

The Intelligent Gambler™

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Number 10, Winter 1998

Publisher's Corner

Chuck Weinstock

About This Issue

About ten years ago ConJelCo was created to design, develop and market blackjack software. That program (*Blackjack Trainer*) was successful. As time went on people approached us (or we approached them) with ideas for additional products for ConJelCo to publish. Other publishers offered us their products to sell to our customers. We liked some of them, so our retail catalog was born. As the years have gone by, we have grown to be recognized as one of the premiere publishers and retailers of books, software, and videos on gambling.

I'd like to think that one of the reasons for this is the newsletter that you are holding. *The Intelligent Gambler* has been bringing you the thoughts of many of the top authors/thinkers on gambling for 10 issues over the last five years. This issue is no exception, with articles by Ian Andersen, Bob Ciaffone, Nolan Dalla, Abdul Jalib, Mason Malmuth, and Arnold Snyder.

ConJelCo on the Internet

ConJelCo has been active on the Internet since its inception. Our World Wide Web site has been providing free information and selling quality products since 1994. We have participated actively in many of the rec.gambling events around the country and, in fact, have been co-organizing BARGE (a summer gathering of over 200 Internet gamblers) for a number of years. Of course our Internet customers already know all of this. With the cost of computing dropping drasti-

cally we are hoping that many of you who have not already done so will have an opportunity to get connected. If you do, please visit us at <http://www.conjelco.com>.

One of the benefits of visiting us there is that you'll find that most items in the catalog are discounted when ordered over the Internet. Among other things this reflects the fact that it costs us less to process Internet orders. Orders that don't come over the Internet are *not* discounted.

As of October 4, 1998 we've changed the Internet prices on most of the items we sell to meet or beat those prices offered by our major on-line competitors. With few exceptions, we doubt you'll find lower Internet prices anywhere.

In Memoriam

As we were putting the finishing touches on this issue of *The Intelligent Gambler*, we were saddened to learn of the passing, due to cancer, of Peter Griffin, 61, in California. Don Schlesinger put it eloquently: "Peter was a mentor to all of us. His legacy will live on in what will forever be the quintessential work on the mathematics of the game: *The Theory of Blackjack*."

In addition to that title (about to be re-released in a new edition), Griffin was the author of *Extra Stuff*—both published by Huntington Press. I only met Professor Griffin once, but I learned quickly that he enjoyed a good Heineken. You might want to hoist a few to his memory.

Mailing List Issues

As you might imagine, *The Intelligent Gambler* is expensive to produce and mail.

While we are happy to send it to people who want to receive it, we would rather not send it to those who simply throw it away.

Although we do what we can to keep our mailing list up-to-date, we receive back 100's of copies as undeliverable. Each one of these returns costs us return postage as well.

All of this is leading up to the following request: please, if you move, make sure you let us know. This will ensure that you receive every issue, and will save us the expense of mailing an issue that is returned.

We are also pruning our mailing list. If you live in the US and we haven't heard from you in the last 30 months, your name will be purged from our list. If you live outside of the US we ask that you confirm that you want to continue to receive *The Intelligent Gambler* every 18 months. As always, there is no need to make a purchase. A simple note asking to remain on the list will do the trick.

Reminder: Except as required by law, ConJelCo will never sell or give

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away your name or any other information about you to another party (other than for purposes of having merchandise you order shipped to you.)

Happy Holidays!

One of the joys of being involved with the Internet gambling community is that, unusual for a mail order company, I have actually met many of my customers. I consider many of you to be my good friends. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish each of you, whether I've met you personally or not, a very happy holiday season.

Examining the Hand Rankings *Mason Malmuth*

In 1976, David Sklansky, a then unknown writer and young gambler, published a small book titled *Hold 'em Poker*. As many of you know, hold 'em has not been the same since. One of the reasons for this is that the text included a device called the *Sklansky Hand Groups*. This was a "ranking of hands" which helped to quantify the game and make it much simpler to understand.

Since this time, these rankings have gone through several changes. This has happened because the structure of the game has changed, and the players in general have become more knowledgeable and aggressive. However, even though this is the case, these rankings are still subject to much debate. For instance, on our forum at www.twoplustwo.com, posters have discussed when ace-nine suited might be a better hand than king-queen off suit, even though the ace-nine suited is ranked lower than king-queen off suit.

