

IS SPRING  
TRAINING  
GOOD FOR  
BUSINESS?

IN BUSINESS



A purrsonal journey  
**FOR THE  
LOVE OF CATS**  
Feline fans gather in Miami  
IN ACCENT

**BREAKING NEWS AT PALMBEACHPOST.COM**

**WEATHER**

TODAY  
**Partly sunny**

HIGH: **78** LOW: **63**

MONDAY  
Sunny skies **76/60**

TUESDAY  
Sunny again **78/66**

LIVE RADAR PALMBEACHPOST.COM.  
WEATHER PAGE BACK OF SPORTS

# The Palm Beach Post

Sunday, March 30, 2014

REAL NEWS STARTS HERE

Final edition | Two dollars

**GET THE MOST**  
out of your subscription!



Register your account  
[PalmBeachPost.com/access](http://PalmBeachPost.com/access)

**IN THE NEWS**

**Plane debris hunt promising**  
Two aircraft involved in missing Malaysian jet investigation spot floating objects in new search area. **A2**

**NATION & WORLD**  
**Kerry to meet with Russian counterpart**  
Secretary of State alters travel plans to convene with foreign minister in Paris to discuss Ukraine. **A3**

**GM woes:** Automaker announces two more recalls on more than 650,000 SUVs, pickups and compact cars. **A3**

**Washington mudslide:** Death toll hits 18, but number of missing falls from 90 to 30. **A20**

**LOCAL**  
**Deputy put on leave after shooting man**  
Off-duty officer claims man threatened him after incident at pool in Boca area enclave. **B1**

**Teacher trek:** Teacher at Okeethee Middle plans 1,100-mile walk to nation's capital. **B1**

**Hatsume Fair:** Morikami festival gets lift from elaborate anime costumes. **B3**

**BUSINESS**  
**Clematis will host giant shoe retailer**  
Footwear & More is slated to open flagship store in July. **D1**

**SPORTS**  
**Gators knock off Cinderella Dayton**  
Florida defeats Flyers to earn a spot in the NCAA Final Four. **C1**

Classifieds	<b>E1</b>
Crossword	<b>E5</b>
Dear Abby	<b>F2</b>
Deaths	<b>B6</b>
Horoscopes	<b>F2</b>
Lottery	<b>B2</b>
Movie listings	<b>F6</b>
Scoreboard	<b>C11</b>

To subscribe to The Palm Beach Post, call 561-820-4663  
Copyright 2014 The Palm Beach Post  
Vol. 79, Number 16, 10 sections



Other lotteries have found many frequent winners involved in ticket theft, ticket brokering and even money laundering, but Florida's Lottery doesn't have a clue.

POST EXCLUSIVE INVESTIGATION

# GAMING THE LOTTERY

## The Post finds winnings so improbable, it could be crime

By **Lawrence Mower**  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Amit and Nita Thakker are two of the luckiest people in Florida. The Florida Lotto? They've won big cash three times. The Fantasy Five? Won that four times. The Play 4? Pssshhh. They've won that 95 times. Altogether, the Thakkers have won prizes worth \$600 or more 214 times since 2005, collecting a cool \$531,000. The Thakkers say it's mostly luck. Other lotteries have seen stories similar to these. Their findings: It's mostly crime.

Florida's most prolific winners might be too lucky, and Florida's Lottery can't explain why, a Palm Beach Post investigation has found. The winning patterns raise red flags that have led other lotteries and police to uncover widespread ticket theft by store employees, neighborhood "ticket brokers" who helped winners avoid taxes, even drug lords laundering money. These people are not the lucky jackpot winners you see on the news. Rather, they're flying under the radar, cashing in tens or hundreds of tickets, each usually worth between \$1,000 and \$20,000. Six of the top 10 winners are like the Thakkers, store clerks and owners who sell lottery tickets. They're defying the odds. But their patterns also defy logic. Take these cases:

- Louis Tillman Johnson had never been lucky until October 2007. Since then, lottery records show he's cashed in a big winner every 11 days, on average, collecting \$719,000. Half of the top 10 winners are like Johnson: no wins for more than a decade, then incredible winning streaks.
- Sherry Monestime gets lucky wherever she goes. The Lantana woman has hit it big with tickets from 55 different stores across four counties, from Surfside to Fort Pierce. Most of the top winners are equally lucky: They've all cashed in big tickets sold

Lottery continued on **A15**

### WHAT THE POST FOUND

The Post analyzed the Florida Lottery's electronic database of winners since 1993 of tickets worth more than \$600. After crimes were uncovered at other lotteries, The Post wanted to see whether red flags found at the other lotteries were happening here. The answer is yes. We found at least 200 people chalked up 30 or more wins, often from 30 or more stores. And while The Post's analysis of public records can't determine whether crimes have been committed, the Lottery can — yet it's paying little attention.

ONLY AT  
[my.palmbeachpost.com/gaming-the-lottery](http://my.palmbeachpost.com/gaming-the-lottery)

**SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVES**

- **Interactive graphics:**
- **In-depth: Top 10 prolific winners**
- **What games did they win?**
- **Store lookup:** See scratch-off lottery payouts at stores near you.

**INSIDE: PROLIFIC WINNERS MAP**  
Florida's top 10 winners, where they won and what they said, **A14**

**ONE WOMAN, 55 STORES**  
Follow the trail of one of Palm Beach County's most amazing winners, **A19**



## POST IN DEPTH FLOOD INSURANCE

# Legislators try to get flood policies flowing

But private insurers not likely to write without huge premium hikes.

By **Charles Elmore**  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

The Florida Senate passed a bill last week that puts the state at the forefront of efforts to encourage private flood insurance, its sponsor says. "It is time for Floridians to control our own destiny and lead the nation with a free-market flood insurance program," said Sen. Jeff Brandes, R-St. Petersburg.

But even if the House agrees, a few awkward points threaten to rain on any imagined parade of private insurers marching in with low-priced relief from the federal government's 46-year-old National Flood Insurance Program. While individual insurers might dip a toe in the market, premiums would need to rise 200 percent to 400 percent generally to get private insurers interested on a large scale, a leading industry group says. After public outcry, this month Congress capped fed-

Flood continued on **A5**

12<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL PALM BEACH AUCTION

*Barrett-Jackson*

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTOR CAR AUCTIONS™

APRIL 11-13, 2014 | SOUTH FLORIDA FAIRGROUNDS



1956 Mercedes Benz 190SL Convertible

TICKETS ON SALE NOW! [BARRETT-JACKSON.COM](http://BARRETT-JACKSON.COM)

**REGISTER TO BID & GET THE PERKS!**  
Invites to the Opening Night Gala, preferred parking and seating, a hosted bidder bar and more!

