

The Intelligent Gambler™

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Publisher's Corner Chuck Weinstock

Welcome to issue number six of *The Intelligent Gambler*. Due to space considerations, I'm going to keep my remarks to a minimum and let the content speak for itself.

I would like to call your attention to two things. First of all, we are about to publish a re-edited edition of Stuart Perry's wonderful *Las Vegas Blackjack Diary*. See the What's New section for details.

As our mailing list has grown, we are still struggling with how to deal with the increased cost of sending out *The Intelligent Gambler*. Beginning with the next issue we are going to prune our mailing list. If we haven't heard from you since 1994, this will be your last issue. If you've ordered from us in the last two years, or have requested to stay on the list during that time period there is no need to do anything. The rest of you should send us a note if you want to stay active.

An Interview with Mason Malmuth Mason Malmuth

Part Two

In January of this year I was fortunate enough to be able to sit down with Mason Malmuth for an extended interview. The subjects were far ranging. Part one appeared in the last issue. Part three will appear in the next issue.

On Tournaments

IG: Do you play tournament's at all? I don't recall hearing of you playing one.

MM: Very rarely. I've played a few in my lifetime, but I've never enjoyed them. Basically the way I see it, the side game players are the ones that win all the money. It seems like the people who hit a tournament or two just shoot it off in the side games. I've seen very few excep-

tions to that. Most of the tournament players don't play the side games very well. It seems to me, the people getting rich are the successful side game players, not the successful tournament players. So basically, I stay in the side games.

IG: Will Espin (Tropicana, Atlantic City) wrote an article recently and has actually said to me privately that he thinks tournaments are bad for poker.

MM: I have to agree with him very strongly there. I think that events like the *World Series of Poker* are great events and are good for poker, but the proliferation of tournaments in general I think is bad for the poker. They take too much money out of the poker economy. They pull too much money into one spot, which means that it often doesn't come back into the poker economy and they burn up players' bank rolls too fast. In general, I think the poker industry would be much better off with a lot less tournaments.

IG: Yet a lot of people enjoy smaller tournaments as a relatively cheap form of entertainment...

MM: People enjoy all sorts of things. I have nothing against tournaments per-se. I never liked having to sit someplace for 7 to 8 hours and leave with nothing and I've always found the side games to be much more profitable.

On How to Become an Expert

IG: Earlier you suggested that to become an expert player you have to read books on poker. Do you have any recommendations?

MM: Obviously I'm going to recommend our own books. I think that they're clearly the best books. If you're new to poker I think David Sklansky's original Hold'em book, which is called *Hold'em Poker* is the place to start. I think our advanced books: *Hold'em Poker for Advanced Players*, *Seven Card Stud for*

Advanced Players and *High-Low Split Poker for Advanced Players*, are by far superior to anything else on the market and David's *Theory of Poker*, we feel is the best poker book ever written.

IG: Would you allow that there could be differences of opinion on how to play and that these differences of opinion might be valid?

MM: No. Generally no. This is actually a very good question. I actually believe that in limit Hold'em, in full games especially when the games are fairly loose, there is a correct way to play. There's no variation to that. Once the game gets short handed particularly and against better players then there's a lot of variation. But generally in the games I play in there's a correct way to play and any other way is incorrect.

IG: So you have an introductory book, for Hold'em and then the advanced book for Hold'em. What about the someone who wants to get into stud? Do you have any recommendation? Your advanced book is certainly the place to go once you've got some experience, but is that the place to start?

MM: Well I think the stud section in Doyle Brunson's *Super System* is fairly good. and our stud book is the best. Essentially I don't see much else out on stud. There's a couple new things that have come out that I haven't looked at yet. I don't see anything else out on stud that I would recommend.

IG: A lot of people like the Percy book. Do you have an opinion on that?

MM: I guess it's all right if you're starting. I mean it's been along time since I've read it. It didn't say a lot of stupid

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things as some of the books say, but I guess it's all right to start with.

IG: Are you working on any more poker books at this point?

MM: I'm putting together *Poker Essays volume II* (now available). I have about four years worth of articles that have been published in the magazines, but I haven't made a book yet. So it will probably come out later this year. And Sklansky and I plan to write a new book. It is tentatively titled *Gambling For a Living* and should be available early next year. We believe that it will quickly become one of the most successful gambling books of all time.