I'm now going to reveal a secret. When I play, I don't think in terms of the Sklansky Hand Groups. Neither does David Sklansky. We believe that it is an excellent device for someone new to the game, and if you are not an experienced player these hand groups should be memo-

rized in order for you to become a winning player. However, the best players usually think in terms of the intrinsic value of the hand for any particular situation. The reason for this is that the hands actually move up and down the rankings depending on the number of players in the pot, your position, their position, how aggressive or passive the game is, how tight the blinds are, how well you and/or your opponents play after the flop, and so on. This is why in our book *Hold 'em Poker For Advanced Players* we give many examples where the hands actually change their presumed value.

To illustrate, I want to give two examples of hands which obviously flip-flop in the rankings. One is well known, while the other is fairly obscure.

The first compares jack-ten suited to ace-jack off suit. According to the rankings the suited hand is significantly higher—Group 3 versus Group 4. But suppose you were on the button and the player on your immediate right, who is first in, raises. Now you would prefer the ace-jack, even though we recommend that you reraise with both of these hands. The reason for this is that there are many situations where you will win with an ace high, but not with a jack high.

Now let's compare a pair of fives to eight-six suited. According to the rankings, these hands are about as close as you can get. They are each listed right next to each other in Group 6. Furthermore, let's suppose you are in a game where several players have limped in, and you are on the button. Of course you will play both hands, but which one would you rather have?

The answer is that it depends on how aggressive/passive the game is. If the game is aggressive, you would prefer the pair. Now if you flop your set, you can expect many bets to go in the pot before the action gets to you. If the game is passive, you would prefer the suited connector.

Now when you flop a weak draw, such as a gut-shot, you won't necessarily be bet out of the pot and may still be around if your miracle card comes.

In conclusion, we can see that even though the Sklansky Hand Groups are a wonderful way to quantify the value of your starting hands, they are not set in concrete. As you become more experienced at hold 'em, you will see where it is proper to deviate from standard strategy, and also, where certain hands move up and down the rankings.

Mason Malmuth writes regularly for Poker Digest, Chance and other publications. He is the author and publisher of many of the top books on gambling. See the special "2+2" section of the ConJelCo catalog. In addition Mason participates frequently in the on-line 2+2 Forum at <http://www.twoplustwo.com>.

Why Do People Gamble? *Nolan Dalla*

Of the many writings on gambling and motivation, English author David Spanier probably best addressed the pivotal question as to "why people gamble" in *Inside the Gambler's Mind* (1987). He wrote (emphasis mine):

"I prefer to take the question the other way around. Why do some people *not* gamble? It's such a widespread trait of human conduct that it might be considered *abnormal* not to do it."

Spanier's implication that gambling is a normal part of human desire, is probably irrefutable. But he goes way beyond just that. Spanier's real premise is that "gambling is good for you." That last statement is sure to raise a few eyebrows. Taken at face value, his assertion may seem deceptive, even preposterous to those sequestered from the concealed subtleties of gambling activity. But as we are about to discover, closer examination reveals that (surprise!), Spanier is right.

Indeed, since an overwhelming majority of American adults gamble in some form—including state lotteries, racetracks, casinos, private poker games, office pools, and so forth—misguided researchers should probably spend more time studying why some people *do not* gamble. Perhaps social scientists should focus their scrutiny and critical presumptions on non-gamblers, as the real malcontents of society. Gambling serves as a convenient surrogate for many things we seek in life—a chance of fortune; the sanctuary of occasional escape; interaction with destiny; the lure of excitement; a sense of eternal hope—the list goes on. As a Las Vegas retiree said in a recent television documentary: “Gambling makes me feel alive again!” Every turn of a card and roll of the dice is Day One. It’s Springtime over and over again, a spiritual renewal, a rebirth of opportunity. But gambling’s mesmerizing quality reveals itself while we are waiting, watching, and wondering what the next outcome will be. Never mind that the dream will be shattered at least half the time, by losing. There’s always the next hand, the next game, the next race, or the next pull of the lever. With every wager there is instant reincarnation (so long as the money lasts).