 **BROADCAST TO OVER 100 MILLION HOMES**  
CALL YOUR LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDER FOR AVAILABILITY

 **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL**

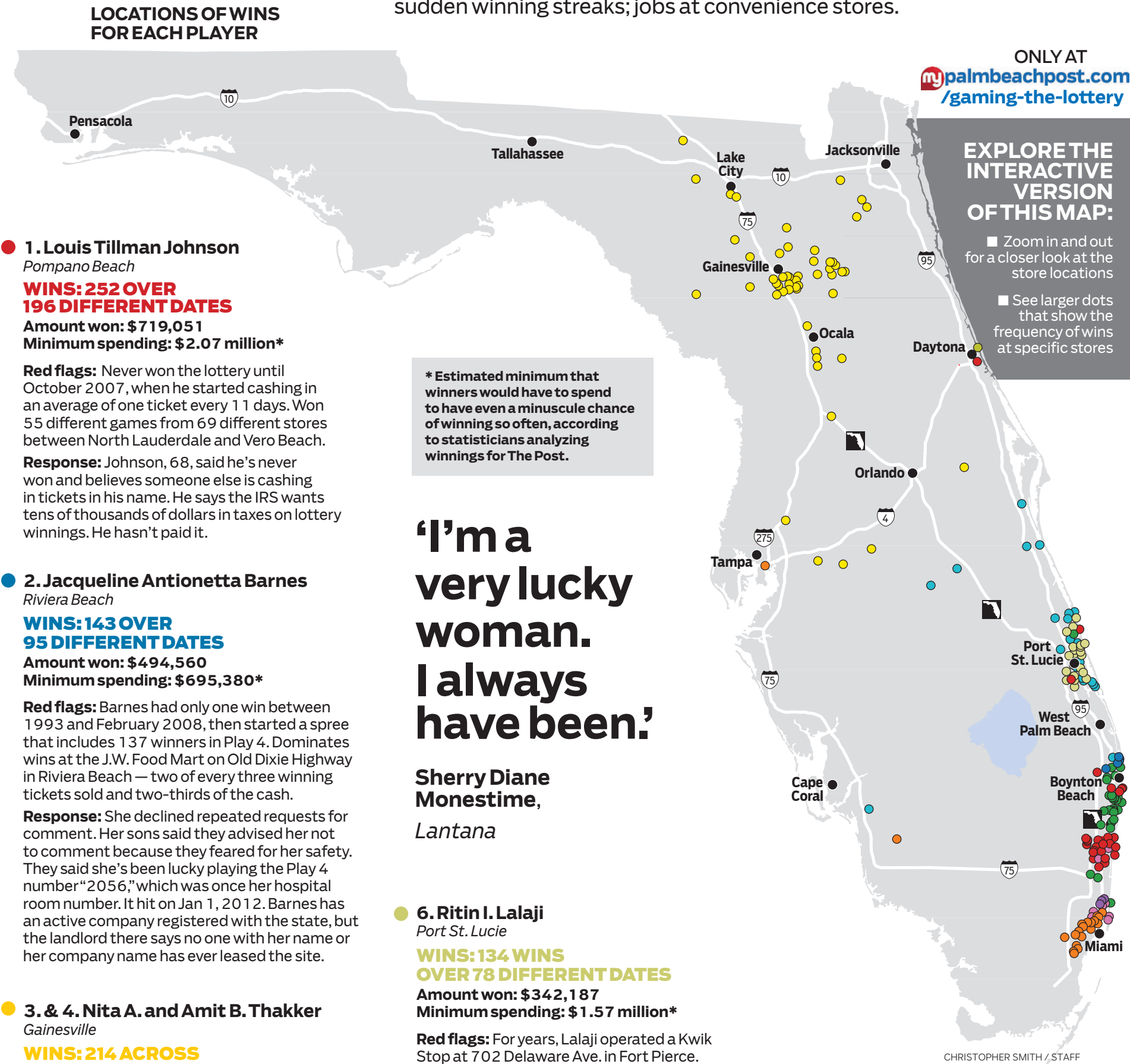
Barrett-Jackson Auction Co. LLC, FL Dealer License # VU1021404/1. Assister & Associates LLC, FL Auctioneer License # AU3010. Call Barrett-Jackson at 961.515.1091 or visit Barrett-Jackson.com for more information.



# GAMING THE LOTTERY

# 10 MOST PROLIFIC WINNERS

Here are the most prolific winners The Post found after analyzing Florida Lottery data between 2003 and August 2013. They're ranked by how often they cashed in winning tickets. How did they win so much? Experts say it had to be more than luck. Red flags for the lottery to pay attention to: winning tickets bought across many dates at many stores; sudden winning streaks; jobs at convenience stores.



**1. Louis Tillman Johnson**  
*Pompano Beach*  
**WINS: 252 OVER 196 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$719,051**  
**Minimum spending: \$2.07 million\***

**Red flags:** Never won the lottery until October 2007, when he started cashing in an average of one ticket every 11 days. Won 55 different games from 69 different stores between North Lauderdale and Vero Beach.

**Response:** Johnson, 68, said he's never won and believes someone else is cashing in tickets in his name. He says the IRS wants tens of thousands of dollars in taxes on lottery winnings. He hasn't paid it.

**2. Jacqueline Antionetta Barnes**  
*Riviera Beach*  
**WINS: 143 OVER 95 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$494,560**  
**Minimum spending: \$695,380\***

**Red flags:** Barnes had only one win between 1993 and February 2008, then started a spree that includes 137 winners in Play 4. Dominates wins at the J.W. Food Mart on Old Dixie Highway in Riviera Beach — two of every three winning tickets sold and two-thirds of the cash.

**Response:** She declined repeated requests for comment. Her sons said they advised her not to comment because they feared for her safety. They said she's been lucky playing the Play 4 number "2056," which was once her hospital room number. It hit on Jan 1, 2012. Barnes has an active company registered with the state, but the landlord there says no one with her name or her company name has ever leased the site.

**3. & 4. Nita A. and Amit B. Thakker**  
*Gainesville*  
**WINS: 214 ACROSS 172 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$531,030**  
**Minimum spending: \$2.38 million\***

**Red flags:** The husband and wife have operated several stores in and around Gainesville. The bulk of their wins come from one, a Texaco station they owned at 1602A NE Waldo Road. Won at 83 different stores and 53 different games. They'd never won between 1993 and December 2005.

**Response:** Amit Thakker attributes his wins to luck and a trick playing scratch-offs. Said information provided by the lottery reveals when big prizes are left in a roll of scratch-off tickets. Lottery officials and experts said the trick was nonsense — nobody knows where the scratch-off winners are, not even the lottery. Amit Thakker said he earns between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per year, which is mathematically impossible.

**5. Jose Mario Campos Pires**  
*Miami*  
**WINS: 111 OVER 94 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$343,686**  
**Minimum spending: \$2.41 million\***

**Red flags:** Most wins from the store he owned and operated for years, the Quick and Easy Food Store at 6490 SW 40th St. in Miami. Also won 29 different games from 30 different stores around Miami.

**Response:** Campos Pires, who sold his store last year, didn't believe he'd won so often over the past 10 years but thought he might have won that much over the past 20 years. Said he played between \$10 and \$15 per day, about \$53,000 over the decade. He said he's stopped playing because he lost a lot of money, but nowhere near the minimum estimated spending of \$2.41 million. "I'm not a rich man," he said. He denied cashing in tickets for customers.

**'I'm a very lucky woman. I always have been.'**

**Sherry Diane Monestime,**  
*Lantana*

**6. Ritin I. Lalaji**  
*Port St. Lucie*  
**WINS: 134 WINS OVER 78 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$342,187**  
**Minimum spending: \$1.57 million\***

**Red flags:** For years, Lalaji operated a Kwik Stop at 702 Delaware Ave. in Fort Pierce. More than half of his wins are from that store, the rest from 40 stores in the Treasure Coast. He's won 38 different games.

**Response:** None. The Kwik Stop has changed owners. When reached several times by phone, family members said Lalaji was either out of the country or unavailable for comment.

**7. Sherry Diane Monestime**  
*Lantana*  
**WINS: 99 OVER 69 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$286,938**  
**Minimum spending: \$785,450\***

**Red flags:** Monestime had won only once between 1993 and June 2010, when her streak started. Won 25 different games from 55 different stores over four counties, mostly Palm Beach County.

**Response:** Initially said she'd never won, that her identity had been stolen and that the IRS had sent her a letter claiming she owed taxes on lottery winnings. Contacted a second time, she said she had won. She denied cashing in tickets for other people, said she had lost more than she'd won, and that her wins were due to luck. "I'm a very lucky woman. I always have been."

