

1:10 A.M. — The Seminole Casino in Immokalee was dealt a bust card when legislative negotiators brokered a deal that would allow blackjack and baccarat at casinos in Tampa and Broward, but not at Immokalee.

Just don't expect the Seminoles to cash in their chips and leave the

table. Gary Bitner, spokesman for the Seminole Tribe, said there was no reason for gamblers - who have been playing blackjack at the casino in Immokalee since December - to panic. "This is not a done deal at this point," Bitner said Thursday. "It's just another step in the process."

While blackjack dealers and players at the Immokalee casino face an uncertain future, the future at the Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track - the Immokalee casino's main competitor - appears a little brighter.

As part of the deal, the Bonita Beach Road track will now be allowed to hold no-limit poker tournaments and remain open 24 hours a day on weekends and 18 hours a day on weekdays. Scott Savin, the track's chief operating officer, said it too was seeking more gaming such as "historical racing," a slot like game based on past horse racing, video lottery terminals and blackjack.

"We were somewhat disappointed that they're not going to allow additional games at the track," Savin said. "We did receive expanded poker stakes, which will benefit the track. But, with blackjack coming out of Immokalee, it definitely puts us on a more level playing field."

But that playing field isn't even just yet. Just because a deal was brokered Wednesday in Tallahassee doesn't mean the Seminoles will surrender.

First, a bill has to be drafted, then it has to pass in both houses, Bitner said.

"The Tribe wants to see the language in the bill and what it'll mean for the Tribe's future," Bitner said.

But even getting to this point - where casino-style gambling is being permitted in Florida - is an accomplishment.

Max B. Osceola Jr., Tribal Council representative from the Seminole Tribe of Florida, said he appreciates what has been done so far.

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