The first studies on gambling behavior established an early precedent for the negative public perception of gamblers, that continues to this day. The worst assault came from Dr. Edmund Bergler in *The Psychology of Gambling* (1958). Bergler introduced his theory that impassioned gamblers are motivated not by the desire to win, but rather by a subconscious desire to punish themselves. Gamblers actually want to lose—or so, Bergler claims. This was academia’s preemptive strike at gambling’s new legitimacy in post-War America—yet, was in fact nothing more than a recycled scholarly extension of Dos-

toevsky’s 19th century literary masterpiece, *The Gambler* (1866). The image of the “degenerate gambler” was later played-out by Hollywood on the big screen in the 1973 film of the same name, and in innumerable film portrayals since then.

Other seminal writings on the subject theorized that, since so much gambling had its roots in urban American ghettos among young immigrants, they concluded that gambling was the natural by-product of idle recreational opportunities and a general lack of optimism. Sort of the *Clockwork Orange* theory taken to yet another extreme—that when young people are denied an outlet of self-expression (economically or socially)—they turn to deviant activities (gangs, crime, drugs, gambling, etc.).

However, with the proliferation of legalized gambling amongst people of all ages and backgrounds, it’s now obvious that those narrow views of gambling and gamblers are both inaccurate, and patently offensive (unless one believes that 80 percent of the American public is either mentally disturbed or deviant). Millions of visitors to Las Vegas and Atlantic City cast votes with their feet, and their dollars, that they aren’t gambling just to “punish themselves.” They gamble for many reasons, most of them legitimate and justifiable. Furthermore, gambling doesn’t necessarily result from a lack of social alternatives. Our boundless cabaret of cable television channels, options in sports and entertainment, and a cornucopia of sex and other permissive behaviors has not stifled the public’s fascination with gambling. To the contrary, it may have fueled it. Gambling is more popular now than ever before.

The purpose of my original question is not so much to delve into the mysteries of the human psyche. My question is meant rhetorically in an effort to introduce a much more puzzling dilemma. Which is the fol-

lowing: Since we have an internal predisposition *to gamble*, why then don’t we gamble in more responsible way? In other words, why is so much gambling done so recklessly? We are able to control our basic human impulses in other areas of life. For example, we would never act so carelessly if we were making monetary judgments about Mutual Funds or our stock portfolios. We make financial decisions based on the information that is available to us, either from the *Wall Street Journal*, *Barron’s*, or from a trusted financial advisor. Yet, in gambling we so often seem to totally abandon rationality and make dreadful decisions, disregarding the basic laws of probability.

It can be said with some justification, that many gamblers are influenced by the intoxicating allure of bright lights and the occasional flair for extravagance. Gambling is not traditionally perceived in terms of “investing,” so much as it is “entertainment.” Casinos take on a similar recreational capacity as do golf courses and tennis courts. It’s a public place to unwind and escape. But this picture is incomplete, for one simple reason. Most golfers strive to shoot par. Tennis players always try to hit the ball across the net. So, every athlete—whether a novice or a professional—plays to win. So, we buy the right equipment. We take lessons. We study the game and follow the professional ranks.

But for several reasons, gambling is so very different. Every gambler expresses a desire to win, but most gamblers do not behave with enough consistency that provides a real opportunity to win. They play the wrong games. They make the wrong bets. They make poor strategic decisions. They practice poor money management. No wonder 98 percent of all gamblers are lifetime losers.

So why don’t gamblers focus on games with positive expected value? Why play games of negative expect-

tation, which simply cannot be beaten? One explanation is the theory of “the lowest common denominator,” and it goes something like this: Take any large group of people, and they will invariably reduce themselves to the lowest common denominator of thought and behavior. People will generally take the path of least resistance. For example, ask two people what they want for dinner—anything in the world—and they might agree on steak and lobster. But ask the same question to a full stadium of people, and the only thing the crowd might agree on for dinner is beans and hot dogs. Which translates into slots as the preeminent social activity inside the casino. Slots require no thought. Slots require no decision-making. Slots require no human interaction. Slots require a small bankroll (Note: I am not diminishing the fine work on slot and video poker probabilities by the late Lenny Frome, Dan Paymar, Bob Dancer, Jazbo Burns, and others—that demonstrates positive expected value is possible under ideal conditions).