**8. Nidia E. Kirkpatrick**  
*Miami*  
**WINS: 83 OVER 68 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$265,477**  
**Minimum spending: \$174,400\***

**Red flags:** None. Unlike the other winners, there is a slim chance that Kirkpatrick could have actually made money. There are no signs she works for a store, and almost all of her wins are in the Play 4, which she won 78 times.

**Response:** Kirkpatrick did not respond to requests for comment.

**9. Abdorauf F. Hammad**  
*Miami*  
**WINS: 82 OVER 65 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$278,904**  
**Minimum spending: \$1.23 million\***

**Red flags:** Has owned or worked at several stores in Miami, claims wins from several. He's won at 49 different stores, 31 different games, including top prizes in Fantasy 5 and a \$2 Monopoly scratch-off.

**Response:** Said he has a gambling problem but is aided by a unique strategy: "I dream in numbers." Said he used to borrow money so his wife could play; now she wants him to stop. He estimates he spends \$3,000 each week on lottery tickets, about \$1.6 million over his winning period.

**10. Vipul K. Shukla**  
*Fort Pierce*  
**WINS: 140 OVER 65 DIFFERENT DATES**  
**Amount won: \$306,035**  
**Minimum spending: \$1.94 million\***

**Red flags:** Has managed several places that sell lottery tickets, including the now-closed G&V Discount Beverage & Food in Fort Pierce, where Shukla won 30 times. Won at 58 different stores, mostly in Treasure Coast; no wins between 1993 and June 2006.

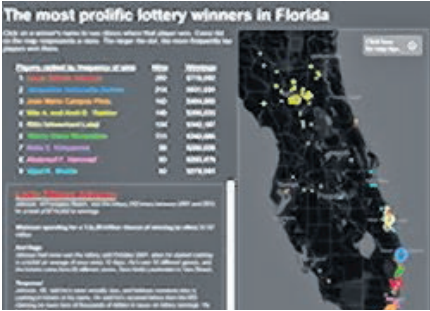
**Response:** Shukla first said his wins "were all random," but when asked if he was cashing in tickets for people, he said he had. "I did do that, but that was a long time ago," he said. He has wins until 2013. Shukla declined to comment further, saying he "could be in trouble."

Source: Florida Lottery; Palm Beach Post research

ONLY AT  
**mypalmbeachpost.com**  
**/gaming-the-lottery**

**EXCLUSIVE FOR SUBSCRIBERS**  
Explore three interactive graphics:

- **Top 10 prolific winners**
- **What games did they play?**
- **Store lookup:** See scratch-off lottery payouts at stores near you.





# GAMING THE LOTTERY

## Lottery

continued from A1

at 30 or more stores.

■ Jacqueline Antionetta Barnes has far outpaced everyone who plays the lottery at the J.W. Food Store in Riviera Beach. She's cashed in two of every three winning tickets sold there since 2008, collecting \$494,500.

Florida's state-run lottery lacks many of the safeguards used by other lotteries to track unusual winners. And officials here can't explain how these people win so often.

Lottery Secretary Cynthia O'Connell said they could be lucky.

"That's what the lottery is all about," she said. "You can buy one ticket and you become a millionaire."

Lottery Inspector General Andy Mompeller doesn't agree.

"Nobody wins that much," he said. "The odds are what they are."

Those mixed signals extend to questions about these winners. Security officials, when asked by The Post, said some winners are on their radar, repeatedly mentioning "the potential for an ongoing investigation."

But their winning streaks go back years, and when The Post spoke to some of them, they said no one had ever questioned their wins.

Lottery officials point out that winning so often isn't proof of a crime, and The Post's analysis of public records cannot conclude whether any crime has been committed.

To discover these extraordinary winners, The Post spent months analyzing the lottery's list of more than 600,000 people who won \$600 or more since 1993 and focused on those who recently cashed in tickets the most often — something the lottery doesn't do.

Most people, 96 percent, cashed in winners on four or fewer dates between 2003 and August 2013. But The Post found more than 200 people who have cashed in big winners at least 30 times.

Other lotteries do the same analysis for one reason: They know that winning even \$600 in the lottery is rare; when somebody does it a lot, it means something's wrong.

California and Ontario discovered some store clerks were top winners because they stole winning tickets from unsuspecting customers or short-changed them. The clerks would run tickets through a machine behind the counter and tell players that their tickets were either all losers or small winners.

Other lottery schemers appeared as big winners because they cashed in tickets for people looking to avoid paying child support or back taxes. If a winner owes child support, for example, the lottery will take that money out of their winnings. A ticket cashier will help them avoid it. Although it's illegal, the lottery has stopped pursuing some of these cases because prosecutors won't go after them.

Still others were drug dealers and other criminals who used lottery tickets to launder money. The Post found examples in six states, including Florida, where a drug dealer and a lottery employee laundered half a million dollars through the lottery in the 1990s before federal authorities caught up to them.

The Florida Lottery is the second largest in North America, but it's taken only meager steps to prevent these kinds of fraud.

Officials have little idea who's operating its lottery terminals at more than 13,000 outlets. Unlike the biggest Canadian lotteries, for example, it backgrounds only store owners, not employees.

They also don't know if retailers or employees are cashing in tickets. Unlike California and other states, Florida doesn't ask.

And while they have rolled out undercover operations to catch dishonest clerks, their scope is far smaller than California, which has conducted stings in at least 10 percent of its outlets. Florida has gone undercover at less than 2 percent of its outlets.

## 'I dream in numbers.'

Abdorauf "Abdul" Hammad, who has won 82 lottery prizes from 49 different stores

### Against all odds

Abdorauf "Abdul" Hammad has a unique explanation for his 82 lottery wins, worth \$279,000, over the past decade.

"I dream in numbers," he said.

Hammad spoke to The Post during his break at the Mercado Oriental corner market in Miami's Little Havana, where he tends the cash register and lottery terminal.

He said he can't predict the numbers, of course. That would be preposterous. But when he sees one in a dream, "you have to write it down right away."

He would have to be getting his numbers from on high to win as much as he does.

Skip Garibaldi, a professor at Emory University and associate director of the Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics at UCLA, estimates Hammad would have to spend \$1.23 million to have the most remote chance of winning as often as he did. He would have lost nearly \$1 million over the past decade.

That \$1.23 million would give Hammad only a 1-in-20-trillion chance. That's like picking one star out of 50 galaxies, then having your friend

## 'That's what the lottery is all about... You can buy one ticket and you become a millionaire.'

Cynthia O'Connell, Florida Lottery Secretary



Amit and Nita Thakker, frequent lottery winners, at their store near Gainesville. LAWRENCE MOWER/PALM BEACH POST

guess the same star on the first try.

Garibaldi applied the same analysis to the other nine most prolific winners. He found all but one would end up big losers, most to the point of absurdity.

Jose Mario Campos Pires, for example, operated the Quick and Easy Food Store at 6490 SW 40th St. in Miami until recently.

Between 2003 and 2012, he cashed big tickets 111 times from 30 different stores, collecting \$344,000.

To win that many times, Campos Pires would have had to spend at least \$2.41 million, Garibaldi calculated, meaning he would have lost nearly \$18,000 a month for almost a decade.

Campos Pires sold his store last year. When reached by phone, he said he knew he'd won a lot, but didn't believe he'd won as often as lottery records show. He won simply by playing the game, he said, estimating he spent \$10 to \$15 per day on the lottery.

That's only about \$53,000 in spending over his winning streak. He laughed when told he'd have to spend millions to duplicate his wins.

