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By Victor R. Martinez  
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► Poll: Will you buy a Mega Millions ticket?

# JACKPOT

## Mega Millions reaches record

Glenn Smallwood is not a greedy man. Smallwood wouldn't mind splitting the estimated \$540 million payday with 15 of his co-workers if they get all six numbers correct in tonight's Mega Millions lottery jackpot. "Everybody is excited and feeling good about this one," Smallwood said after purchasing \$350 worth of lottery tickets Thursday afternoon.

The Mega Millions madness has reached historic propor-

tions in value and hysteria.

The estimated \$540 million payday is among the largest lottery jackpots in world history, surpassing the previous U.S. record of \$390 million.

It's also sending El Pasoans into a frenzy over the prospect of striking it rich.

Please see **Jackpot 11A**

## Jackpot

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"We usually put in \$10 apiece once it gets to \$200 million," Smallwood said. "But when this one didn't hit a few days ago, we decided to kick it up and put in \$20. This one has kept rolling over and rolling over, and now it's game time."

If there is just one winner, he or she could choose a lump sum of \$389 million or \$20.7 million a year for 26 years.

"Friday night's Mega Millions drawing will truly be a spectacular event in lottery history and provides an unprecedented opportunity for players to take a chance on a half-billion-dollar dream for just the \$1 price of a ticket," said Gary Grief, executive director of the Texas Lottery and lead director for the Mega Millions group.

Tickets for tonight's drawing can be purchased until 8:45 p.m. The drawing will be at 9 p.m.

Vincent Canzanese, a manager at C&R Piggy Bank No. 1 convenience store in Canutillo, said his Mega Millions sales are understandably more than usual.

"I had a couple of customers who bought a bunch of lottery tickets," he said. "One bought \$150 worth and another one bought \$100 worth of them."

Canzanese, who said he was going to buy five lottery tickets, has been reminding his customers about tonight's big drawing.

"When they buy something, I'll ask them, 'Are you playing the Mega tomorrow? It's at \$540 million right now,'" he said. "The lottery guy came in to the store (Thursday) and said it could max out to \$600 million be-



VICTOR CALZADA / EL PASO TIMES

**Jose Martel** buys Mega Millions tickets Thursday at Kenneth Min's store in Downtown El Paso.

fore the drawing."

Francisco Retana and Carlos Fierro were picking numbers for the Mega Millions at the Rest Area Convenience Store in Downtown El Paso on Thursday afternoon.

"We've never played Mega Millions before," Retana said. "But I won about \$5,000 two weeks ago playing the lottery, so I figured my luck is good right now."

Fierro simply laughed and said, "I feel lucky, too, very lucky. I think I'm going to win something."

Larry Lesser, a professor of mathematics and statistics at the University of Texas at El Paso, doesn't want to spoil other people's enjoyment, but ...

"The probability of Friday's jackpot being won is 1 in 176 million," he said.

Lesser is somewhat of an expert in the lottery. He taught a class called Lottery Literacy in 2006 for the Professional and Continuing Education program at UTEP. Before that, he taught an informal, not-for-credit class called Lotto Luck at the University of Texas in 1993.

"Playing the lottery is an individual choice," he said. "But I want them (people who play the lottery) to be able to make an informed choice and really understand what the probabilities are and not go in with false hopes or fall for some of the schemes out there."

The chances of winning the \$540 million payday are quite astronomical.

Lesser said there are three ways to understand the chances of sharing today's jackpot.

"Imagine guessing a partic-

ular sheet of typing paper from a stack that's 11 miles high, keeping in mind that Mount Everest is 5½ miles above sea level and (movie director) James Cameron just went seven miles below sea level," he said. "Another way to imagine it is to try to remember one particular second from a 5½-year time period or guess a particular square inch from an area that's bigger than 21 football fields, including end zones."

With odds like that, why play? "For someone who doesn't have the means to buy a whole bunch of real estate or a massive amount of stock, it's one of the few ways for as little as \$1 you can give yourself a chance, mathematically anyway, of winning a huge amount of money," he said. "For a lot of people, this may be their best chance to be-

## Feeling lucky?

► **What:** Mega Millions jackpot.

► **When:** 9 p.m. today. 8:45 p.m. is the deadline to buy tickets.

► **At stake:** \$540 million payday, among the largest lottery jackpots in world history, surpassing the previous U.S. record of \$390 million. If there is one winner, the winner could choose a lump sum of \$389 million or \$20.7 million a year for 26 years.

► **Information:** [megamillions.com](http://megamillions.com)

come a multimillionaire."

From a statistical standpoint, Lesser said, there are no valid strategies that will increase a player's chances of winning the jackpot.

There is a subtle strategy, however, that can increase your share of the jackpot.

"If you pick common numbers or numbers that people consider lucky like seven or anniversary or birthday dates, then you are more likely to have to share your jackpot with 15 other people," he said. "But if you pick higher numbers that are off the beaten path, you have a better chance of sharing the pot with less people. Not that I would complain if I had to share a million-dollar jackpot with 10 other people."

Lesser said he rarely plays, but when he does, he picks his own numbers.

"I only play when the jackpot gets as huge as it is now," he said. "I'm tempted to buy my one ticket now."

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