On Blackjack

IG: Let's turn to blackjack for a moment. You prefer poker, but there are a lot of our readers who are blackjack players. Do you have anything you would say to them?

MM: Well, the cuts are very important. Generally, the cuts are more important than the rules.

IG: So penetration is the name of the game?

MM: Yes, penetration is the name of the game. However, there is a problem in the single deck games with the preferential shuffle. A lot of it is unintentional, but it's there. If you're interested in betting serious money you almost have to go to a six deck game where your fluctuations are going to be very, very severe. I just don't think it's as much fun as poker.

IG: Do you play six deck games basically?

MM: Well I have.

IG: What count do you use when you count?

MM: I've used several different counts in my career, but for the six deck games, the simple high-low count like Wong's high-low is probably plenty good. If you were somehow in a deeply dealt single deck game, you might want to use a little more complicated count. Basically in the shoe games you want a count that's effective in betting, more than effective in playing strategy. So a simple plus minus count, that counts the aces as minus one will do the job quite nicely.

IG: So, I gather then you would recommend that somebody who is starting out in blackjack get a copy of Wong's *Professional Blackjack* or....

MM: Actually, I think my favorite book for beginners is Arnold Snyder's *Black Belt in Blackjack*, even though the Zen count is maybe probably a little too complicated for someone new. But all the

counts are just about as good and *Professional Blackjack* is certainly a must read.

IG: The Red Seven isn't bad. It's not as good for shoe games I guess.

MM: Right, but any count, the Zen count, Wong's high-low count. They're all fairly good and they all achieve roughly the same.

IG: Do you have another blackjack book in you at this point?

MM: No. Everything about blackjack is out. The problem in blackjack is that it is not getting better, I believe it's getting worse. There is still money to be made out of it, not quite as much as there used to be. Most of the blackjack players I know right now are struggling, but that may be more of a function of short term luck than actual conditions.

IG: Do you ever do any recreational gambling or is it all serious? By that I mean do you ever play a negative expectation game, just for the hell of it?

MM: Essentially no.

IG: You don't like playing craps once in a while or...

MM: No. I have no interest in that. Basically, if I'm putting money down on something, I'm trying to win some.

IG: Do you ever play video poker, when you have the edge?

MM: Very rarely, I actually have a couple times, but I just don't have much interest in it. It just comes down to the fact, it's not that these things aren't worth doing, I find that my time is better off playing poker.

Mason Malmuth is the author and publisher of numerous books on gambling, and is now offering his consulting services through ConJelCo.

Low-Limit Play at the Higher Limits *Lee Jones*

When I wrote *Winning Low-Limit Hold'em*, I said that many of the techniques in the book were applicable only to (surprisingly enough) low-limit games. My belief and experience were that as you got to 10-20 and 15-30 games, the caliber of play went up, and you needed more sophisticated strategies to win.

T'ain't necessarily so.

Recently, I've been watching and playing in some relatively high limit games, and I've been stunned at how loose and wild the game can be. For example, a couple of months ago, I was watching a game (let's just say that it was at least 30-60) in which a friend of mine was playing. He's a very

good player, and I always enjoy watching him and discussing his play. He said, "Lee, you've got to get into this game." I demurred until I saw a woman make it three bets cold with Q8-off-suit pre-flop. I sat down, endured some wild swings, and cashed out a small (for that game) win.

Consistently, I saw people make inexcusably bad calls, the hallmark of bad play. I saw a lot of bad bets and raises, but it's always harder to fault somebody for giving his opponent an opportunity to fold. This time, I saw people calling two and three bets cold before the flop with hands that were huge dogs to win, or were likely to be heavily dominated.

There were a couple of incidents that reminded me that I was not playing 3-6. In one case, a very wild player raised under the gun, and it was folded to me. I had pocket 8's, and based on her play, I was comfortably in front. Wanting to playing the pot heads-up, I re-raised. It was (as I had hoped) folded back around to her. She stopped, looked at me... "You haven't played a hand in half an hour." and folded. So, even the wilder players may be more attuned to the game around them. And, of course, in almost every one of those big games, there will be one or more sharks looking to feed on the fish.

