



**SPORT INTEGRITY  
AUSTRALIA**

# **COURTSIDING**



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## What is courtsiding?

Courtsiding (also known as pitch-siding) is the practice of the instant, covert transmission of information about developments in a sports event to obtain an advantage over wagering service providers. Essentially, it allows a gambler to take advantage of the longer time it takes for that same information to get to gambling operators by placing a bet on an outcome during a contest, with additional information (either a win or some intermediate event).

It often involves a paid contractor to attend live matches armed with electronic devices, usually engineered to be concealed, who simply transmits updates of a live event to a gambler. This information gets to the gambler quicker than the gambling operator, who is disadvantaged by using slightly slower transmission channels from data providers, their own data-scouts, or simply live broadcasts. The gambler is then able to place bets on an outcome using information that the gambling operator hasn't received yet, which places the gambler at an advantage given the operator has not updated their odds, on account of that new information. As such, it is an activity that is associated with 'in-play' gambling, meaning it is more likely that courtsiders will be providing data to gamblers accessing offshore gambling operators given Australia's in-play gambling restrictions make it difficult to exploit in-play markets this way.



### Courtsiding in practice – tennis example

A gambler may decide to focus on break points or set points, which tend to influence the outcome of a match. Say Joe Bloggs and John Doe are on-serve early in their match but now Doe has reached a break point on Bloggs' service and it's 30-40.

If Doe wins this point, he wins the game. As such, the odds for him to win both the set and the match may change drastically. However, if Bloggs comes back and ties the match at deuce, then there won't be such a big change.

If someone at the match sees Doe win the point on a big service return and bets on him before the data gets to the gambling operators and they adjust the odds, they've obtained a potential advantage and increased their chances of winning greater amounts.



## Is it illegal?

No. In 2014 Victoria Police arrested and charged a courtsider attending the Australian Open tennis tournament under competition manipulation related offences, specifically Section 195F, of the *Victorian Crimes Act 1958*, however, those charges were later dropped after it was found there would be no reasonable prospect of conviction in the case<sup>1</sup>.

It is, however, usually in breach of event ticketing or entry conditions and, if detected by venue staff, courtsiders can be removed from the venue and likely receive long bans preventing them from re-entering the venue. Removing courtsiders is not an unusual occurrence in Australia, with reports of courtsiders being at most major sports in Australia over the last few years.

## What is the problem then?

While it does not impact the integrity of the event, it is argued that courtsiding corrupts betting markets by the unfair advantage it creates. With sports increasingly entering agreements with gambling operators, it is important that the integrity of both the sporting event and betting markets is upheld, maintaining trust and positive perceptions among fans, customers, and sponsors.

## What is the difference between courtsiding and data-scouting?

While both involve the capture and dissemination of sports data, the primary difference is its use. While courtsiding is to collect and disseminate data **for gamblers** to get an advantage over gambling operators, data-scouting is the collection of sports data (event and/or performance data), such as live scores or statistics, to disseminate **to gambling operators** to assist them to offer betting options. Data collection and dissemination is an activity undertaken 'officially' through a commercial arrangement between a sports data company and a sporting organisation, or 'unofficially' via the use of unofficial 'data-scouts' collecting sports data outside any commercial arrangement. Distinguishing data-scouts from courtsiders is difficult; regardless, both are usually in breach of ticketing or entry conditions, if any exist.

Unauthorised data-scouting presents a threat to the integrity of sports given it facilitates the creation of betting markets, particularly at lower levels or for non-traditional betting sports, in unregulated markets. These unregulated operators and markets allow for almost no visibility or cooperation with sports and law enforcement agencies. The creation of betting markets, together with other factors such as vulnerable participants, then provides opportunity for those looking to exploit betting markets through corrupting sport. For more information about data-scouting refer to the [Data-Scouting Fact Sheet](#).

## What can a sporting organisation do to stop courtsiding or data-scouting?

Identifying courtsiders and data-scouts may be difficult, however increasing awareness of venue staff of the potential for courtsiders or data-scouts to attend, and what action to take if identified, should be considered.

Having the ability to remove courtsiders or data-scouts from venues requires ticketing or entry conditions enabling that. Sports may consider reviewing these conditions to ensure that when identified, courtsiders and data-scouts can be removed.

Sports are also encouraged to report instances of courtsiding or data-scouting to Sport Integrity Australia. This will help us compile a better understanding of courtsiding and data-scouting activities in Australia and disseminate this information to sporting organisations to act where appropriate.

For some extra reading on the subject, this [BBC article](#) provides a good summary of the individuals involved and the courtsiding methodology employed.

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<sup>1</sup> [Charge dropped in Vic 'courtsiding' case \(smh.com.au\)](#)