"That's not true," he said. "I'm not a rich man."

### Lottery odds designed to be poor

The lottery isn't designed to produce frequent winners. It's designed to raise money for education.

For every \$100 spent on the lottery, only \$61 goes back to winners, a rate far worse than most casino games. You can walk away from a blackjack table with more money than you started with; it's next to impossible to do that playing the lottery.

To maximize the amount that goes to public schools and college recipients, lottery games are carefully engineered to produce certain odds. All of the odds are lousy.

Hitting a \$1 million jackpot is nearly impossible. Even amounts that are not life-changing are abysmal. Of the 82 different scratch-off games, only one in every 8,700 tickets is worth \$600 or more, and the rate is worse for online games like Play 4 — about one in 39,000.

And you can forget about fixing the games. Security is too tight to rig a draw game like Mega Millions. Producing fake scratch-offs doesn't work anymore. Popular schemes like "predicting" winning numbers have been totally discredited.

So when some people go on extraordinary winning streaks, it means one of two things: either they're spending — and losing — an absurd amount, or they're not playing by the rules.

Jeffrey Rosenthal is a University of Toronto professor and the author of Struck By Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities. He was instrumental in the investigation that led to multiple arrests of Canadian clerks who were stealing tickets.

Rosenthal came to the same conclusion as Garibaldi about Florida's winners. The top winner would have to buy 1,050 tickets every day for six years to have just a 1 percent chance of winning so often, he calculated.

"It seems pretty inconceivable that anyone would buy that many tickets," Rosenthal said. "It seems more likely that they're somehow getting tickets after they've been won."

### A law not enforced

Louis Tillman Johnson said he buys tickets only a couple of times a week, when he has spare change.

Johnson, 68, lives in a tiny rental home off Copans Road in Pompano Beach. He can't afford to fix the 1994 Ford F-150 pickup parked on his lawn.

"If I had \$700,000, that'd probably be a brand new Chevy right now," he gestures, holding one of his grandchildren in his lap. He cares for two of them.

On paper, Johnson is the most prolific lottery winner of the past decade. He's cashed in a winning lottery ticket worth \$600 or more 252 times since 2007, collecting \$719,000.

He's won 55 different games, including the \$20,000 top prize in one scratch-off with odds of one in 1.68 million. The tickets came from 69 different stores, from North Lauderdale to Vero Beach.

But he says he's not the real winner. He believes someone is cashing tickets in his name.

## 1-in-20-trillion chance... That's like picking one star out of 50 galaxies, then having your friend guess the same star on the first try.

He said the IRS has sent him letters claiming he owed roughly \$50,000 in taxes from lottery winnings. He told them it wasn't him, that there must be some mistake.

"They didn't believe me," Johnson said.

If Johnson is not the person cashing in the tickets — the lottery wouldn't provide enough information to confirm or deny it — that would mean someone else is cashing in tickets in his name and sticking Johnson with the tax bill.

Ticket brokers, who cash in winning tickets for other people, would have an incentive to do that.

The lottery automatically withholds federal lottery taxes from winning tickets above \$5,000, but winnings between \$600 and \$5,000 have to be self-reported to the IRS, which takes a 25 percent cut in addition to income taxes.

The lottery automatically checks if you owe debts to the state or child support, and takes that out of the winnings. That's an incentive to have someone else cash in the ticket, typically for a fee. Illegal immigrants also can be coerced, for fear that by going to a district office, they'll be noticed and deported.

Ticket-cashers, known as "brokers" or "middlemen," are no secret to the industry. The Massachusetts auditor noted that these people cashed in more than \$16 million in tickets in that state's lottery in 2007. In 2011, Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi shut down a company that was offering ticket-cashing services.

One of Florida's top winners even admitted to it. Vipul Shukla has won 140 times, cashing in more than \$300,000, since 2006. Most of those are from the Fort Pierce liquor store he owned, the G&V Discount Beverage & Food at 2725 S. U.S. 1.

When asked how he could be winning so often, Shukla said, "It's all random."

But when asked whether he cashed tickets for other people, he said, "I did do that, but that was a long time ago." He estimated four years ago. His wins stretch from 2006 to 2013.

He didn't respond when asked how he came by the tickets and whether he charged people to turn them in. He then said he "could be in trouble" and declined further comment.

In Florida, cashing in someone else's ticket for a fee is a first-degree misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. But Lottery Director of Security Doug Pitts said they've stopped pursuing ticket cashers since, in many cases, prosecutors view both parties as consenting adults and have declined to prosecute.

"Technically, it is illegal, but ... that kind of ties our hands," he said of prosecutors. "There's only so much we can do."

Lottery continued on A16

## People who owe taxes, child support or have their wages garnished would have an incentive to have someone else cash in the ticket for them, typically for a fee.

## Florida's most prolific winner lives here

He's won 55 different games from 69 different stores, totaling more than \$700,000. If he'd really won all that, he says, he wouldn't still be driving the Ford pickup sitting on his lawn. **HIS STORY, A17**



Louis Tillman Johnson rents this 1,200-square-foot home in Pompano Beach.



## WAYS TO POLICE LOTTERIES

Florida’s Lottery, No. 2 in North America, lags in some best practices for security:

### Managing retail clerks

Ontario tracks all retail employees, who aren’t allowed to play at their own store. California and Ontario ask winners whether they work for a retail store. Florida does neither.

### Frequent winners

California and Ontario watch for frequent winners, a red flag for fraud.

### Undercover stings

California Lottery agents pose as customers, asking store clerks to check their tickets. At first, 18 percent of clerks stole tickets. After arrests were publicized, the rate fell to 2 percent. Florida has done stings on fewer than 2 percent of retailers, with a theft rate of about 10 percent. It doesn’t publicize results.

### Better equipment

In Florida, only clerks can see lottery tickets scanned behind the counter. In Ontario, terminals chime for a winner. Florida has self-checking terminals in 54 percent of outlets.

### When winners get cash

Florida winners get a check immediately when they cash tickets over \$600. The lottery can’t recover winnings if there’s a problem. California and Ontario mail or deposit the winnings within a few weeks.

## LOTTERY RED FLAGS

What lottery security experts look for:

### Frequent winners

All but 4 percent of Florida winners cash in tickets four or fewer times. The Post found about 200 who cashed in 30 or more times.

### Gaming variety

Winning one lottery game worth \$600 or more is rare. Yet eight of the 10 most prolific winners have won 25 or more different games.

### Big losers

Would you spend \$2.7 million to win \$343,000 worth of lottery tickets?

### Multiple stores

Eight of the 10 most prolific winners cashed in tickets sold from 30 or more stores. The same games are available at nearly every outlet.

### Winning streaks

Half of the top 10 winners have no wins for more than a decade, then go on streaks. Lottery odds are too poor for “hot streaks.”

### Delayed gratification

If you won \$5,000 in the lottery, how long would you wait to cash it in? Jose Mario Campos Pires waited 100 days for his \$5,112 from Lotto.

## THE CRIMES

### Ticket cashing

Cashing someone else’s ticket for a fee is first-degree misdemeanor, up to a year in jail.

### Stealing

Taking a ticket worth \$600 or more, third-degree felony, up to five years in prison.

### Money laundering

In state court, up to 30 years in prison, 20 years in federal court



## Lottery

continued from A15

“Brokering” tickets is one way someone could appear as a frequent winner. But other lotteries found more nefarious examples.

In Canada and California, security officials discovered most of the top winners were store clerks and owners, and they were stealing tickets from customers.

The scam works like this:

When you buy a lottery ticket, you have a few ways to determine it’s a winner.

If it’s a scratch-off, the symbols underneath the wax will tell you.