The moral of the story is this: just because they're playing with different colored chips doesn't mean that you're not capable of participating. A few thoughts before you buy in to the biggest game in the house:

As I and others have discussed, wild loose games have a huge variance, even if you're a winning player. A 30-60 game will add a zero to all your swings, if you're typically a 3-6 player. Be sure your bankroll (and your nerves) can tolerate it.

The chance of you finding a juicy "big" game (let's call that 30-60 and up) without at least one or two strong pro's or semi-pro's is very small. Figure out who those people are and stay out of their way. Also know who the fish are. Most importantly, never forget the adage about not being able to spot the fish in the first half hour.

Don't lose your self-control. You get two cards just like everybody else. If you play better than your opponents, you'll take down the chips, regardless of what color they are.

Lee Jones is the author of our best-selling book Winning Low-Limit Hold'em. He can regularly be found playing poker in the San Francisco Bay area.

Video Poker vs. Regular Poker

Bob Dancer

A friend and I were walking through a casino. He stopped in front of a 10-7 double bonus video poker machine and started to deposit quarters. I commented that I didn't know he played that game. He responded that he played real poker, so surely he could handle this. When I later asked him why he didn't draw to inside straights (correct strategy for this game), he replied that since he wouldn't do that in regular poker, he surely wouldn't do that here!

It hadn't previously occurred to me that the games have much in common. To be sure, they both use quite a bit of similar terminology. I decided to examine exactly how they compare.

Hand rankings are similar. Every video poker game pays more for full houses than for three of a kind, but some pay the same for straights and flushes, and straight flushes are not always worth more than four of a kind. Indeed, in some games, four fours are worth more than four fives.

Royals get a big bonus. In regular poker, a king-high straight flush is very marginally inferior to a royal flush. In most games, either hand would win every pot every time. In video poker, the difference between these hands is huge, especially if a progressive is involved.

There are no bad beats in video poker. If you end up with 4 of a kind, you are going to get paid. You can't lose out to another player getting a straight flush.

There is only one decision point in video poker. Regular poker frequently has several betting rounds, and sometimes several decisions per round. In video poker, you make your one choice before the draw. The draw occurs and the game is over. And every player is in every game until the end.

Bluffing, raising, calling, sandbagging and a variety of other poker strategies have no place in video poker.

Both games include several variations. Video poker includes a variety of draw poker types. Some of these (jacks or better or deuces wild) have direct analogues in real poker (although most poker players would dispute that the deuces wild variety of live poker should be considered "real" poker.) Some others (various types of bonus poker) do not.

Regular poker includes several stud varieties, as well as high-low games, which do not directly compare to video poker types.

In both games, good players vary their strategies considerably as they go from one variation to another.

In video poker, you know at the outset what any hand, such as three of a kind, is worth. In regular poker, three of a kind may or may not be a winner. And it may be very expensive to find out for sure.

In video poker, you know at the outset what any hand will cost. You rarely know this in real poker, unless you or a sole opponent are close to going all in.

A good mathematician will do well at video poker. A good psychologist, who happens to be inscrutable, will do better at regular poker. Social skills are largely unnecessary at video poker.

Video poker games are always available, twenty four hours a day, in a huge number of variations (at least in Las Vegas, Atlantic City and a few other cities). You do not always have enough live players to make up a poker game, and the first game that is made up may not be to your liking. However, live poker games may be found in thousands of cities every night.

Video poker players who only play for progressives above a certain level will have a bit in common with the live poker player waiting for the right "live player" to come along.

"Cheat Sheets" won't do you any good, and are usually illegal, at regular poker. However strategy charts, such as found in books on video poker, can be extremely useful at video poker. And most casinos allow you to use them.

At video poker, helping your neighbor is quite acceptable. (Although many neighbors prefer it if you keep your advice to yourself, thank you.) Collusion of any sort between players in the same poker game is strictly forbidden. This is not to say, of course, that it doesn't happen.

In most live poker games, the "house" has no stake in the game. Usually, the house collects a fee for providing certain services, and the players go after each other. In video poker, the house is the direct opponent of every player. And the players do not play against each other, except in the case of progressive jackpots.

In video poker, usually the size of any hand does not matter. For example, an ace-high flush is worth no more than a 7-high flush. To be sure, in some games a pair of jacks is worth more than a pair of tens, but even in that game, a pair of kings is no more valuable than a pair of jacks. In real poker,

a low two pair might very well lose out to a high two pair.

