

## **Cyber bookie joins billionaire's club. The Canuck with the bucks on the cover of Forbes grew up on a Prairie pig farm**

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WASHINGTON—What are the odds?

If anyone would know, it would surely be Calvin Ayre.

The lad from Lloydminster, Sask., is today Canada's newest billionaire and cover boy at Forbes, the U.S.-based magazine that keeps the world's scorecard on the rich.

The 44-year-old Ayre moved into one of the globe's most exclusive clubs as founder of Bodog.com, the online gambling behemoth he operates out of Costa Rica because what he's doing has never been licensed by a government in Canada.

A University of Waterloo grad who financed his education by selling Okanagan Valley apples, cherries and peaches on the Prairies, Ayre now makes a cool billion based on wagers on sports events such as the upcoming NCAA March Madness basketball tournament, NFL games and his online casino.

He'll even take bets on the last one off the island on Survivor.

Ayre has since moved into music marketing and distribution and is taping a Fox Sports Network "poker lifestyle" series. He's a renowned analyst and consultant in the online gaming industry, owns real estate in Vancouver's desirable Yaletown area and farmland in B.C., and is a licensed pilot and certified scuba diver.

Recent pictures of Bodog events include shots of Ayre with sports icons Mike Ditka and Reggie Jackson, actor Colin Farrell, musicians Bif Naked and Snoop Dogg, and even (oops) O.J. Simpson.

He started the company 10 years ago with \$10,000. By the end of 2005, it was estimated Bodog.com had taken in \$6 billion (U.S.) in wagers.

"Instead of doing things for money, I do things for love," Ayre said in an interview yesterday from San Jose, Costa Rica.

"If you do it out of love, you'll do it a lot better than if you do it for money.

"I never thought I'd make this kind of money — oh, maybe a couple of million — but I've carved out an excellent lifestyle because of this business."

Ayre, who calls himself "heavily single," grew up on a Saskatchewan pig farm, born to what he calls a family of entrepreneurs.

He ascribes his success to marketing — he is, he says, the best marketer in the industry.

"I have the strongest brand in the world in this industry," he says. "There's no secret to it. It's just mainstream marketing, being creative and linking the right values to our brand.

"Everything else is overblown."

But online gaming is not a licence to print money, and most analysts agree it takes a certain savvy and marketing know-how to turn such a site into such a success story.

Money accrues to the house by a commission charged to the bettor, but to make the business truly profitable, it must pay very close attention to the "line," or the odds against one team winning, so as to avoid ending up with big paydayes to the bettors.

Ayre says he makes most of his money from poker and casino gambling.

"It's easy. Everything I do is easy. I've been doing this a long time and helped start the whole industry," he says.

Ayre is one of four Canadian additions to the Forbes billionaire list this year, bringing Canadian membership in such rarefied ranks to 21.

In his magazine cover, Ayre is pictured holding a stack of poker chips beside the headline, Cyber Bookie Calvin Ayre Sticks it to Uncle Sam.

"He has an interesting story and online gaming produced four new billionaires this year," said Forbes spokesperson Meghan Womack.

"Plus it's illegal in the U.S., which adds a twist."

In Canada, Ayre says, governments have maintained a "hands off" approach to online gaming, understanding that a number of Canadians are employed in "back channel" operations in the industry, including a technical services and marketing company that Ayres holds in Vancouver.

The U.S. is more aggressive in dissuading the industry from operating within its borders than Canada, although no Canadian provincial or federal government has ever issued an online gambling licence.

"It would only be illegal to operate in Canada without a licence," says Ayre. "Costa Rica provides me with a very healthy environment in which to operate."

The Canadian billionaires list is dotted with familiar names, including Charles Bronfman, Jean Coutu, Paul Desmarais, Wallace McCain, Ted Rogers, Jim Pattison and Galen Weston.

Publishing magnate Kenneth Thomson and his family top the list of Canucks with bucks, and are listed at ninth-richest in the world, with \$19.6 billion (U.S.). But that's a fraction of the \$50 billion (U.S.) fortune owned by Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who is ranked the world's richest man for the 12th straight year.

The new Canadian additions include:

Robert Miller, 60, of Montreal, president and CEO of Future Electronics and likely the country's most reclusive billionaire.

The family portfolio includes factory outlet malls in Quebec and Florida. He recently gained attention when a published account indicated he'd keep part of his \$3 billion (U.S.) fortune should he ever come out of cryonic suspension, a life-support system in which chemicals are used to cool the body's cells after death.

Murray Edwards, 46, a Calgary oilman and founder of Canadian Natural Resources. Forbes says his ambitious plan to harvest and process the Alberta tar sands, under an oil recovery project named Horizon, could "either multiply his \$1.4 billion (U.S.) net worth or put a very big dent in it."

David Cheriton, a 54-year-old Stanford University professor and computer networks expert, is worth \$1 billion, Forbes says, after providing seed money to a pair of students who founded the search engine Google.

Cheriton, born in British Columbia and raised in Alberta, last year donated \$25 million (Canadian) in Google stock to the University of Waterloo computer science program, where he earned his master's and Ph.D. degrees.

Collectively, Forbes says there are 793 billionaires in the world, up from 691 a year ago.

Together, they are worth \$2.6 trillion (U.S.), up 18 per cent from a year ago.

Almost half of them, 371, live in the U.S., and more live in New York (40) than any other city.

More than half, 452, call themselves self-made, including six of the 78 women on the list.

The youngest billionaire on the list is Hind Hariri, the 22-year-old daughter of Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister assassinated in February 2005.