If it’s an online game, you can watch the drawing on television or check it online.

Even then, it’s not always easy to tell if your ticket is a winner. Some of the games are confusing, and that’s partly the reason that roughly \$63 million in Florida Lottery winnings went unclaimed last year.

The surest way to see if you’ve got a winner is to go to a lottery terminal and scan the barcode on the ticket.

About half of the outlets in Florida have self-checking terminals. For ones that don’t, the customer hands his tickets to the clerk, who scans them in the machine behind the counter. The machine isn’t visible to the customer, so an unscrupulous clerk could say there are no winners or pay only part of the winnings.

The player, expecting to lose anyway, doesn’t think twice.

### Going undercover

The problem is epidemic in lotteries that haven’t tried to stop it.

To catch dishonest clerks, Bill Hertoghe, former director of security for the California Lottery, did undercover stings on random stores with investigators posing as customers. Winning tickets were stolen 18 percent of the time. In some places, such as San Francisco, tickets were stolen at twice that rate.

André Marin, who runs a watchdog agency for Ontario, issued a scathing report about the prevalence of ticket theft by store clerks there in 2007. He got calls from lottery officials as far away as China, who also noticed that the most frequents winners were “insider wins” — lottery clerks and owners.

“Whole lottery systems around the world seemed to be rigged,” Marin said.

Florida’s lottery agents also have noticed it. They’ve done undercover stings on 234 of the more than 13,000 stores that sell lottery tickets over the past four years.

Ten percent of clerks took the agents’ tickets, including Jayendrasinh Thakor, an Auburndale store clerk arrested in 2011 who later pleaded no contest to charges that included grand theft. He was sentenced to three years of probation.

Florida’s approach to these operations differs from California’s. California investigators go to as many stores as they can, then publicize the results so that clerks don’t know whether the next person who walks in is a customer or an agent.

Florida agents go to few stores and don’t publicize the results. Thakor’s arrest, for example, was never touted. The lottery never mentioned their retailer integrity program on its website until Friday, the day this story was published online.

The results also are different. California’s strategy has worked: Fewer than 2 percent of clerks there take agents’ tickets. In Florida’s most recent operation, in June 2013, clerks took agents’ tickets nearly 9 percent of the time.

Florida Lottery Secretary O’Connell, who was unfamiliar with the Canadian scandal, believes her system works, and publicizing the results of their operations would tip their hands. Store owners and clerks hear of the operations by word of mouth anyway, she said.

Florida’s agents do stings mostly prompted by complaints. In the past three years, dozens of people have complained to the lottery of having their ticket stolen, being cheated by a store clerk, or having a clerk offer to buy their ticket, lottery records show.

The lottery has caught some people in its stings. But The Post couldn’t find any who faced jail time after their arrests. One case was dropped after prosecutors said they didn’t have the investigative reports.

And even if those arrested had been convicted of a crime, the lottery admits nothing stops them from working in a store again.

### Dirty money

Then there is organized crime.

Over the past few decades, drug dealers and other criminals in at least a half-dozen states and three continents have exploited their lotteries’ lax security procedures to launder ill-gotten gains. They include:

■ The notorious Boston gangster James “Whitey” Bulger, who got some friends to buy a \$14 million Massachusetts Lottery ticket from a legitimate winner in 1991.

■ The multistate “Black Mafia Family” cocaine-trafficking ring, which bought more than \$1 million in Michigan lottery tickets from legitimate winners through the 1990s and 2000s.

■ A Brazilian congressman who won various federal bingo and lottery games 24,000 times. Records showed he spent \$30 million in government money to win \$9 million playing the games between 1988 and 1993.

Florida is also on the list. Federal authorities arrested Carlos Tejas of Miami in 1994 on charges of cocaine trafficking. They later discovered he’d won 13 big lottery tickets in only eight months, collecting half a million dollars. Then they charged him with money laundering and he pleaded guilty to conspiracy to cheat the government out of money.

Like the suspects in the Black Mafia Family, Tejas had the help of a store clerk, who, along with a Florida Lottery employee, steered legitimate winners Tejas’ way. Tejas paid those winners more than the tickets were worth for the ability to tell police that he’d made his money legitimately.

Combating money laundering has become a focus for some European lotteries. A 2006 report from the World Lottery Association, a trade organization, urged lotteries to adopt procedures to deter criminals from using the lottery for money laundering.

Among the WLA’s recommendations were for lottery officials to monitor wins by store clerks and to probe winner databases for repeat winners “that defy the laws of probability.”

The Florida Lottery is not a member of the WLA, and officials here don’t monitor wins by store clerks. Mompeller, the inspector general, said he does track unusual winners, but it’s unclear what he does with the information.

He does have his work cut out for him. The Post had trouble tracking down several winners, including Barnes,



## FACTS ABOUT FLORIDA’S LOTTERY

**Established:** 1988

**Operated by:**  
State of Florida

**Secretary:** Cynthia O’Connell, appointed by Gov. Rick Scott in 2011; former University of Florida trustee

**Objective:** Money for education

**Payments to education:** \$26 billion, about 30 percent of all sales

**How education money is spent:** School recognition bonuses, Bright Futures scholarships

**Palm Beach County’s schools got:** \$10.4 million in budget year 2014.

**The rest:** 61 percent to winners; 5 percent, retailers; 2 percent, vendors; the rest to administration.

## GAMES

**ONLINE:** Tickets printed on lottery computer in stores; player picks a combination of numbers that match daily or weekly drawings.

**Examples:** Play 4, Fantasy 5, Mega Millions, Powerball.

**Cost:** \$1 or \$2.

**Odds:** Top prizes — 1 in 1,000 in Cash 3 to 1 in 258 million in Mega Millions.

**Prize range:** \$500 to hundreds of millions.

**SCRATCH-OFF GAMES:** Also known as “instant” games; players scratch off layer of wax on card to reveal if the ticket is a winner.

**Examples:** Monopoly, Bingo Gold, 50X the Cash  
**Cost:** \$1 to \$25.

**Odds:** The more expensive the ticket, the better the odds; best odds are \$25 “100X The Cash” game at 1 in 2.86, about a 35 percent chance of winning something.

**Prize range:** \$1,000 to \$5 million.

the Riviera Beach woman who has cashed in two of every three winning tickets sold from one store.

She owns a business called “Palm Beach Multimedia, LLC,” according to the Florida Division of Corporations. Its official address is in a business park near her condominium.

But The Post couldn’t reach her there. The landlord said no one has rented that space for years.

Her condominium also wouldn’t accept a certified letter sent by The Post. It was forwarded to a P.O. box, then to an apartment she owns on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.

The Post found her there visiting her sons, who advised her not to speak because they were concerned for her safety. The sons said she was lucky playing 2-0-5-6 in the Play 4.

It hit once, on Jan. 19, 2012.

They said they didn’t know how she won the other times.

### ‘A huge conflict’

Security improved in other states once the lotteries changed their relationships with retailers.

Lotteries rely on stores to sell their tickets and are reluctant to disrupt that relationship, lottery security experts Marin and Hertoghe said. In Florida, the lottery pays stores a meager 5 percent of commissions on lottery sales. It’s so low that some store owners feel it’s not worth the hassle.

It’s for that reason that there’s little oversight by the lottery of the people who work in stores. In Florida, like most states, officials only do background checks on store owners. But they have no idea who else is working there and operating its terminals.

Marin called the relationships with retailers “a huge conflict of interest.”

“The government dealt with these retailers as partners, and not as arm’s-length business people,” he said. “Check any bank where there’s a vault. You think the bank doesn’t check the backgrounds of the people running it?”

