

# A worldwide community – tote betting’s global place at the WoTA Forum

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To the general public and the industry as a whole, no sport is seen as intrinsically linked to betting as horse racing for obvious reasons – but questions have been raised about how long this will last.

By extension, a betting product which is glued to the essence of horse racing is tote wagering – the future of which was debated by a panel of experts on the 42nd floor of London’s Leadenhall Building at the [WoTA Forum 2022](#).

## Liquidity – the pool betting USP?

With the River Thames and the London skyline in the background, the speakers argued that the liquidity and fairness of commoning/tote betting is its key defence against its competitors in the form of fixed odds bookmakers and casino firms.

“I think what is important in the future is of course liquidity,” said **Hans Lord Skarploth**, CEO of Sweden’s ATG, whilst also arguing that all accounts in online pool betting systems ensure that everyone gets a fair share through proper ID processing.

“Our liquidity is our USP towards fixed odds, sportsbooks, lottery and online casino, and we have done a lot over the last 30 years with commingling and the World Pool, but of course we could do more to go forward.”

One of the key stakeholders in the World Pool is the **Hong Kong Jockey Club** (HKJC), a partner in the project alongside the **UK Tote Group**, and a pool betting-focused organisation that has been experiencing increasing success in recent years.

Although also highlighting the importance of liquidity, **Michael Fitzsimmons**, HKJC Executive

Director of Wagering Products, argued that tote betting can go one step further by promoting itself as an industry segment supportive of horse racing.

“If you have enough liquidity, it can be a good thing, it can be a more marketable aspect of pools and a point of differentiation and interest for your customers,” he said.

However, he added: “For us, it’s about giving back to sport. It’s about us being recognised as the people who contribute back to racing or whatever sports we are involved in, and being recognised as such by governments, by customers.”



“Getting that brand and getting the local brand aligned with that message to customers through a responsible gaming trademark – that’s the Holy Grail, and then that opens up everything else.”

## The tote – what has it achieved and where should it go?

Offering the US perspective, meanwhile, was **Keith Johnson**, Chief Revenue Officer of 1/ST Technology Group – a firm which has set out further expansion of horse racing’s US reach as a key objective in line with growth of the regional betting space.

Sharing his opinion that liquidity is the ultimate USP of tote betting, Johnson observed that one of the biggest achievements of the vertical in the US was its ability to transcend state borders.

“The Tote also has the ability, which sports betting can’t do in the US at least currently, to get across state lines and commingle to get increasingly critical liquidity,” he explained.

“We can leverage those things and complement with fixed odds to get us to where we need, and in a few years time really have an impact on US horse racing.”

Sports is of course a national obsession in the US, with the four major leagues (NFL, NBA, MLB and NHL) generating huge interest – but horse racing has yet to catch up on the momentum of these tournaments.



“We can grow tote betting, but also the sport of horse racing, because they’re closely tied,” he continued. “You can look at it from both angles, and you can also look at it as both a tremendous opportunity or a tremendous risk. “I thankfully look at it as a tremendous opportunity. That said, if we choose as an industry or as operators to bury our heads and ignore it, it would be a steady decline in our product not too many years down the road.

“It’s here, in North America we need to embrace it and we need to embrace the opportunity.” 8000 miles to the east, tote betting is also taking hold in some areas of Africa, particularly South Africa with its active racing scene, home to world-renowned tracks such as Durbanville racecourse.

**Fundi Sithee**, CEO of **4Racing** – a firm ‘committed to re-energising and reinvigorating the horse racing industry in South Africa’ – outlined that the tote has ‘yielded great results from a betting and broadcast perspective’ in her home country.

The CEO explained: “As we have collaborated more, it has become a pivotal product that can bring in the new generations and diverse audience we are looking for. We can create a bigger audience, that is bigger playing.

"Horse racing is not an easy sport to underrated or take part in, but with a pool we make sure data and education is bolstering that.

"Our strategy is not to compete with bookmakers, but to partner with them. Bookmaker agnostic. What serves the industry is collaboration and partnership. Bookmakers are not the enemy, we should coexist."

Providing his insider analysis of the Global Pool's progress since its inception, Fitsimmons summarised that 'success has grown year on year', with new partners and racetracks'. He added: "This is a super exciting, genuinely disruptive product in front of customers, and the role of us at WoTA and where we go next is to bring that alignment between everything we do, between products, rules, data and bet types."

Lastly, **Amymeric Verlet**, PMU's International Manager, also highlighted the success of the World Pool and tote betting. He explained that between 2012 and 2018, PMU experienced a substantial decline in betting turnover.



However, he assumed that in the years since "the pool is more stable and attractive, and since 2019 we have had an increase in wagering. We have to focus on the customer. Commingling helps pools to be bigger than the rest."

With PMU now active in 61 markets and involved in 'numerous partnerships', Verlet shared Sithee's view that tote operators should cooperate with their competitors in bookmakers and lotteries – PMU is particularly active in agreements with the latter.

"We need to open the world of horse racing betting to other distributors," he concluded. "If we stick to tote betting we will not survive, we have to diversify liquidity."