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Million dollar slot machine winner loses in court

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BILOXI, MS (WLOX) - Imagine playing a slot machine and winning \$1 million. Now try and imagine your disappointment when you're told by the casino, "there's been a mistake."

It happened to a Biloxi woman three years ago. Since her court battle is now over, she's going public with her story, which she shared first with Steve Phillips.

It has been a series of emotional ups and downs for Florida Eash. Just a few days ago, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled she's entitled to just \$8,000 in slot machine winnings, not the \$1 million she's still convinced she's due.

"I felt excited, and thank you to Lord. My God, that's a big thing. I never expected, you know," said Florida Eash, talking outside the casino where she hit the big jackpot.

"This is the picture when I won that million dollars," she said, pointing to an 8x10 color photograph, "I totally believe that I won that \$1 million."

Florida Eash has vivid memories of that winning night exactly three years ago Thursday. She was playing a \$5 slot machine at IP. Suddenly, the top jackpot lines up.

"I felt so great. And I thank you to God, to the Lord. And it said on the plate machine, congratulations Florida, you won \$1 million. See attendants for pay," she said.

Just as suddenly as her dream came true, the bubble burst. The casino claimed the machine was mistakenly programmed as a progressive slot, meaning the actual top jackpot was just \$8,000, not a million.

The dispute over the jackpot first landed before the Mississippi State Gaming Commission, which ruled that Florida Eash was indeed entitled to that \$1 million payout. But the happiness over that ruling soon disappeared when the issue was taken to court.

First a circuit judge sided with the casino, ruling Eash was entitled to \$8,000 only. That ruling was upheld by the Mississippi supreme court last week.

"You get a decision and it's okay, they've sided with you. Then you go to the other side and it's they've appealed it. So, it's back and forth like emotions. It's emotionally draining too," said the winner's daughter, Celeste Eash.

IP released a statement from general manager Jon Lucas, saying, "We are happy about the decision. The monies involved IGT, not IP. They are IGT's slot machines."

"And it's not my fault that I hit the machine and won that jackpot. And they admitted they're the ones that set it up by mistake. Mistake is mistake. You have to pay for it if you make a mistake,"

said Eash.

I talked with Florida Eash's attorney, Paul Newton. He told me she has just two options for further legal appeal: asking the state supreme court for reconsideration, or trying to get the United States Supreme Court to hear the case. No decision has been made yet.



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