In the wake of its 2007 scandal, Ontario now requires store employees to register with the lottery. It also prohibits them from playing the lottery at their own stores. And when a clerk wins, they’re required to disclose that they work for a store.

Violations result in a store being stripped of its lottery privileges.

California requires store clerks, store owners and relatives of store owners to disclose their relationship when cashing in a big winner, and it also tracks frequent winners.

Some of the changes, such as keeping track of notoriously transient store employees, are too difficult for many lotteries to adopt, said Thierry Pujol, chairman of the WLA’s risk management committee.

But Pujol said it was critical for lottery directors to track every step of the lottery process, including who’s buying the tickets and who’s cashing them in, to prevent fraud. He followed the scandal in Ontario and is adopting one of the ideas from California.

O’Connell, who called retailers the “lifeblood” of the lottery, relies on the retailers to police themselves.

“We do everything in our power, with the means that we have, to not police our retailers, but educate our retailers to do the right thing,” she said.

In the lottery’s first year, 1988, retailers were prohibited from playing. Since then, they’ve been allowed to play without restriction, and O’Connell said she couldn’t change that without the Legislature’s help. She’s not brought the issue to lawmakers.

Marin says lotteries have an ethical obligation to police themselves.

“The government is not just one of those Donald Trump businesses,” Marin said. “They’re in the business of securing public business. That trust can’t be abused.”

Until then, luck might be the only reason the lottery can point to for winners like Sherry Monestime.

The Lantana woman has cashed in big winners from 55 different stores, most of them in Palm Beach County, since she started winning in 2010. When contacted outside her home, she told The Post she’s never won the lottery.

She said that she’d lost her purse and was receiving letters from the IRS claiming she owed back taxes. Lottery records show she’s won \$287,000.

Her story changed, however, when contacted a second time. She admitted winning the drawings.

When asked how, she offered a common refrain.

“I’m a very lucky woman,” she said. “I always have been.”



# GAMING THE LOTTERY

**NO. 1:** The Florida Lottery’s rank in sales of scratch-off tickets among North American lotteries.

**Publix is the top seller of Florida Lottery tickets**

**68.4 percent**

The percentage of lottery tickets worth \$600 or more sold from Florida mom-and-pop stores among the 200 most prolific winners.

**44.6 percent**

The percentage of all \$600 plus lottery tickets sold from Florida mom-and-pop stores.

**NO. 2:** The Florida Lottery’s rank in sales among North American lotteries. Only New Yorkers spend more.

**25 percent**

The amount of the federal lottery tax taken out on winnings above \$600. That doesn’t include income tax.

**\$63 million**

Florida Lottery winnings that went unclaimed last year.

## ‘Nobody’s that lucky.’

Louis Tillman Johnson, on his 252 lottery wins. He believes someone else is cashing in tickets using his name.

**13,000**

The number of places where you can buy Florida Lottery tickets.

**\$2.41 million**

The minimum one person would have to spend to match Jose Mario Campos Pires’ 111 lottery wins worth \$343,686.

**1 in 8,747**

The chances of winning \$600 or more across all of the lottery’s more than 80 scratch-off games.

**6-1-7-2**

Play 4 number that’s won the most (in that order). It has won 7 times since 1991 for a total payout of \$2,163,150 in winnings.



Many of Louis Tillman Johnson’s winners were bought from stores within a 20 minute drive of where he lives, including the Akel Market in Pompano Beach. He says he does visit there every day for a cup of coffee and the latest gossip, but neither he nor a clerk there knew about his wins.    MADELINE GRAY/THE PALM BEACH POST

# Top winner: ‘I’ve never won’

Louis Tillman Johnson says he owes the IRS \$50,000 in taxes.

**By Lawrence Mower**  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Louis Tillman Johnson’s eyes grew wide when a reporter showed up at his modest 1,200-square-foot Pompano Beach rental home.

He’s the most prolific lottery winner of the past decade, having cashed in a big lottery ticket an average of once every 11 days – 252 tickets totaling \$719,000.

How’d he win so often?  
“Lottery? I’ve never won the lottery,” Johnson, 68, responded.

That’s despite the lottery’s massive list of winners crediting him with a winning pattern that defies logic.

He has no wins from 1993 until October 2007, when he launched into a streak that includes unlikely wins in 55 different games from 69 different stores, from North Lauderdale to Vero Beach.

He believes someone else is cashing in tickets in his name, and he’s now in trouble with the IRS.

“There’s something strange going on,” he said. “It hurts me. I’d like to know who this guy is.”

It would be possible to cash in a lottery ticket with someone else’s photo ID and Social Security number. And that would be lucrative for identity thieves: They could cash in tickets at will and stick someone else with the tax bill.

Johnson, a retired tire repairman from Vidalia, Ga., said the IRS sent him a certified letter in 2008 or 2009 claiming he owed roughly \$50,000 in taxes from lottery winnings. He called them, confused.

“I told them it wasn’t me,” he said. “They didn’t believe me.”

He said he tried to hire a lawyer, but the lawyer’s fees were too expensive. He’s since received a few more letters but didn’t keep them. He’s stopped worrying about it.

“What can you do? When you’re poor, you can’t do anything,” he said. “Lock me up, I don’t care. There are a lot of people in jail for stuff they didn’t do.”

Johnson never filed a police report and couldn’t provide the letters he said he received from the IRS. An IRS spokesman wouldn’t comment specifically on Johnson’s case. Records indicate they’ve never filed a lien against Johnson, but that’s not surprising – he doesn’t seem to own anything worth putting a lien on.

The Post asked Robert Warren, a retired 29-year special agent in the IRS’ criminal investigations division, for his thoughts on Johnson’s case.

Warren said an IRS collections officer wouldn’t aggressively pursue a case if the officer felt the information was wrong. And, he said, Johnson’s situation sounds like that.

“Either he’s the luckiest man in the world, or there has been some identity theft and mixup in the records of who won these lottery tickets and who was paid,” he said.

The lottery has been penalized by the IRS when winners don’t report their correct information, a February state legislative audit noted. The lottery only recently joined an IRS pilot program to verify players’ information.

That database is in real time. Currently, when someone cashes in a ticket, the lottery won’t match the ID to the Social Security number until later.

Lottery officials said Johnson’s tickets were redeemed at district offices in Miami and West Palm Beach, but declined to comment on his case, citing “the potential for an ongoing investigation.”

Warren said it’s easy for criminals to obtain a driver license and Social Security card.

Johnson, who has no criminal record, wondered if his son with the same name could be responsible for the wins. But the son was in prison for cocaine possession while many of the tickets were cashed.

The Post interviewed the son in January in a Broward County jail, where he was being held for violating his probation. He said he knew nothing of lottery tickets and couldn’t remember giving anyone his personal information.

Most of Johnson’s lottery wins were sold from stores within a 20-minute drive of his house, including the Akel Market, which he visits nearly every day for a cup of coffee and to hear the neighborhood gossip. He said he asked the store clerk about the wins, but the clerk pleaded ignorance.

The Post also asked a store clerk there about a frequent winner at the store. He said he didn’t know anything about it.

Only one thing is certain: Johnson could not have come by his wins by playing the lottery.

He would have had to spend a minimum of \$1.62 million, or \$10,270 per month, to have a 1-in-20-trillion chance of winning so often, according to one mathematician. Another statistician calculated Johnson would have to buy 1,050 tickets per day to have a 1 percent chance of winning so often.

Johnson says that didn’t happen, no matter who bought the actual tickets:

“Nobody’s that lucky.”

lmower@pbpost.com



The rental home in Pompano where Louis Tillman Johnson lives and cares for two of his grandchildren.