Games that require gamblers to make a special effort (call it “work”), are significantly less popular by comparison. Poker, sports betting, and to a lesser degree horse race handicapping are dwarfed by the popularity of slots (inside the casino) and lotteries (outside the casino). Most people will not go to the trouble or try to improve skills (I will examine at least one theory why this is so, in an upcoming *IG* column). So, the vast majority of gamblers end up losing. How appropriate. It's pure economics, plain and simple, in the classic Darwinian mold. Those who work and apply themselves have opportunities to succeed. Those that fail to do so, lose (except in rare cases, such as winning the state lottery or hitting a progressive slot jackpot).

At the *Intelligent Gambler*, and other texts targeted to gamblers, not only do we seek to keep up-to-date

with the latest information, we also strive to educate and inform all gamblers of one thing—winning is possible. There is plenty of good advice and information out there....you simply have to get it, read it, and then finally apply it.

Nolan Dalla is a columnist for Card Player magazine. His writings, frequently on gambling issues, have been published in many newspapers. E-mail: NolanDalla@aol.com

The Finer Points of Play *Abdul Jalib*

The object of poker is to win money, and you do this by making positive “expected value” (EV), which is just the average outcome. Pros frequently do some little thing to catch a bit of extra EV per hour for minimal effort. Each little thing might be worth only pennies per hour, but the pennies add up once you are doing a lot of them.

Spread Your Blinds. Spread out the chips you put in for the blinds. This way the dealer won't toss one of your cards into the stack of chips, causing it to tip over and the hand to be declared a misdeal, which would waste valuable time. Had a pro named David not pointed this out to me, I wonder if I would be wasting time to this day. Also, you should place bets out in the middle of the table, so that the dealer does not have to waste time leaning far over or asking you to push the bets in. The dealer will also greatly appreciate this.

Time Your Breaks. In stud you can leave any time, but in hold'em leaving for a minute usually means missing the blinds. I think it's too costly to make up the blinds after the button, since some of the money is dead. I usually just take a break for a full lap, but if the game is very juicy or if I'm paying time, I may dash out a hand before my under-the-gun hand. In a \$20-\$40 hold'em game, this hand is worth about \$2.25 in a tough game. You can leave a bit earlier if you look at

your first card and it's a card you wouldn't play, like a 6 or less in a tough game. Just push it in slightly and leave before your second card is dealt. This may allow you to get back before the hand is done, or at least before the big blind passes you.

Negotiate to Avoid Revealing Your Cards. Exposing your hand at the end gives away information. Instead, if called, and you have AQ high, first tell your opponent that you have no pair, then if he doesn't turn over his hand, tell him you have ace high, then if he doesn't turn over his hand, you can finally give up and turn it over. Usually your opponent will cooperate by participating in this process. It does consume time, but not much, and I think it's worth it.

Put Maniacs to the Right, Rocks to the Left. You want unpredictable aggressive opponents to your right, so you can know what they are doing before you have to decide on your action. You know what rocks are usually going to do—they will usually fold—so you want them on your left. However, for the seat immediately to your right, you want a very tight and/or passive player in a tight game, so that you don't automatically face a raise when it's folded around to the button. Conversely, if you really fear someone in a tight game, it's better to have them immediately behind you than two spots behind you, so that when you raise on the button you don't so often have to play against that player. (However, it's best to have players you fear on the opposite side of the table, to minimize the number of confrontations.) Seat selection actually is a very important point, but so many ignore it, or choose based on superstition, that I felt I should mention it here in the finer points.

Scoot Your Butt Left. When a seat opens up immediately to your left, scoot your butt into it, everything else being equal. By the end of the night, you may have made a full lap

of the table, which is worth about the amount of the blinds. Many pros go a step further, placing a chip to lock up the seat, and waiting to see who the new player will be, before deciding whether they prefer to be on the left or right of this player.

Look at Your Opponents. When the first two cards are dealt, or the flop, turn, or river card is dealt, you should be looking at your opponents for tells. Sometimes I can put an opponent on an exact hand, like AA or even AJo, before the flop, just based on his tells. More often I get a tell of the general strength of the hand. Even if you rarely get useful information, when you do, it's often extremely valuable.