In regular poker, good players will win most of the time. In video poker, that won't happen. I personally lose about two sessions out of three, even though I never play in a game where I am not the favorite, play virtually perfectly, and overall am a significant winner.

In video poker, you will usually lose during a session if you don't hit one of the top two or three hands. For example, in 25¢ deuces wild (which is worth about \$5.70 per hour, plus slot club benefits), you have less than a 5% chance of being a winner after a three hour session unless you hit 4 deuces or a royal flush. If an expert plays about 600 hands per hour, on average he will hit either 4 deuces or a royal flush approximately once every eight hours. In three hours, he has, overall, about a 40% chance of being plus, and a 60% chance of being minus.

However, his score when he's plus will be higher than when he's minus. Without hitting either jackpot, he will be down, on average, about \$130. If he hits 4 deuces, he'll be up \$120, and if he hits the royal flush (a once every 75 hour joyous occasion), he'll be up \$870.

In regular poker, you very well may be close to even after three hours. In video poker, this is not likely.

At video poker, you can analyze your opponent (the machine) very accurately. After several hundred thousand hands, your expected win (or loss) will be very close to the mathematical expectation—assuming you play perfectly. At live poker, your opponents come in a variety of strengths. And each of these opponents have good days and bad days. And many of these opponents will be making adjustments to their game depending upon results. Your score after several hundred thousand hands is far less predictable.

At live poker, the competition increases with the stakes. The players in a \$2 - \$4 game are generally not nearly as competent as those in the \$100 - \$200 game. Optimal strategy will differ between the games. In video poker this is not true. You can find 5¢ 9-6 jacks or better machines. You can find \$100 9-6 jacks or better machines. The strategy for either game is identical.

You can trust your opponent at video poker, at least if you play in Nevada or New Jersey. State gaming commissions ensure an honest game. Cheating incidents

are very rare. In live poker, there are always players looking for an edge—some without scruples about bending the rules.

Tournaments abound in both games. In both games, tournament strategy differs widely from “normal” strategy.

Bob Dancer is a Las Vegas based video poker professional. He is currently writing a new book, Video Poker for Winners.

Collusion Countermeasures

Nolan Dalla

Several years ago, the world of tournament bridge was rocked by a major scandal. It was learned that a small group of competitors used a cunning arrangement of sophisticated signaling techniques and voice intonations during the bidding stages at the table. This exchange of information gave them a tremendous advantage in tournament competition over opponents. The scandal eventually led to fundamental changes at the top levels of tournament bridge, and specifically in the bidding process. Today, in some cases players use screens and bidding boxes which block their partners from view. Although this may seem an odd and obtrusive procedure, the countermeasure was deemed the only means feasible which would preserve and protect integrity of bridge tournaments.

In poker, teams might also employ various signaling techniques. Some of these methods are very simple. Others are more complex and may be virtually undetectable—even to those witnessing every single move. The two primary motives for partners to use signals are:

Gaining information by signaling key cards: A popular method is to signal hidden cards to the collusion-partner on relevant hands. Using an extreme case as an example; In hold'em if both partners discovered they each hold the same pocket pair (and exchange this information successfully), they both would know there is virtually no way to improve their hands with communal flop cards. A dual fold early would save both individuals money—from calling perhaps through the entire hand. Another example is even more evident in high/low split games (notably stud and Omaha), where one player signals to the other if he is going for the “high” or “low” hand, thus avoiding the possibility that the partners may counterfeit each other.

Prompting a specific betting action to manipulate the size of the pot: This tech-

nique is commonly known as “whipsawing.” If one player holds the absolute nuts in a hand, the obvious goal is to make the pot as large as possible—to win the maximum amount of money. This may be accomplished by signaling to a confederate that all betting activity should be raised until the maximum number of bets have been placed—naturally catching unsuspecting callers in-between, all the way to a big payoff.

