



Information on Skin Betting

Compiled by Newport Citizens Advice Gambling Support Service
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Throughout October we have been looking at an emerging way to gamble, called Skin Betting.

What is Skin Betting?

Skins are collectable, virtual items in video games - such as modifications that change the appearance of weapons. Sometimes skins can be earned within a game, but they can also be bought with real money.



Some games also let players trade or sell their skins - and rarer ones can attract high prices. A number of third-party websites let players gamble with their skins for the chance to win more valuable ones.

Since skins won on such a website could in some cases be sold and turned back into real-world money, critics suggest betting with skins may constitute unlicensed gambling.

What is an example?

Skin betting has increased worldwide primarily thanks to a PC game on the Steam system called Counter Strike: Global Offensive (CS :GO); an online multiplayer first-person shooter where players collect skins, weapons and health packs in their inventory while playing the game. The popularity of the game has seen a number of external websites set up where players can gamble there virtual property, and even trade 'products' in exchange for real money with the games 10 million players.



I've never heard of CS:GO, what about other games?

Perhaps the best example to give is FIFA football games, the game that without fail will top sales charts every year when released each October.

Since 2009, FIFA has a section of the game called FIFA Ultimate Team (FUT) where players can make their own team using virtual coins. Coins are awarded for playing matches or completing tasks. These can then be used to improve the team.

Players can be obtained specifically by purchasing them on the virtual transfer market, or by trying their luck opening a pack similar to football stickers. Obviously the best players such as Messi and Ronaldo are not only very rare, but also go for an incredible amount of virtual coins. Ronaldo for example will set you back some 1,300,000 coins. We mentioned that you get coins for playing matches – but didn't mention that the usual amount for a win is 500 coins, meaning that you would need to play some 2,600 games (or a minimum of 31,200 actual minutes playing – that's nearly 22 days non-stop).



So how do people obtain skins without playing the game?

It didn't take long on a search engine to find something relevant. csgolounge.com is a trading platform for customised weapons, but also has an option for avid collectors to obtain items for real money.

A quick search for "FUT Coins" leads us to fifautstore.com, a flashy website that may fool some people in to think that it is actually endorsed by the game itself. Having selected our required quantity, we can see that to have a virtual Cristiano Ronaldo playing in our virtual team would cost £260.

You can also pick up a player on eBay if you're quick (and have the money!). eBay banned the sale of virtual items in 2007 but until they get noticed, the listings are available to be bought. The only listing available at the time of writing was a seller offering a £7.50 'lucky dip' of top players of which he claims Ronaldo is one. Who knows if Ronaldo would actually be included in the selection?

Interestingly a question on the listings is a refund request from a father whose son purchased the item without permission. You have to imagine how many parents end up in similar situations.



Question to seller:
"Hi Sorry but my son has done this without permission Please could you refund the money. Sorry for any inconvenience"

Skins are different to coins and FIFA players though?

Skin betting is also referred to as **ITEM BETTING**, which opens up a whole new genre of in-game collectibles. FUT players, much like skins, can function as a virtual currency and have a convertible real-world value and therefore pose the same danger to gambling behaviour.

If you think of a CS:GO weapon skin as having a solely aesthetic appeal, in game collectibles as in FIFA players that improve your chance of winning in-game has even more appeal to avid gamers.

Is this really gambling?

The Gambling Commission certainly think so. In September 2016 two famous YouTubers were charged with offences under the Gambling Act. A statement reads: "Following the Gambling Commission's investigation into the website www.futgalaxy.com, summonses were obtained and served on Dylan Rigby and Craig Douglas for alleged offences contrary to the Gambling Act 2005, including the provision of facilities for gambling (Mr Rigby), advertising unlawful gambling (both defendants) and inviting children to gamble (Mr Douglas)."

One CS:GO website in particular that we identified (csgofast.com) has gone one step further and actually incorporates roulette and lottery games in to exchanging goods. These websites are very well used too – games are played at an extremely fast pace with stakes rising equally as constant.



On csgolive.com, you can play blackjack using 'chips' converted from the value of your deposited skins. A link labelled 'Provably Fair' on the website currently leads to nowhere. Whilst the majority of the sites we researched has no evidence that large amounts of actual money is lost, gambling isn't always about financial gain.

It's our belief that gambling with virtual property can have the same harmful effects as gambling with real money. Imagine someone has been playing a game for a long time, and then to lose hard-earned virtual belongings in one click of a button. It can have the same psychological effect as betting with real money in the bookies.

Ladbrokes and William Hill now have markets on team games – just the same as they would have on "actual" sporting events such as horse racing and football matches. We often highlight the blurred boundaries between gaming and gambling, and this is probably the biggest indicator yet.

Further reading:

<http://www.esportsbettingreport.com/sites/skin/>
<http://www.pcgamer.com/csgo-skin-gambling/>
<http://www.givemesport.com/890495-the-cost-of-the-best-team-in-fifa-17-ultimate-team-in-real-money>
<http://kotaku.com/fifa-youtuber-prosecuted-under-new-gambling-law-1786754003>

Have YOU had any harmful experiences with skin betting?

You can call us on 01633 222622 or email gamblingsupport@newportcab.org.uk.

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