

Casino winner fights off attack near home - Philadelphia Inquirer

Written by Administrator

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Casinos have been operating in Pennsylvania for a few years, but it wasn't until gambling came to Philadelphia that a patron leaving with a wad of cash caught the eye of some enterprising - and ultimately bumbling - criminals.

At least three men followed a man who had won about \$2,000 at the SugarHouse Casino all the way to his home in New Jersey on Saturday morning, authorities said.

Two of the men then jumped the 26-year-old, cracking him in the skull with a handgun. The attackers got nothing for their effort, partly because the victim wrestled one to the ground and another "tripped over his baggy pants" and fell down, according to Cinnaminson police.

The men, two of whom were captured on the casino's surveillance cameras, most likely were listening to the victim as he talked about his winnings on his cell phone in a casino bathroom, Cinnaminson Detective Sgt. William K. Covert said.

"Probably what happened is, the one guy overheard him talking to his girlfriend and they just targeted him," he said.

The attempted robbery was the first of its kind for the state's 10 casinos and comes less than a month after SugarHouse opened on Philadelphia's waterfront, according to the state police.

"Obviously, one is too many," said Lt. John C. Evans, a commander in the Gaming Enforcement Office. "Other states have experienced similar incidents."

Casinos, including SugarHouse, take steps to protect big winners, and robberies of successful gamblers are rare, said Joe Weinert, a senior vice president at Spectrum Gaming Group.

"Casinos are going to do their best to take care of their customers," he said. "It's in their best interest to make sure something like this doesn't happen."

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Weinert said that walking out of a casino with cash winnings is no different from leaving a bank with a large withdrawal or a jewelry store with a "big rock."

"You have to be careful," he said. "Bragging about your winnings, it might make you feel good for that evening, but there are preyers in the casino."

Any patron can ask for an escort when he or she leaves SugarHouse, and the casino offers one to big winners, said Leigh Whitaker, a casino spokeswoman. Winners also can accept their money in a check rather than cash.

"We'll say, 'Hey, when you're ready to leave, stop by security, and somebody will walk you to your car,' " she said.

It's unclear whether a player who won \$2,000 would be offered an escort, Whitaker said, but the victim in Saturday's attempted robbery caught a cab right outside the building.

The victim, who was not identified, had gone out in Philadelphia on Saturday night with friends, police said. He arrived at SugarHouse about 3:30 a.m. and played blackjack.

Two of the men arrived about 5:30 a.m. The victim said they chatted him up while he was waiting for the cab a half-hour - and even offered him a ride.

The victim declined the ride and had a taxi drop him off down the block from his house, police said.

"He didn't want the cab driver to know where he lived," Covert said.

As the victim was walking home, two armed men came up from behind and hit him in the head.

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The assailants both yelled, "Give it up," police said.

One man then urged the other to "Pop him, pop him." When one of the gunmen reached down to hit the victim again, the victim wrestled him to the ground and started screaming, "Call the police."

The men fled, and the victim dialed 911 on his cell phone about 6:30 a.m. He had a gash on his head that required eight staples to close, police said.

During the attack, the victim noticed a third man nearby. Police believe the three men were using a newer-model gold, four-door Chevrolet Impala.

Covert said the victim returned to his job Monday, but refused to give more details about him. The victim could not be reached.

"He's scared that somebody's going to come back and find out where he lives, and attack him outside of his house," Covert said.

Anyone with information on the attempted robbery is being asked to call Covert at 856-829-6667, Ext. 22.

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