Look for Klingon Brow Ridges. A very common tell is the scrunching together of the forehead between the eyes after you bet or raise. If someone looks like one of the new klingons, they are probably concerned. You might be able to push them off their hand, but be careful, they are likely thinking of calling you down with a marginal hand, though they feel rather ill about it. A safer response is to value bet or raise with your not so marginal hands. This tell seems especially common among women. It's rarely an act, unlike sighs, shoulder slumping, headshaking, or ttttch sounds, which are acts of weakness meaning they are actually strong.

Wait Until Your Turn to Look at Your Cards. When you get your initial cards, wait until it's your turn to look at them, but have them ready to spread quickly. This prevents others from getting fold/call/raise tells on you before the flop. Of course, conceal your cards while peeking and protect them with a stack of chips once you have made your play, securing them with a hand in the meantime. (Protecting hole cards isn't usually done in stud, but don't let this stop you.) Memorize your hole cards, exactly, to avoid slowing down the game and giving away tells. More generally,

always wait until the opponent before you has given a binding indication of his action before you give any hint of your intention, even if you intend to fold. For example, if an opponent bets, and a second opponent comes out with a huge stack of chips, wait to see if he is calling or raising (or even folding, if the cardroom allows this move) before you move a muscle.

Come Armed for Bear. Bring lots of chips to the table, like two racks. Not only can this allow you to establish an intimidating presence, but also it allows you to sell chips to other players, to help keep the game going and the players gambling chips instead of money. I usually then call for a chip runner to turn the bills back into chips to maintain my chip intimidation factor. If you lose more than a rack, but think you should stay in the game, quietly buy a couple more racks.

Put Your Name on the Transfer List. You might as well put your name on the transfer list, even if you are in a good game now. You never know when your game may suddenly become bad.

Keep Your Chips Racked. If your casino allows it, keep your chips in racks. This allows you to quickly move to a more advantageous seat should one open up.

The thing about such a list is that it can never be complete. There's always one more thing you can do to improve your expected value, and perhaps the above will inspire you to find other ways. Good luck, or more properly, good expected value.

Abdul Jalib is a professional gambler and author who lives in Las Vegas. He is a frequent contributor to the Intelligent Gambler.

On Guises and Disguises
Ian Andersen

The Oxford Dictionary defines a guise as "an outward manner or appearance put on in order to conceal the truth; a pretense." A dis-

guise is defined as "something worn or used to conceal identity." I've dabbled in both.

Guises

My experience with guises is far more extensive than with disguises. The main reason for this is that guises are so much easier to use. A guise is an act I can perform, a personality I can project, a mask I can don at will. I can create a persona (literally: "speaking through a mask"). I can fabricate a name, an education, and a profession whenever and wherever I choose. I can readily select my dress, accessories, accent, choice of words, posture, and carriage. In short, I can put on a variety of acts to "conceal the truth," although we could easily get into a philosophical discussion about what "the truth" means.

I've found that the best place to practice guises is on airplanes (I spend inordinate amounts of time flying). I've got a captive audience in the hapless person sitting next to me, who can't escape until the plane lands. What better place to try on a new guise?

Before boarding the plane, I thoroughly evaluate the details of my guise. I study beforehand, trying to learn as much as possible about whatever new profession I've chosen for myself. I read voraciously, and use what I learn to help create the guise. When I have the opportunity, I ask people who really are in the business I'm studying detailed questions about themselves: what they do, where they're from, where they were raised, and so on, most of which I retain. I am also extremely well traveled, so I've seen a lot of places and cultures, and I often weave these details into the role I'm playing.

The person sitting next to me on the airplane usually asks, "So what do you do?" I'm always ready. Not only with a profession, but with a whole life story starting with my childhood. Maybe I grew up in Singapore

the son of a British World War II pilot. Or maybe I was raised in the Yucatan, the son of a Louisiana anthropologist studying the modern Maya. Or maybe I'm from Florida, son of a land developer who used to take tourists through the Everglades to see the alligators. As for professions, I've been a developer, a farmer, an investment banker, a broker, a sexual therapist (if she's attractive), a travel agent, a money manager, an international corporate lawyer, a professor, a psychiatrist, and an antique dealer, just to name a few. Most of these go over so well that by the end of the flight, fellow passengers often want to use a service I've expounded on.

