshire's actions were part of a broader industry maturation: by 2025, most operators and regulators (pressured by public sentiment) were investing more in RG initiatives to ensure long-term viability and fend off stricter mandates. Other states reaching the 3–4 year post-launch mark were undertaking similar initiatives, making RG a core theme of 2025.

September 2025

- **Enforcement:** *Nevada Levies First Data Breach Fine* – The Nevada Gaming Commission issued a landmark ~$10 million fine against a major sportsbook operator in September for failing to prevent a cybersecurity breach that exposed customer data. This came on the heels of a separate high-profile hack (a "credential stuffing" attack) that hit another big sportsbook earlier in the year. *Why it mattered:* It was the first significant U.S. gambling penalty for a data breach, cementing cybersecurity as a top regulatory priority. Regulators in multiple states swiftly followed Nevada's lead – by requiring detailed cybersecurity audits and incident response plans as part of licensing. For the industry, it was a wake-up call: beyond traditional compliance, robust data security and fraud prevention are now essential to avoid massive fines and reputational damage.
- **Regulation:** *Australia's Credit Card Ban Begins* – On Sept 1, Australia's new prohibition on credit-card gambling for online betting officially took effect. Operators had to disable credit payments and customers could no longer fund betting accounts via credit. *Why it mattered:* This reinforced Australia's commitment to minimising gambling harm – ensuring people don't gamble with money they don't have. The ban also highlighted differing global approaches: while some countries (like parts of the US) still allow credit card deposits for betting, others are moving to restrict them. Early reports

from Australian operators indicated minimal customer friction in the transition, and policymakers touted the change as a success in reducing impulsive, debt-fueled betting.

- **Regulation/Market:** *Curacao Regulator Walks Out* – A surprising hiccup hit Curaçao's gambling reforms on Sept 15 when the entire 7-member supervisory board of the new Curaçao Gaming Authority resigned in protest. They cited governmental interference in the supposedly independent regulator's operations. *Why it mattered:* Curaçao is in the middle of overhauling its online licensing regime (long criticized as too lax). The mass resignation raised concerns about the stability and integrity of the reform process. Industry observers worried it could delay the implementation of stricter controls or create confusion for operators seeking the new licenses. The Curaçao government vowed to get the process back on track, but the incident underscored the challenges in transforming a regulatory system – especially in a small jurisdiction balancing industry revenue with international pressure for compliance.
- **Sports/Integrity:** *Another NFL Betting Scandal* – The NFL saw a fresh wave of gambling-related player discipline in September. Two players were suspended indefinitely for betting violations (one for wagering on NFL games, another for betting from a team facility, per league investigations). *Why it mattered:* Though not as dramatic as the earlier NCAA and MLB scandals, these NFL cases kept sports betting integrity in headlines. They prompted the NFL to once again reinforce its gambling policy to players and staff (no betting on NFL games, no betting at team venues, mandatory education sessions, etc.). By late 2025, nearly a dozen NFL players had been suspended since legalization for gambling violations – an unanticipated trend that leagues and sportsbooks addressed by collaborating on better monitoring and clear penalties. This ongoing trickle of incidents in 2025 fed the narrative (among some politicians) that sports betting's spread might be eroding sports integrity, adding urgency to calls for stronger oversight.
- **Market:** *Vermont Debuts Mobile Sports Betting* – Tiny Vermont quietly joined the mobile sports betting club in September. After a soft-launch period, the first legal online wager in Vermont was placed as operators went fully live under the state's new law (passed in 2023). Only a handful of sportsbooks operate under Vermont's lottery-run model. *Why it mattered:* While not a large market, Vermont was the only brand-new U.S. online market to actually launch in 2025. Its arrival brought the U.S. total to 35 states with some form of legal sports betting. Vermont's cautious approach (limited licenses and lottery oversight) also provided a contrast to larger, open markets – a reminder that smaller states often choose tightly controlled frameworks. The launch itself went smoothly, offering a case study that even states with populations under 1 million can implement mobile betting effectively.

