

There was no September swoon at Foxwoods.

The giant gaming complex that includes Foxwoods Resort Casino and MGM Grand at Foxwoods reported Friday that it "won" \$56.1 million at its slot machines last month, an increase of 2.1 percent over September 2009.

That's the best year-over-year showing for either of the state's tribally owned casinos since Foxwoods

notched an 8 percent gain in May 2008, the month MGM Grand opened.

Mohegan Sun, meanwhile, reported a September win of \$57.6 million, a year-over-year decline of 3 percent.

Robert Victoria, Foxwoods' chief marketing officer, attributed Foxwoods' showing to "a very solid marketing calendar during the month, a lot of exciting promotions and great entertainment." He noted that Foxwoods put a significant dent in Mohegan Sun's long-running market-share lead, cornering 49.3 percent of Connecticut's slots win to Mohegan Sun's 50.7 percent.

Nearly \$7.6 million worth of free-play coupons, or credits, were redeemed at Foxwoods last month, compared with \$4.6 million at Mohegan. Based on a formula worked out with the state, the casinos pay 25 percent of a portion of those redemptions to the Division of Special Revenue along with 25 percent of their slot-machine wins.

Overall, Foxwoods' contribution to the state outstripped Mohegan Sun's, \$15.1 million to \$14.8 million, the first time that's happened since May 2005.

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Written by Administrator

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"It was no more (actually less) than we gave away in July and August," Victoria said of September's free-slots play at Foxwoods. "Nothing out of the ordinary."

Foxwoods ramped up its free-slots play to \$8.9 million in July and to more than \$8 million in August, substantially more than in previous months.

One promotion at Foxwoods during September worked too well, according to Victoria.

On Sept. 18, the casino's "Ultimate Dream Point Exchange" program drew long lines of Dream Card holders eager to cash in their players' club points for \$1 a point rather than the usual 50 cents. About 14,000 people took advantage of the program and about 12 percent of them chose to take the money and leave rather than gamble with it, Victoria said.

Foxwoods had planned to repeat the promotion on Saturdays in October but postponed it "due to unforeseen technical difficulties," according to the casino's website.

"We didn't have the systems in place to handle the volume - the parking, staffing," Victoria said. "We still have some IT stuff to straighten out, but we're hoping to do it again. Our target is November."

Mitchell Etes, president and chief executive officer of Mohegan Sun, said September's numbers capped a promising quarter for the overall Connecticut slots market.

"Essentially, it's the best quarter that Connecticut's had in a year," he said, noting that Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun were down 1.2 percent in the quarter that ended Sept. 30.

"That's certainly positive," Etes said. "It shows there's a vibrancy in the market, that people are starting to spend some money again. It's not altogether a bad picture."

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Despite Mohegan Sun's market-share slippage, Etes said the casino, which laid off hundreds of employees in September, would stay focused on a disciplined approach to marketing.

"No one likes to lose market share, but we're not going to overspend just to get market share," he said. Free-slots play "is a major driver, but at some point too much is counterproductive," he added.

Etes said Mohegan Sun's recent entertainment lineup - another key driver of business - has been hurt by the economy's effect on artists' touring schedules.

"That's the price we pay for being a major concert venue," he said.

The Connecticut casinos' September slot numbers contrast sharply with those reported earlier in the week for Atlantic City's casinos. According to the New Jersey Casino Control Commission, the 11 casinos' combined slots win fell 9.9 percent, while their table-games revenue was down 15.6 percent, a sign of the effect of Pennsylvania casinos' mid-July introduction of table games.

Foxwoods' casinos operated nearly 6,700 slot machines in September, about 800, or 11 percent, fewer than in September 2009. They produced an average daily win per machine of \$279.32. Mohegan Sun, whose 6,400 machines were 330 or 5 percent less than the casino had a year ago, posted an average daily win of \$299.94 per machine.

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