One wealthy executive wanted me to manage his 401-K retirement plan with a couple of million bucks in it. I'd been telling him that I was a money manager who used a proprietary computer model to generate consistent 20% compounded annual gains. I put him off by saying I wasn't taking on new clients because I was about to retire. Still, he persisted. By the end of the trip he was a bit annoyed that his cajoling hadn't persuaded me to take his account. By noting my temporary traveling companion's expressions, tone of voice, and body language, I can discern whether or not my guise is effective. Interestingly, the only story that my seatmates have a hard time believing is when I tell them I'm a professional gambler, traveling around the world playing blackjack and poker.

"Come on. You're putting me on," they insist. "No one can make a living doing that!"

"No, it's true," I exclaim. "That's really what I do!"

They just shake their heads in disbelief and laugh. Apparently, the only role I am unable to pull off convincingly is the truth. Go figure.

Mind you, I never bilk anyone. The plane is just my venue for honing an image I intend to spring on a casino.

After all, how many people that you meet on an airplane do you ever see again?

When I broach a casino with my story, I'm prepared. I can carry off the role I've chosen just as surely as an actor can perform on a stage. In my diary I record the names I've used, the details I've supplied, the story I've told, and I study my notes each time I return to that casino. I print up business cards in advance, which I'm ready to give to a casino host, pit boss, shift boss, and the like when one hands me his card. For an address I use a mailing service, preferably one that has a street address, rather than a post office box. Many such services are available, including overseas locations. These mailing services often provide telephone answering services and will call, fax, or e-mail messages to you as they come in. I always tell the people at the casino that I don't give out my home phone number because I don't want my wife to know about my gambling and how much I lose, a common stance taken by high rollers.

When I'm in Las Vegas, I buy a first-class round-trip airline ticket from wherever I'm supposed to be from (the city of my mail service). Usually I pick a venue far away from the casino I'm visiting so I can collect full airfare should my playing time so justify, which is generally the case. I pay for the ticket using either cash or a credit card that matches the name I'm using. Las Vegas travel agents are used to dealing in cash. If I were ever asked (I never have been) why I buy my tickets in Las Vegas, I would simply say that I want to be ready to come at a moment's notice. It's easier for me to buy my ticket for my next visit when I have time—like just before leaving town.

When I arrive in Las Vegas, I often forgo the casino limo service, opting for a taxi instead (it's only a 10-minute ride from the airport to the Strip). This way I don't have to tell

VIP services what flight I'm on or where I'm coming from.

When it comes time to have my airfare reimbursed, I always remember to tear off the in-bound leg, which is what the airline would do if I really took the flight, before presenting my ticket. I usually present a ticket in a woman's name as well. After all, I want to extract the full value of the comps to which I'm entitled and airfare is my favorite, especially when I'm getting reimbursed for a pair of round-trip tickets from some distant overseas city. Airline comps are hard dollars. If a host mentions that he hasn't seen my girlfriend around, I confess that I haven't seen much of her either, because she's always out shopping.

So, as you can see, a well-thought-out guise has its rewards. I usually use the same guise for several casinos. I select another guise for the next group, and so on. It's important to remember who you're supposed to be. If you've presented yourself as Stuart Malcolm, don't answer a page for Ian Andersen! You laugh? It happened to a friend of mine. He forgot he was using a different identity, and he actually told the pit boss to get the page for him in another name. At first the pit boss didn't understand, but later he added two and two; his suspicions ultimately led to my friend's demise at this particular watering hole.

Ian Andersen is the author of the classic Turning the Tables on Las Vegas (now out of print). This article is an excerpt from his new book Burning the Tables in Las Vegas a new 300 page hardcover book due from Huntington Press in December. See the catalog for details.

A Tournament Tip

Bob Ciaffone

Special to The Intelligent Gambler

A key concept of tournament play is the idea that a hand has a "point of no return," where the player has committed such a large portion of

his chips that he should simply close his eyes, commit the remainder of his chips to the pot, and hope for the best. Although this is a general concept of poker, it arises far more often in the setting of tournament play than in money-game play, because it is there the blinds and bets can easily be a large portion of your total chips, so I speak of it as primarily as a tip for tournament players.