There are an assortment of signals partner teams might use. These signals are reminiscent of a baseball coach signaling to a hitter what should be done on the next pitch with convoluted gesticulations. Naturally, in poker these motions are much more subtle. Keeping in mind that signals are usually not so obvious as is suggested here, some common means of communication are:

Hand signals: A semi-known series of signals is conveying an Ace with a scratch to the top of the head; a King by rubbing the eyes; a Queen by touching the nose; a Jack by contact with the mouth; and a Ten by scratching the jaw (moving lower by rank). This would give the affiliate an advantage knowing which cards are out of play. For example, if one player seeks to inform his partner that he folded Q-10 pre-flop, he might touch the nose first, then the chin area. The gesture would seem very natural for someone not involved in the hand. But, the partner picking-up this signal gets an added edge. One other popular hand signaling technique is used occasionally in 7-card stud. When holding on to unexposed cards, if one finger is extended—this signifies one-pair. Two fingers outward may mean two pair. Three fingers extended may symbolize three-of-a-kind. Two hands covering the hole cards might suggest a (straight or flush) draw. Of course, signals are always pre-arranged so only the confederates will perceive them. There are countless others also.

Target placement of a table object: There are almost always cigarettes, drinks, lighters, lucky charms, and assorted items on the poker table. These objects all provide an opportunity for someone to convey information. Taking a drink or puffing on a cigarette may seem like an ordinary occurrence, but is it? Without meaning to suggest player paranoia, these actions may also signify something more sinister. If someone hasn't set a cigarette in the ash-tray all night then suddenly sets it down and a raising war starts, look out.

Key words or phrases: Probably the least common of collusion methods. However, if partners are not in good visible proximity to each other, codewords might be utilized.

There are obvious situations which scream “collusion!” What I look out for are instances where one player has raised or re-raised another (always including at least one other player who is the target) without any apparent justification. In limit poker, two players may insist on capping the betting every round to trap an unsuspecting victim. At the showdown then one player shows the nuts and the other raiser inconspicuously mucks his hand. Countermeasure Number One—That's a hand I want to see! Simply ask the dealer to expose the losing hands. It will usually be obvious if the player was truly justified in raising all along. If the player has absolutely nothing—he is a prime suspect as a cheater. Occasionally there are times when maniacs, drunks, or extreme novices simply don't know what they are doing. But its rather obvious when a player seems to be selective about the hands he plays—then is suddenly raising a re-raising with absolutely nothing. Watch out. A red flag should go up.

Don't worry about slowing up the game or opponents becoming angry when you request to see a dead hand. That's their problem. If they don't like it, simply suggest the game would move along faster if all players would expose all cards at every showdown (also be aware of differing state laws and individual cardroom rules which deal with mandatory exposure of hands—in New Jersey, for example, any player sitting at the table may ask to see a “call” hand at the showdown; However, rules differ from state to state). By accomplishing this, at least part of the collusion arsenal will be neutralized.

If you suspect cheating is going on, what should you do? Unless the colluders are so incompetent you can intercept their signals (which would probably be a enormous waste of time and effort to study anyway), leave the table. If you are socially conscious—as I believe everyone should be in the interest of poker—immediately inform the floor manager of your suspicions away from the table. Insist that action be taken. However, be aware that catching cheaters red-handed is most-likely a hopeless effort. Proving misconduct is next to impossible. In Atlantic City, for example, despite occasional com-

plaints about collusion to management—and an outright brawl on one occasion where the suspected colluder was physically assaulted, there is no record with the Casino Control Commission of anyone being “banned” from any poker room in New Jersey for such activity. In Las Vegas, where countermeasures are more strictly enforced with more experienced poker personnel—thus giving poker players slightly more protection—some partner teams are nevertheless able to operate undetected. The infamous “Black Book” contains the names of cheaters, not colluders—although to those of us who play poker they are one and the same.

The sad truth is there is not much one can do to stop this form of cheating, other than to simply deny colluders the opportunity to get your money. Make sure you do not fall victim. At the poker table there are too many important things going on which deserve your attention. You should not have to contend with worries of being victimized. So, if you suspect it may be happening, the very best course of action is simply to find another game. Inform management of your suspicions. And, if you are bold enough—announce to the entire table what you suspect to make it as uncomfortable as possible for the partner teams to remain in the game and operate freely. Indeed, some things in poker and in life are worth fighting for.

Nolan Dalla writes frequently on gaming issues. His column “Tales From the Felt” regularly appears in Card Player Magazine.

Going For The Big Con By Arnold Snyder

Q.: I’m relatively new to card counting. I discovered I enjoyed this approach to playing blackjack a few months ago. I’ve read about ten books on the subject, and spend many hours per week practicing. I feel I could really make some big money at this game.