PHOTO FROM BROWARD PROPERTY APPRAISER

### WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

Louis Tillman Johnson of Pompano Beach is credited with winning 252 prizes in the Florida Lottery, each worth at least \$600. Here are some of his most exceptional scratch-off wins:

Game	What he won	Game odds	There is a better chance...
Pink Panther	\$20,000	1 in 840,000	... that you will be struck by lightning in Florida this year.
Bronze Bucks	\$5,000	1 in 240,000*	... that you will die from being bitten or struck by a dog.
50 Grand	\$5,000	1 in 178,286	... that the football field-sized asteroid 2007 VK184 will land in the United States.
10X the Money	\$5,000	1 in 129,328	... of getting a royal flush, the best hand in the game, in a hand of Texas hold ‘em.
\$2 Monopoly	\$2,500	1 in 29,189	... that you are a current or former NFL player.

SOURCES: FLORIDA LOTTERY, NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE, NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL, NASA, WIZARDOFODDS.COM, NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE  
\* HE WON TWO DIFFERENT GAMES AT THESE ODDS.





# Lottery odds: To win, you'd have to be a loser

For a tiny chance, 9 of the top 10 winners would have had to spend between \$200,000 and \$2 million more than they won.

**By Lawrence Mower**  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Just how much do you have to spend to get lucky?  
The answer: a lot.  
That's the question The Palm Beach Post posed to two mathematicians and a statistician after identifying extraordinary Florida Lottery winners.  
Skip Garibaldi, a professor at Emory University and associate director of the Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics at UCLA, analyzed the top 10 most prolific winners found by The Post.  
Jeffrey Rosenthal, a University of Toronto professor and the author of "Struck By Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities," looked at the top four. He was instrumental in uncovering clerks winning too often in Ontario.  
They took different paths to reach their conclusions, both using some pretty complicated math. They looked at each of the winners' tickets, the odds of winning that ticket and how much it costs to buy one ticket.  
In the end, they arrived at the same conclusion: It's not going to happen.  
Rosenthal looked at how many tickets someone would have to buy to match the winnings of the



**Jeffrey Rosenthal**, a University of Toronto professor and the author of "Struck By Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities"



**Philip B. Stark**, professor and chairman of the Department of Statistics at the University of California, Berkeley

top four winners.  
He found they would have to buy between 630 and 1,050 tickets every day during their respective winning periods to merely have a 1 percent chance of winning so often.  
His conclusion: Even if somebody wanted to buy so many tickets, itself a Herculean feat, they still wouldn't win as often as they did.  
Garibaldi calculated the absolute minimum the top 10 winners would have to spend to have even a minuscule chance of winning so often – a 1-in-20-trillion chance, the same chance as choosing one star out of 50 Milky Way-sized galaxies, then having your friend pick the same star.

Garibaldi wouldn't go as far as to call it impossible. He put it this way:  
"It's possible, it's just utterly implausible," he said. "Quantum mechanics tells us all sorts of insane, unimaginable things could happen. Your desk could suddenly turn into a talking goose. There's a calculable probability that that could happen. But it's never going to happen."  
He consulted with Philip B. Stark, professor and chairman of the Department of Statistics at the University of California, Berkeley.  
Assuming the winners invested every penny of their wins into buying more tickets, all but one would have lost a minimum of between \$200,000 and \$2 million, depending on the winner.  
That's right – assuming they played the game like everyone else, they all would have been big losers.  
"Some of the gamblers definitely appear to have won too many times ... unless they have some tremendous bankroll that could fund so much playing," Garibaldi said. "Maybe their dad has the copyright on 'Happy Birthday' or something."  
Garibaldi's analysis was generous for the winners, too. He didn't include their \$1 and \$2 scratch-off wins, most of which have very long odds.

lmower@pbpost.com

**'Quantum mechanics tells us all sorts of insane, unimaginable things could happen. Your desk could suddenly turn into a talking goose. There's a calculable probability that that could happen. But it's never going to happen.'**

Skip Garibaldi, a professor at Emory University and associate director of the Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics at UCLA

## Reporters analyzed lottery data to find intriguing patterns

Post staffers Lawrence Mower, Fedor Zarkhin, Niels Heimeriks and Michelle Quigley spent months parsing data, researching and finding winners.

It was an interesting premise: Lottery scratch-off cards can be inherently flawed, and if you're clever enough, you can exploit them.  
That 2011 story in Wired magazine, about a geological statistician who could spot a winning Canadian ticket without scratching off the wax, got Palm Beach Post investigative reporter Lawrence Mower thinking.  
Could someone be exploiting Florida's lottery scratch-offs?  
To get the answer, he used the state's public records law to obtain the Florida Lottery's electronic database of winners for tickets worth more than \$600 since 1993. The lottery does not keep data on winners of tickets worth less than \$600.  
The database included the winners' names, hometown, game, amount won, store that sold the winning ticket and the date it was cashed in.  
The database's shortcomings? It doesn't show winning numbers. It doesn't prove that the person cashing the ticket actually bought it. And it doesn't specify the date and time of sale. The Lottery has some of that data, but it's on paper records locked in warehouses and not easily retrievable.  
Mower and database reporter Fedor Zarkhin used computer software to analyze the winners. If someone had "cracked" a scratch-off, they'd appear to win it far more than anyone else.  
They didn't find that. But they found something else: people winning all kinds of games far more than anyone else.  
They decided to sort them by those who cashed in tickets most often.  
Why that measure, as opposed to people who won the most tickets, or the most money? Because



ONLY AT  
**my palmbeachpost.com /gaming-the-lottery**

**VIDEO:** Watch reporter Lawrence Mower explain his investigation.

The Post was looking for people who weren't behaving like normal lottery players.  
People who win a lot of tickets at once – like betting 20 times on the same Play 4 number – cash in their tickets immediately, and all at once. Cashing in tickets worth \$600 or more requires a trip to one of nine district offices in the state; a winner isn't likely to make multiple trips to cash in those 20 tickets. By The Post's measure, that person was lucky once, not 20 times.  
And a list of people who win the most money is dominated by those rare people who win a multi-million dollar jackpot. Those people were also lucky just once.  
Mower and Zarkhin also compared the list of stores that sell lottery tickets to corporate records to determine if top winners owned convenience stores.  
The results: Some people were making several trips per week to cash in tickets, in open defiance

of the odds. They were winning all kinds of games, from stores everywhere, and they were often store owners or clerks.  
Mower enlisted three university-based mathematicians and statisticians to analyze the top winners and come back with an estimate of how much the winners would have to have spent to win so often.  
Meanwhile, he and staff researchers Michelle Quigley and Niels Heimeriks tracked the top winners to their homes. They spent months cross-referencing business and property records, courthouse files and other information, and Mower traveled across the state to track them down.  
Some winners refused to answer questions. Others offered unusual explanations for their stream of luck. Only one offered an explanation that would be mathematically possible.

lmower@pbpost.com



## PLAY 4 CHAMP: 568 winners in 15 months

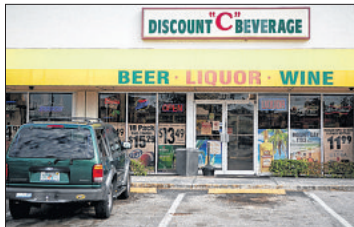
**By Lawrence Mower**  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

The odds of winning the top prize in Florida's Play 4 are one in 10,000, the same as your chances of ever being struck by lightning.  
So how did one person win it 568 times, collecting more than \$2.8 million – in just 15 months?