The concept of hitting a point of no return is easy to understand. Poker is a game where the worse hand has a chance to improve by having additional cards help the hand. Sometimes we are better off sticking it out and hoping to help rather than surrendering. In practice you usually have two chances; either your hand is good, or you get some help. So when you get confronted with a bet or raise, your chip position relative to the pot size may dictate that you play in a committal fashion. Rather than just calling, if you do decide to play, you should put the rest of your money into the pot.

As a simple illustration of committing your money, let me use a hypothetical example. Suppose the game is pot-limit hold'em. You have only a small stack of \$1000 in tournament chips in front of you. An opponent makes a preflop reraise to a total of \$900. You hold AK. It should be obvious that to just call the bet, having the intention of either continuing or folding, depending on the flop, is a faulty strategy. You will flop a pair about a third of the time, yet will make a pair about half the time if you go all-in and look at all five board-cards. If you call the \$900, are not helped by the flop, and subsequently fold, you will be losing all those hands where you would have helped on fourth or fifth street and won. There is about a couple grand in the pot, counting what would be added from the blind money. For only \$100 more, you can look at five cards. Rather than just calling the

\$900 with the intention of calling your last \$100 if the opponent bets the flop, it is considered better technique to put the money in before the flop, so your opponent cannot get away from his hand if you buy help and bet the flop yourself.

In our hypothetical problem, it was easy to see that you should either raise the rest of your remaining chips before the flop or throw your hand away, because the money figures I used were so close to putting you all-in. Now here are a couple of examples from real play that were recently given to me by one of my students. You will see the same principle at work.

My student said, "I was playing in a tournament and had about \$300 worth of chips in front of me. A player raised the pot to \$75. I was in the big blind with 9-9; what should I have done?"

Holding a pocket pair, we must first see if the chip position allows us to try and flop a set. It is over seven to one against this, and a set will lose some pots, so you should never commit more than ten percent of your money to try and turn a set. If you call and try to hit the flop holding 9-9, what type of flop will you be aiming at, if you do not turn a set. An overpair? Hard to achieve, and there is no guarantee of winning if you do get that flop. Only one overcard? No ace or king on the flop? These things are of some help, but why back off and give your opponent with 8-8 or some such holding a chance to win the pot when you both miss? The fact is when you have a pocket pair, if you have to commit more than ten percent of your stack to the pot to see the flop, it is better to take a firm position. Either throw your hand away or move in, but do not make the indecisive play of calling with the hope of getting a good flop, because such a thing is difficult to identify. It is particularly tempting to make the wimpy play of just calling when it is late in the tournament and you are

hoping to survive to achieve a higher place in the money, but don't do it. You can fold, of course, but if you decide to play, go out with your guns blazing, not shelling out large chunks of your money hoping to get a good flop.

His second example was from the late stages of a limit hold'em tournament at an eight-handed table. He had \$15,000 in chips. The blinds were \$200 and \$4000, and the betting limit \$4000-8000. Here is what happened. "I picked up A-K in the big blind. A player opened in middle position with a raise and a player in late position cold-called. Should I call or raise?" I believe that the player is close enough to being all-in that he is going to have to call on the flop even if the boardcards are not helpful. With less than one big bet left (seven grand when a big bet is eight grand), he should reraise, and bet the remainder of his money on the flop. That way, he sees five cards, and not just three. Note that it is the amount of chips that he has left relative to the pot size that required this strategy. The fact that it was thousands of dollars worth of chips is not of consequence, as that changes only the psychology, not the mathematics. With more money, say over twenty grand, it would have been quite reasonable to only call, and hope to help the A-K on the flop, but not in the actual circumstances he faced.

The experienced tournament player is especially aware of these situations where you must either marry your hand or muck it. If you wish to succeed in tournament poker, and especially satellite play, you must be familiar with the concept of a point of no return, and recognize the many situations where such a situation forces a committal decision upon you.

Bob Ciaffone, writes a regular column for Card Player. His books including Improve Your Poker are among ConJelCo's top sellers.