I’m fairly well-known in many of the big casinos, as I often make table-limit bets, and sometimes multiple table-limit bets. I’ve been playing this way since about 1980, though until my last couple trips, I’ve never applied any advantageous strategy. I’m always treated very well by the casinos, which is as it should be. They’ve won a bundle of loot from me over the years.

I don’t need the money, but I love the thought of evening the score. I’ve been

careful to maintain my “act” since I started counting cards, which is to say, I haven’t made any radical departures from my normal playing style. They’re used to me spreading my bets widely, so I can get away with murder at the tables, so to speak. I have two questions: One, what would be the most important things I should do to keep the wool over their eyes? And, two, How long can I realistically expect to last until their suspicions are raised? I’d hate to lose my comped casino vacations. It’s not the money, it’s the luxurious treatment I’m afraid would disappear if they found me out.

A.: Right now, you’re in the catbird seat. Any player who has spent twelve years establishing his “act,” prior to making his move, is well-positioned to make a killing. You already know this. As you suspect, however, this card-counting fling could be short-lived. There are many potential pitfalls.

First, anyone who makes frequent, multiple, table-limit bets is going to be watched closely. There will be security personnel analyzing your play, despite the fact that you’ve been losing “bundles of loot” since 1980. If they note that your biggest bets always correspond with high counts, surveillance will increase. If the trend continues, other pit personnel will be notified. You will be secretly hawked until a decision is made on you.

If you’re serious about taking the casinos for a ride, you better be good. You’ll have to learn to camouflage your high count bets into your old wild betting style, without using so much camouflage you negate your advantage. It is essential that you maintain as much as you can the same playing style and attitude you’ve had through the years. You already know this, too.

Ten books is a pretty good start, but you’re going to have to acquire a phenomenal knowledge and “feel” for the game to pull this off at the stakes you’re playing for. You’ll have to learn which “dumb” plays are costly, and which ones look worse than they are. You’ll want to know your precise (dis)advantage from playing basic strategy, and you’ll want to know how much you can affect your expectation by making strategy changes alone. I’d suggest you familiarize yourself with some of the excellent computer simulation software that’s available, so you can run tests of the games you play in, under the conditions you find.

If possible, seek out games where you can come close to breaking even with strategy changes alone. In these games, you should frequently revert to break even play, by ignoring the count for your bet-sizing. Follow your established spreading patterns regardless of the count, until you decide to go in for the kill. Since you can afford the fluctuation, longevity is your main concern. Remember that it’s the betting strategies that card counters use that give them away 99% of the time.

You didn’t mention which ten books you’ve read, so allow me to provide a mandatory list of authors whose work on blackjack you should be aware of (in alphabetical order, not order of importance): Ian Andersen, Julian Braun, Bryce Carlson, Carlson Chambliss (and co-author, Thomas Roginsky), Steve Forte, Peter Griffin, Mason Malmuth, Lawrence Revere, Edward Thorp, Ken Uston, Allan Wilson, Stanford Wong, and Bill Zender. And get a copy of Michael Dalton’s *Blackjack: A Professional Reference*, so that you’re aware of how much you haven’t read.

In the real world, most card counters don’t make it very long. The higher the stakes, the more difficult it is to pull it off. If you do get caught counting cards, and you still want the comps and the luxury treatment, no problem. Take up craps.

Arnold Snyder is the author of Blackbelt in Blackjack and editor of Blackjack Forum magazine, both available through ConJelCo. Write to him c/o RGE Publishing, 414 Santa Clara Ave., Oakland, CA 94610, or E-mail asnyder@rge21.com.

How Many Americans Really Make a Living at Gambling? Mike Caro “America’s Mad Genius”

Why is it that every time I agree to do an interview, the questions are the same? For instance: When was the first time you played poker? Who cares? I mean, let’s be honest—I don’t even remember that first time. I was a little kid for godsakes.

What interviewers should really ask is: What didn’t you know the first time you played poker that would have prevented you from getting kicked in the ass? Truthfully, I don’t remember that, either; but I can speculate.

The first time I played poker, I didn’t know that you weren’t supposed to try to win the pot. I mean, it just seems obvious when you’re a little kid that winning the pot is what poker is all about. Unfortunately,

most casual players bring this little-kid attitude to the tables as adults. If you went to the table the first time knowing that you'll get paid in the long run for making quality decisions, knowing that throwing a hand away and surrendering any chance at the pot actually can put money in your pocket, you'd be successful almost immediately.