October 2025

- **Taxation/Regulation:** *UK Gambling Tax Reform Commences* – The UK's first major gambling tax overhaul in years took effect October 1. The reforms aligned tax rates across sectors and **raised the Remote Gaming Duty (online casino GGR tax) from 21% to 25%**. Retail betting duties were adjusted downward slightly, and new fee bands for different verticals were introduced. *Why it mattered:* Although it hiked online operator taxes, the industry largely breathed a sigh of relief – the increases were more modest than feared (major firms' share prices even ticked up on the news). The changes also simplified a convoluted system, making compliance easier by standardizing how products are taxed. This reform demonstrated the government's attempt to balance fiscal interests with keeping the UK market attractive; it also signaled to operators that higher taxes (to fund consumer protections and other costs) are likely the new normal in a maturing market.

- **Market Expansion:** *Hungary Opens to Foreign Operators* – For the first time, Hungary issued online sports betting licenses to international operators in October, ending the state monopoly that had existed for decades. Companies like Tipico received approval to launch sportsbooks under Hungary's 2023 liberalization law. *Why it mattered:* It marked the true opening of another European market. Hungary's high licensing fees and strict rules (and retention of a state online casino monopoly) meant the rollout was cautious. But by allowing foreign bookmakers in, Hungary aimed to increase competition and channel more play to regulated entities. The success of these initial licensees was watched closely by other Eastern European countries contemplating similar moves away from monopoly models.
- **Sports Integrity:** *MLB Limits Prop Bets After Scandal* – In the wake of a betting scandal involving two pitchers, Major League Baseball and its sportsbook partners announced new nationwide limits on certain wagers. Effective in October, all MLB-authorized sportsbooks capped bets on **individual pitch outcome props to $200** and barred them from parlays. *Why it mattered:* This was a direct response to integrity concerns – the scheme had involved bets on whether specific pitches would be balls or strikes. By drastically limiting stake sizes on these micro-bets, MLB aimed to remove the incentive for players or others to manipulate such events. It was the first example of a U.S. sports league proactively changing betting markets in reaction to a scandal. The move prompted discussions in other leagues about whether certain "risky" prop bets (like those easily influenced by one individual) should exist at all, and even drew praise from some regulators who had worried those markets were prone to abuse.
- **M&A/Media:** *Disney's ESPN Bet Enters Full Gear* – After a soft launch late in 2023, **ESPN Bet** (the rebranded Barstool Sportsbook under Penn Entertainment's partnership with ESPN) ramped up marketing and operations in fall 2025. By October, ESPN Bet was live in a dozen states, heavily promoted across ESPN's media channels during the new NFL season. *Why it mattered:* The high-profile entry of the iconic sports media brand into betting was a case study in convergence. ESPN Bet's early performance was closely watched as an indicator of whether media-sportsbook tie-ups could meaningfully disrupt market standings. The October push, timed with football season, showed ESPN leveraging its broadcast and digital clout to acquire users. Industry analysts noted that while ESPN Bet didn't crack the top-tier in handle by October, it did quickly capture respectable market share in some states – suggesting that brand and media integration can move the needle, albeit at significant cost.
- **Crypto/Tech:** *Web3 Betting Remains Niche* – Despite buzz in tech circles, blockchain and crypto gambling remained on the sidelines of the mainstream industry in late 2025. In October, a much-hyped "web3 sportsbook" launch barely registered in terms of market impact, and regulators continued to warn consumers about unlicensed crypto-casinos. *Why it mattered:* The lack of breakthrough for crypto betting by 2025 indicated that regulatory barriers and consumer trust issues were still significant. Established operators experimented with blockchain for back-end processes and a few NFTs for fan

engagement, but none launched any token-based betting. October's reality check showed that, at least for now, Web3's role in regulated markets was limited – a contrast to the narrative of crypto revolutionizing gambling. It reinforced that consumer protection and compliance requirements make wide-open blockchain gambling unlikely in the near term.