The Palm Beach Post caught up with the man who has won more big lottery tickets than any person in the history of the Florida Lottery. He's a bookish Hollywood engineer who talked about his wins on the condition that his name not be used.  
He chalked up his status as the winningest Play 4 player in the last 20 years as simply dumb luck.  
"It's a fluke," he shrugged. "I tell everybody to follow through with their numbers."  
On its surface, he might seem like the luckiest player in the state. But here's his secret: He just bets a lot more than most people do.  
He's different from the lottery's most prolific winners, who were measured by how often they cashed in tickets. Those winners, most of whom were store clerks, cashed in tickets 65 or more times. They've won all kinds of games, and the tickets come from dozens of stores.  
The Hollywood man, on the other hand, cashed in tickets only 14 times in the same period. He won at only two stores. And he's only won one game: the Play 4.  
The game is simple: Bet \$1 and pick four numbers between 0 and 9. If the next drawing picks your numbers in order, you win \$5,000.  
You can bet multiple times on the same number, of course, and that's what the Hollywood man did. The secret to his success, he said, was playing the year of his birth, 1951. Variations on those four numbers hit six times between January 2011 and March 2013.  
Two of those times, he bought 200 or more tickets. At \$5,000 a win, he walked out of the district office with a \$1 million check. Twice.  
He also played 100 times on Nov. 11, 2012, on number 4077. That meant a \$500,000 check.  
And he hit about 50 times on number 6251 on Dec. 6, 2011. That was a \$250,000 prize.  
The Post found that his style of play is unusual. Nobody else wins that much. Only five people have cashed in 100 or more Play 4 tickets at a time, and the Hollywood man is the only person to cash in 200 or more tickets at a time.  
There are just two explanations for his wins: dumb luck or the lottery is fixed, and there is no evidence it is fixed.  
Unlike the 10 most prolific winners identified by The Post, even a mathematician agrees that this gambler is different. Skip Garibaldi, a professor at Emory University and associate director of the Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics at UCLA, calculated that the man could spend as little as \$176,160 to have a one-in-a-million shot at winning so often.  
That's a long shot, but it's still mathematically possible.  
The man wouldn't say how much he spent chasing his wins. He just sighed and said, "Too much."  
His amount of playing is taxing on the store clerks who have to fill his orders.  
Hiral Patel, 28, has worked for two years at Tuzzo's Circle News, on Hollywood Boulevard and Federal Highway.  
He said the Hollywood man is a "nice guy" but plays so many tickets, it takes up to 10 minutes just to print them.  
"It's because of him that I've got two machines. I've got 10 customers waiting (while the Hollywood man's tickets are printed)," he said. "I told my boss, 'We need another machine.'"  
In true gambler's fashion, he'll tip the store clerk when he wins. And like many gamblers, he asked to keep his name out of the news because he fears being targeted for his winnings.  
The man said he's always been fascinated by numbers, and 20 years ago a psychic told him, "I can't tell you what, but something big is going to happen."  
That "big" thing was winning more big lottery tickets than any person in the history of the Florida Lottery, apparently. He's grateful she never told him his fate.  
"If she told me I was going to win, I would have played more money and probably gone broke."  
He said he actually stopped playing after his first \$1 million win, on Feb. 4, 2013.  
But then he realized that the same day of the week of that win fell exactly a month later, on March 4.  
It was like an anniversary for his big win, he believed, so he decided to resume his playing that day.  
He put down another \$200 on the same number, 1951. Incredibly, it hit.  
He hasn't stopped playing since.

lmower@pbpost.com





**'C' Discount Beverage**  
1203 Hypoluxo Rd., Lantana  
**Number of wins: 2**  
**Winnings: \$6,000**



**Super Stop Food Store**  
2121 N. Dixie Hwy., Lake Worth  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Kwik Stop #2900**  
6282 Forest Hill Blvd., Greenacres  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$2,700**



**Kwik Stop Grocery Store**  
1418 S. Dixie Hwy., Lake Worth  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$2,600**



**Kareem Food Market**  
1401 N. Tamarind Ave., West Palm Beach  
**Number of wins: 5**  
**Winnings: \$13,500**

**ONE OF PALM BEACH COUNTY'S AMAZING WINNERS**

**1 woman, 55 stores, over \$285,000**

Most of her winning tickets were bought in Palm Beach County stores; 40 of them are pictured here.



**7 Days Food Mart**  
121 N. Federal Hwy., Lake Worth  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Shop N Fill (Now Sunoco)**  
6729 S. Military Trail, Lake Worth  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Prip Mart**  
1255 W. Palmetto Park Rd., Boca Raton  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Cherry Hill Mini Market**  
1213 N.W. 4th St., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$2,700**



**Mobil Mart**  
20570 Lyons Rd., Boca Raton  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Publix**  
7375 W. Atlantic Ave., Delray Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$5,000**



**7-Eleven**  
4948 Le Chalet Blvd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$2,700**



**Bi-Low Market-1**  
24 N.W. 8th Ave., Delray Beach  
**Number of wins: 3**  
**Winnings: \$10,400**



**Mr. A's Grocery**  
847 Miner Rd., Lantana  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$6,000**



**Hess Express**  
14624 S. Military Trail, Delray Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$5,000**



**Shell**  
301 N. Congress Ave., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$5,000**



**Kenny's Market**  
214 E. Ocean Ave., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$5,000**



**Winn-Dixie**  
1620 S. Federal Hwy., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Seaside Superette**  
4635 N. Ocean Blvd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Sandcastle Discount Beverage**  
1304 Hypoluxo Rd., Lantana  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Farmer Food Store**  
15061 Jog Road, Delray Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Community Market**  
1130 W. Atlantic Ave., Delray Beach  
**Number of wins: 5**  
**Winnings: \$17,900**



**Rainbow City Food Store**  
1919 N. Seacrest Blvd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 10**  
**Winnings: \$25,600**



**Dollar Saver**  
2200 Lake Ida Rd., Delray Beach  
**Number of wins: 2**  
**Winnings: \$3,660**



**A&M Beverage**  
2424 N. Congress Ave., West Palm Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$2,900**

Sherry Monestime of Lantana has won \$286,938.\*  
She's cashed in 99 tickets for 25 different games between 2007 and 2013.



**Donnie's Place**  
60 N.W. 5th Ave., Delray Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Community Shell**  
2970 N. Military Trail, West Palm Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$5,000**



**Publix**  
1005 Gateway Blvd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$10,000**



**Corner Food & Beverage Mart**  
(Now vacant)  
1899 Woolbright Rd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**7-Eleven**  
850 Gateway Blvd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 2**  
**Winnings: \$2,000**



**A1A Food and Gas (Marathon)**  
302 W. Boynton Beach Blvd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**Kwik Stop Food store**  
225 S.E. 23rd Ave., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$3,325**



**Har-Dip Food Mart**  
1147 S. Federal Hwy., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 2**  
**Winnings: \$15,000**



**Kwik Stop (Now vacant)**  
1305 S. Federal Hwy., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$2,500**



**Fairway Market and Deli**  
1015 S. Congress Ave., Delray Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$5,000**



**Fast Lane Food & Beverage**  
1600 N. Federal Hwy., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 2**  
**Winnings: \$10,000**



**BMT Discount Beverage**  
566 E. Gateway Blvd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$5,000**



**Express Food & Beverage**  
103 E. Boynton Beach Blvd., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 3**  
**Winnings: \$6,600**



**Shell Gateway**  
2360 N. Federal Hwy., Boynton Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**



**7-Eleven**  
720 S. Congress Ave., West Palm Beach  
**Number of wins: 1**  
**Winnings: \$1,000**

\* Her winnings from tickets worth \$600 or more. The Florida Lottery does not track winnings below \$600.  
PALM BEACH POST STAFF PHOTOS