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P R E S S R E L E A S E

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***Interviews available, incl. this weekend

No Lottery Loophole: New Movie Tells True Story of Michigan Couple Who Beat the Odds – But It Doesn't Work That Way in California

SACRAMENTO – A new movie premiering this week in the United States tells the true story of a retired couple who, nearly 20 years ago, figured out a statistical way to legally beat the odds of Lottery games in Michigan and Massachusetts. The California Lottery, however, wants its players to know that despite the story in *Jerry and Marge Go Large*, **there's no way to game the system in the Golden State.**

Why Not?

Jerry and Marge Go Large is the story of Jerry and Marge Selbee who (spoiler alert) wound up making millions off two draw games with what was known as a roll-down feature: If the jackpot grew to \$5 million in Michigan or \$2 million in Massachusetts and no ticket matched all 6 numbers, players whose tickets matched five or fewer numbers split the prize money. According to the [Huffington Post article](#) on which the movie is based, Jerry Selbee has a mind for puzzles as well as degrees in mathematics and business; when he saw a brochure for the Michigan lottery game known as *Winfall* back in 2003, he did some quick math based on the advertised odds and figured he could come out ahead if he invested enough money in tickets. He was right, and according to the article, the Selbees grossed nearly \$27 million over nine years of playing *Winfall* and a similar game in Massachusetts.

The California Lottery does not have any games with a roll-down feature. Further, unlike many states that participate in the multi-state draw games known as Powerball® and Mega Millions®, the prizes for all Lottery games in California, other than Scratchers®, are pari-mutuel.

Pari-WHAT?

California is unique among its partner states for both Mega Millions and Powerball in that all prize levels are pari-mutuel. That means that, like the jackpots, even the lower prize amounts (for those whose ticket matches more than one, but not all six, numbers) are split among the number of players who won in the same way. In other words, if two tickets match five out of the six numbers in California, they will split what is essentially a secondary jackpot amount based on sales. Most other states set a fixed prize amount for the lower-tier winners.

“Not all of our players appreciate the pari-mutuel aspect,” said Nicholas Buchen, Chief Financial Officer for the California Lottery. “But that’s usually because they don’t *know* about it. Depending on the size of the prize pool, it’s possible to actually win more in California with a secondary prize than with a secondary prize in other states, but that doesn’t always happen.”

What Are the Odds?

The California Lottery also wants its players to know the following:

- The odds of winning a prize are the same in any drawing, no matter how big the jackpot or prize pool is. Even if there are more tickets sold in a particular drawing, the odds of winning a prize remain the same.
- All Lottery drawings adhere to strict protocols designed to uphold the integrity of the games, ensuring accuracy and fairness. An independent, third-party auditor is present for every single Lottery draw and has authority to stop any draw if they feel it is any way compromised.
- Similarly, for Scratchers games, winning tickets are distributed randomly throughout each specific game so that eliminates any winning patterns or predictability. The random distribution does not change the odds of winning.
- The overall odds of winning on a Scratchers ticket apply to each ticket purchased in a game, not a series of tickets. So, for example, if the odds of winning are one in four, a player who buys four tickets is not guaranteed to have purchased a winner; it means that if a player were to buy ALL of the tickets in a single game, one in four of them would yield a prize.

Box Office Bottom Line

The bottom-line message from the California Lottery?

“We hope our players have fun watching *Jerry and Marge Go Large*, just like we hope they have a little fun playing our games,” said Carolyn Becker, California Lottery spokesperson. “Though not everyone will win millions, we do make winners every day by the thousands. And ultimately, we want to thank our players because they’re supporting our mission which is to raise extra money for California’s public schools, which is a win-win no matter what.”

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The California Lottery’s mission is to provide supplemental funding to California public schools, including kindergarten and grades 1-12, community colleges, the California State University, the University of California, and other California public educational entities. The funds the Lottery transferred to public education totaled more than \$1.8 billion for fiscal year 2020-21, which amounted to a modest percentage of education’s overall budget. However, this funding is largely nondiscretionary, meaning schools can use this for important, yet unfunded instructional programs they would otherwise not afford. During the same period, the Lottery generated almost \$8.4 billion in sales, more than 95% of which went back to the community in the form of prize payments, retailer commissions and bonuses, and contributions to education. The California Lottery urges its customers to play responsibly. Problem gambling resources are available to anyone at 1-800-GAMBLER.

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