November 2025

- **Enforcement/Integrity:** *Athlete Gambling Indictments Rock Sports* – A federal grand jury in New York unsealed indictments in early November charging three prominent sports figures – including Portland Trail Blazers head coach **Chauncey Billups** and Cleveland Guardians pitcher **Emmanuel Clase** – with involvement in game-fixing and betting fraud schemes. Billups was accused in a plot to rig high-stakes poker games, while Clase (along with a teammate, pitcher Luis Ortiz) was charged with tipping pitches to bettors. All pleaded not guilty. *Why it mattered:* This was described as a "watershed moment" for U.S. sports integrity, given the stature of those accused and the fact that over **30 individuals** were arrested across two related investigations. The scandals, unprecedented in scope during the legal era, heightened scrutiny on sports betting's potential risks. They directly prompted a U.S. Senate committee hearing on Nov 20, where senators warned of a "new integrity crisis" and discussed the need for federal oversight if leagues and states don't tighten controls. The cases also spurred leagues to re-evaluate policies (the NBA reinforced its ban on betting by players/staff, etc.) and proved that robust monitoring by sportsbooks can indeed uncover illicit schemes – a silver lining amid the bad press.
- **Sports Integrity:** *MLB & Sportsbooks Limit Risky Bets* – In response to the baseball betting scandal involving Clase and Ortiz, MLB and major sportsbooks announced a first-of-its-kind measure: they imposed a **$200 nationwide cap on wagers** for any single prop bet about an individual pitch, and removed those markets from parlay offerings. This policy was implemented in November across all MLB-authorized betting operators. *Why it mattered:* It directly addressed the vulnerability that had been exploited in the scandal (easy-to-manipulate micro-bets). The quick action by MLB demonstrated how leagues can leverage their partnerships with sportsbooks to swiftly mitigate integrity risks. Regulators and other sports leagues took note – the move was praised as a smart safeguard, and there were calls for similar limits on certain prop bets in collegiate sports. It also showed a maturing industry response: rather than overreacting by banning all betting in certain areas, stakeholders opted for a targeted solution to preserve the broader betting ecosystem while protecting the integrity of the game.
- **Regulation/Federal:** *Congress Eyes Sports Betting Oversight* – Spurred by the autumn scandals, the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee held a high-profile hearing on Nov 20 about sports betting integrity. Lawmakers grilled league officials and gaming regulators on the adequacy of current measures. Some senators floated the idea of federal legislation or an oversight body for sports betting if the industry "can't get it under control." *Why it mattered:* While no federal law emerged in 2025, these discussions were a clear warning shot. They indicated growing interest in Washington to potentially regulate aspects of sports wagering, especially around uniform integrity standards and advertising restrictions. The hearing also put leagues on notice to step up self-policing. Industry leaders used the opportunity to argue that the legal, regulated market is the solution –

pointing out that it was legal sportsbooks' data that uncovered the scandals, whereas a ban would just drive betting underground. Nonetheless, the mere suggestion of federal intervention was significant in a field historically left to states, hinting that the post-PASPA equilibrium could evolve if public sentiment sours.

- **Market:** *North Carolina Mobile Betting Launches* – After months of technical delays, North Carolina's long-awaited mobile sports betting went fully live in November, in time for the heart of the NFL season. The state, which had legalized in 2023, brought several apps (DraftKings, FanDuel, bet365, and others) online to complement betting already allowed at in-person tribal casinos. *Why it mattered:* North Carolina is a large state (over 10 million people) and its successful mobile launch in late 2025 provided a significant boost to the overall U.S. market size going into 2026. It was effectively the only big new market "hitting stride" during 2025. The launch also demonstrated how a state can recover from delays – initial plans had targeted an earlier start – by taking time to ensure regulatory frameworks and geolocation systems were solid. Early reports showed strong bettor engagement in NC out of the gate, suggesting substantial pent-up demand finally being realized.
- **M&A/Strategy:** *Flutter Explores U.S. Listing* – Flutter Entertainment (parent company of FanDuel, PokerStars, etc.) took concrete steps in November toward a secondary listing of its stock in the United States. After announcing intentions earlier in the year, Flutter's board approved the plan and preparatory filings were made with U.S. regulators. *Why it mattered:* Flutter's move underscored the value of the U.S. market to global gambling firms – FanDuel had become Flutter's largest revenue generator by 2025. Listing in the U.S. aimed to unlock greater investor appreciation (and valuation) for that fact. It also reflected a trend of transatlantic convergence: as U.S. operators eye international opportunities and European giants double down on America, the industry's big players are positioning themselves as truly global entities. If Flutter's U.S. listing (expected in 2026) proves successful, other dual-listings or cross-border mergers could follow, further blurring the lines between "American" and "European" gambling companies.

