

January 18, 2006  
By Anthony Thornton

### Powerball Gives State Better Odds

Oklahoma's entry into Powerball boosted sagging lottery sales and increased the odds of hitting this year's projections, the lottery's oversight board learned Tuesday. Between Thursday and Saturday, players spent nearly \$1.7 million on Powerball. That helped Oklahoma stores sell 51 percent more than the previous week on the lottery. However, the week's sales still were \$1.5 million less than the average level needed to reach the \$218.6 million projected for this fiscal year.

Lottery Director Jim Scroggins said he's not concerned, despite figures showing overall lottery sales have fallen consistently since October's launch of scratch-off games. "No, I don't think the newness has worn off," Scroggins said. Sales need to average \$5.9 million a week to hit projections. The state Education Department used those projections to distribute \$65.5 million to schools this year. Education receives 30 percent of total sales. Through the first 14 weeks, sales have averaged \$5,054,840 a week.

Nevertheless, Scroggins said sales are on target to reach fiscal year projections. He said a straight comparison "may not be the best way to project sales; you have not allowed for growth associated with natural game growth and new initiatives that we are and will be working on," he said in an e-mail response to questions.

Peak sales (\$8.7 million) occurred Oct. 12-15, representing the first week of scratch-off sales. Sales reached a low of \$2,947,016 the week ending Jan. 7, just before Powerball started. Scroggins cited an industry study indicating high gasoline prices have hurt sales nationally. The study, by **Independent Lottery Research**, found 26 percent of lottery players said gasoline prices had prompted them to buy fewer lottery tickets. Twenty-one percent expected that impact to continue.

The study was conducted in September, soon after Hurricane Katrina led to record fuel prices. Another potential concern is the steady drop in scratch-off sales since October. Within two months of their launch, scratch-off sales dropped by 60 percent. A one-week surge came just before Christmas, possibly because customers bought them as gifts. Since then, though, the slide has continued, to a low of \$2,585,932 last week.

The Lottery Commission will unveil four new scratch-off games Jan. 27 in hopes of boosting sales. Those games will replace four that were introduced for the holidays. While Powerball generates publicity, the highest sales typically come from scratch-off games, Scroggins said. He expects Powerball sales to grow as jackpots grow. The current jackpot is estimated at \$87 million. The minimum jackpot is \$15 million.

Scroggins is excited about the initial Powerball sales, which he said were "not bad for less than a full week." In all, 33,679 Powerball players who bought tickets in Oklahoma won prizes totaling \$255,160 in Saturday night's drawing. Of those, 7,248 chose the Power Play option and multiplied their winnings by five. The biggest winner bought his ticket at a Kum & Go in Jenks at 7:59 p.m. Saturday, within seconds of the sales cut-off for that drawing. The winner hadn't claimed his prize by Tuesday afternoon.

Source: <http://newsok.com/article/1736550/>