

Powerball players go against odds

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Odds, schmodds.

That's how gas station owner Paul Dean views his mathematical chance of winning the Powerball jackpot.

He figures his customers feel the same.

Dean's motto: Somebody's bound to win. If you don't play, that somebody won't be you.

Never mind that you're only slightly less likely to be on a hijacked airplane twice in the same year as to win Powerball's biggest prize.

"I think when most people play, they know the odds of winning are pretty slim," said Dean, who owns a Conoco station at Hefner Road and May Avenue in northwest Oklahoma City.

How slim? More than 146 million to 1.

If you drive 10 miles to buy a Powerball ticket, you're 16 times more likely to die in a car wreck on your way to the store than to win the jackpot, according to Mike Orkin, mathematician and author of "What Are the Odds? Chance in Everyday Life."

Orkin's book says if you buy 50 tickets a week, you'll win Powerball's big prize, on average, once every 30,000 years.

That's of little consequence to Dean.

"It's the chance of becoming a millionaire," he said, summing up not only his customers' view, but his own.

Powerball sales begin this morning in Oklahoma. By then, players should know whether the current jackpot, estimated at \$65 million, was won Wednesday night.

For most Powerball players, the game represents life's big "what if?" as in, "What if I struck it rich?"

Jim Scroggins, executive director of the state lottery, hears that question a lot.

And as a guy who also plays the lottery - "but not in the state where I work" - Scroggins also asks it.

Many Powerball jackpot winners announce at news conferences their intention to continue working.

"I'd probably do the same thing," Scroggins said. "I'd say, 'It's not going to change me.' But then I'd probably lay awake a couple nights thinking, '\$76 million. Why do I need to work?' Because the last thing you need is more income," Scroggins said.

The best line Scroggins ever heard came from a Chicago man who won \$100,000 in the Illinois lottery: "Oh, I'll spend a little bit of it on wine, women and song. The rest of it," the man said, "I'll probably just waste."

Feverish sales expected

Anticipating a crush on the first day of sales, Dean will have three extra clerks working today and one on Friday.

The real crowd, he figures, will be just before Saturday night's drawing, especially if the jackpot keeps growing.

Dean just hopes his own lucky streak continues.

He already has proven to be a guru at Pick 3, spending \$1 a day since its Nov. 10 launch. Twice, he has chosen correctly and won \$500.

The odds of winning that game just once are 1 in 1,000.

That has prompted more than one customer to ask whether he has some inside information.

"Of course not," he said. "If that was true, I'd win every day."

What are the odds?

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36 to 1: Winning a prize in Powerball.

1 in 146 million: Winning the grand prize.

1 in 12,000: Finding a pearl while eating an oyster.

1 in 59,000: Being dealt pairs of black aces and black 8s.

1 in 6 million: Dying from a bee sting.

1 in 57 million births: Having quintuplets without fertility aid.

1 in 68 million: Contracting tetanus in the U.S.

1 in 8 million: Two holes in one during one game.

1 in 150 million: Being victim of terrorist plane hijacking twice in same year.

1 in 200 million: Being hit by a meteorite.

Sources: Powerball, "Odds'R: The Odds of Everything Book" and "That Book of Perfectly Useless Information"