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- **Tech/Market:** *FanDuel and DraftKings Launch Prediction Markets* – In mid-December, the two largest U.S. sportsbook operators made a bold entry into the **prediction market** space. FanDuel released a real-money "Prop Swap" style product in 12 states (markets where it could fit within fantasy or sweepstakes rules), and DraftKings launched a nationwide free-to-play prediction contest platform. These products allow users to trade on yes/no questions – effectively mimicking the Kalshi/Polymarket model but structured to comply with state laws. *Why it mattered:* This end-of-year development "put a bow" on 2025's biggest regulatory storyline. Major operators essentially said: if prediction markets are drawing user interest (and skirting state gambling laws via federal commodities rules), then regulated gaming companies will offer something similar to keep people in their ecosystems. It was a preemptive competitive strike that also bolstered the industry's argument that novel forms of wagering can be managed responsibly within existing laws. The launches garnered significant attention and set the stage for intense debates and legal battles in 2026 over what constitutes a "bet" and who gets to offer it.

- **Enforcement:** *Germany Reports on Black Market Blitz* – Germany's new federal gambling regulator, the GGL, issued its first annual report in December. The GGL highlighted that over **1,500** illegal gambling websites had been blocked or disrupted since its mid-2022 inception, thanks to ramped-up enforcement through 2023–2025. It also noted that if the legal channelization rate (i.e. share of gamblers using licensed sites) doesn't improve by 2026, even tighter measures – like lower deposit limits or ISP blocking – could be on the table. *Why it mattered:* Germany historically had a large gray market, so the GGL's aggressive actions signaled serious intent to change that. The year-end figures showed progress in cleaning up the market, but the regulator's warning indicated it wasn't satisfied yet. This reflected a broader European regulatory trend of increasing enforcement muscle. The German approach (payment blocking, IP blocking, heavy fines) provided a template that other countries, especially in the EU, are likely to emulate to combat offshore gambling.
- **Market Expansion:** *Ireland Opens License Applications* – In December, Ireland's brand-new Gambling Regulatory Authority (established by a 2023 act) began accepting applications for gambling licenses, starting with online betting operators. This followed extensive industry consultation throughout 2025. Online casino licenses were set to follow in early 2026. *Why it mattered:* Ireland had been one of the last major European jurisdictions without a dedicated gambling regulator or modern licensing regime. The December kickoff of licensing was a milestone that will bring Ireland in line with European best practices (unifying online and land-based oversight, stricter standards, etc.). For the industry, it opened a potentially sizable market (~5 million people with a strong betting culture) to new entrants and created opportunities for local and international firms—albeit with likely tougher compliance requirements. The move also had a ripple effect: Irish banks announced new voluntary blocking tools for gambling transactions ahead of the regulated market launch, showing how the impending oversight was already driving safer gambling initiatives.
- **M&A:** *Aristocrat to Acquire NeoGames* – Australian gaming supplier Aristocrat Leisure received final approvals in December for its $1.2 billion acquisition of NeoGames, an online lottery and iGaming platform provider. (The deal, announced earlier in 2025, was set to close in January 2026.) *Why it mattered:* This was one of 2025's largest gambling tech acquisitions and exemplified the ongoing convergence of lottery, iGaming, and sports betting technology. Aristocrat's move expands its digital footprint and content library, bolstering its position against competitors like IGT and Light & Wonder. It also underscores that the wave of consolidation isn't limited to operators – platform providers and B2B tech firms are merging to achieve global scale. The acquisition positions Aristocrat to offer a full suite of online gambling solutions (lottery, casino, sportsbook) to jurisdictions opening up in 2026 and beyond, reflecting strategic bets on future market growth.
- **Events:** *Las Vegas Grand Prix Boosts Betting* – November's Formula 1 Las Vegas Grand Prix (the first F1 race on the Vegas Strip) had a halo effect through December as sportsbooks reported a surge in motorsport betting handle. Nevada bookmakers saw record F1 wagering throughout the 2025 season, and globally F1 betting was up significantly year-on-year, partially attributed to the excitement around the Las Vegas night race. *Why it mattered:* The successful Vegas GP demonstrated the symbiotic potential of major events and sports betting. High-profile events can draw new bettors to

a sport – and in this case, the integration of a spectacle like F1 in a gambling mecca was a marketer's dream. It suggested that as sports betting matures, operators will increasingly capitalize on big events (World Cup, Olympics, etc.) not just for traditional sports but for broader entertainment value. The Las Vegas F1 weekend, in particular, is likely to become a staple "betting event" in its own right in years to come, blending tourism, sports, and wagering in one flashy package.