Q: I recently found a used copy of the 1957 classic, *Playing Blackjack to Win*. This is the book written by four mathematicians — Roger Baldwin, Wilbert Cantey, Herbert Maisel, and James McDermott — that contained the first relatively accurate basic strategy for casino blackjack. As an avid follower of the blackjack scene for the past ten years, I was familiar with this book by title and reputation, though I had never before seen a copy. I must tell you I was frankly amazed when I read it. I had no idea how far ahead of its time it was. Not only was the basic strategy nearly perfect, but the chapter on "partial casing" must be recognized as the first valid card counting system ever published, a credit that has always gone to E.O. Thorp.

I don't mean to discredit Thorp for his monumental *Beat the Dealer* (Random House, 1962), but shouldn't we consider honoring Baldwin, Cantey, Maisel and McDermott, whose book came out 5 whole years earlier than Thorp's, as the true fathers of modern card counting? I think if more card counters had actually read this impossible to find classic, these authors would be elevated in the blackjack community to a more prominent stature.

A: It is a shame that this groundbreaking book is not more widely available. I do not know if the publisher, M. Barrows & Co., ever even issued a second printing. The copies of this book that have survived these 40 years are few in number, as the plastic spiral binding and the cheap pulp paper have not held up well through the decades. If you are lucky enough to find an intact copy in a used book store, grab it. Rare book dealers who know the value of this little gem will not let it go cheaply. Expect to pay \$25-\$75 for an intact copy in poor to fair condi-

tion, and quite a bit more for a copy in good to excellent shape. A broken plastic binding is common, as that thin 1950s plastic is very brittle after all these years.

As for your comments on the importance of this book, and its deserved place of honor in the hearts of blackjack players, I must concur. For the single-deck Vegas Strip game the authors analyzed, their basic strategy analysis was devastatingly accurate. That they conducted their research by hand on crude mechanical calculators — what used to be called "adding machines" — is truly remarkable. Their hit/stand strategies, both hard and soft, are 100% accurate, including the recommendations that hard totals of 12 are hit against 2 and 3, and that soft totals of 18 are hit vs. 9 and 10 only.

The only errors in their hard doubling strategy is that they failed to advise doubling down on 8 vs. 5 and 6 — borderline decisions true for single-deck games only. They missed a few more of the soft doubles, but nothing very serious from the perspective of dollar value.

Even on the pair split decisions, they made only 3 errors in their entire chart — erroneously advising that 2s and 3s be split vs. 2, and that 3s also be split vs. 3. These are also close decisions, and in double-after-splits games, are correct plays.

Any player who used their basic strategy today would not be giving up more than a few hundredths of a percent over perfect basic.

As for their "Chapter 10: Using the Exposed Cards to Improve Your Chances," this truly is the first valid card counting system ever published for casino blackjack, some five years prior to Thorp's *Beat the Dealer*. In fact, it could be argued that this counting strategy they advised was actually the first "ten count" strategy, as they provide 16 changes to basic strategy, depending on whether or not various numbers

of the last cards dealt were either ten-valued or "low cards" — which they define as being Aces, 2s, 3s, 4s, and 5s.

But, although they were undeniably the first authors to grasp the concept of a card counting system, and the type of logic that must be employed for it to work, their strategy itself is very crude, and would be unlikely to add much gain to the player. They did not realize that tens and aces were more valuable to the player than were the low cards, so they failed to provide any advice whatsoever on proper betting strategy. Their advised technique for making use of the cards seen, though on the right track, did not even begin to take the advantage available to counters who might be watching for both tens and low cards.

I doubt the value of their strategy changes were worth more than a few tenths of a percent, if that, even in the deeply dealt single-deck games they faced. (They also acknowledged this in their book.) They did the important groundwork for card counting theory, and surely were more responsible than anyone for Thorp's ultimate development of his truly powerful counting strategies, but their "partial casing" system simply wasn't much of a winner.

In any case, I am glad you wrote to me, and jogged me into recognizing the importance of these four long-forgotten researchers, Roger Baldwin, Wilbert Cantey, Herbert Maisel, and James McDermott, who stand as giants in the field of blackjack strategies. They truly were the ones who started it all.

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