What else didn't I know in that first poker game when I was a little kid? Let's see. Oh, I didn't know that anyone actually played poker for a living. I probably thought it was a game of luck, like Old Maid. So, here's the really intelligent question I've never been asked:

How many Americans make their living gambling?

Many millions, if you define gambling as the art of taking chances, including business ventures. But that's not what you mean. You mean games of chance and formal bets on the outcome of events. First, let's qualify this by specifying that not everyone who is money ahead from this sort of gambling is making a living at it. I'll exclude two categories: (1) Those who are currently ahead, but whose results are luck based and who can't expect to win regularly in the future; (2) Those who are skillful enough to win and augment their incomes gambling, but not by enough to make a living from it.

So, now—under that definition, how many American's make their living gambling? Well, wait! Do you we include those that are on the business side of legalized gambling, such as casino owners and even employees? No, we're not talking about them; we'll only count players who make their living beating the casinos, players who make their living beating other players, gamblers who make their living on winning bets on the outcome of events, or gamblers who combine any of those.

Are we ready now? I guess not, because we need to define what a living is. Does it mean not working, but barely scraping enough to get to the tables while begging food and sleeping in the back of a car? No, not in this definition. To qualify, let's say a gambler must make at least half as much as he would if he held the job he would otherwise hold and must make a minimum of \$30,000 a year. There, now—even though we still have things to quibble about—we can work with this definition.

To sum it up, I'm about to tell you how many adult Americans win and have a winning expectation of at least \$30,000 a

year, that sum being at least half of what they could earn if they chose another profession, who are primarily involved in formalized wagers or games of chance (as opposed to taking business risks) and who are not benefiting from the casino's side of it. We will also exclude illegal bookies, considering them to be more like casinos with a built-in edge.

Here's the over/under: 32,813. Don't ask me how we got that number, just some rough estimates here and some wild speculation there. But, I think it's very accurate. In other words, I'm saying there are just as likely to be 32,812 or fewer American gamblers earning a living as there are to be 32,814 or more.

If that sounds like a large number, just keep in mind that it means fewer than one in 5,000 adults makes a living gambling. But let's break this figure down more.

How many of these don't cheat? Answer 19,124 (again a ridiculously exact number arrived at by compromise). Repeating, there are only about 19,124 honest gamblers earning a living in the United States under my previously explained definition. That means, of the estimated 32,813 total gamblers making a living, only 58 percent make that living honestly. The rest have various schemes or angles going for them. This includes some blackjack players who go against the house, although the vast majority of these do so honestly—if you consider counting cards and honest. I do; casino management sometimes doesn't.

But let's take poker. First of all, of that 32,813 gamblers making a living in America, how many are primarily poker players? OK, you want another over/under, here it comes: 18,100. How many are totally honest in the way they exact this living? It's 6,914. That means 62 percent of American poker players making a living are scamming.

Why so high a number of cheats? First, you should know that the figures are probably similar for other card games for which there are a far fewer numbers of professionals. Gin rummy and hearts come to mind. There is also a considerable amount of cheating in games like backgammon, although here more than half the long-term winners cheat.

Since poker is an easy game to beat through skill, why would more players choose to beat it through cheating, instead? Interesting question, but there's a profound and powerful answer. More players do *not* choose to earn a living at

poker by cheating. By far the majority of players capable of earning a living at poker are strongly opposed to cheating. The reason the percentages are as stated is simple: Honest poker players with great skill seldom win when they end up unknowingly in games where unscrupulous poker players with lesser skills cheat. The result is that the original pool of potential players who could make their living at poker is overpopulated with predators.

Why am I telling you this? I'm telling you so that, assuming you're an honest gambler and especially if you're an honest poker player, you can redouble your vigilance. Don't play in games where you worry about being cheated. Even if the game turns out to be totally honest, you will waste valuable mental energy on your concern that you're being scammed. When that happens, you don't have your full mental faculties available to make best-quality strategic decisions.

Remember, we've been talking about gamblers making a living, not gamblers who win. There are many times as many winners as full-time pros, particularly in games like blackjack, poker, gin rummy, bridge, and backgammon.

Some people make enough money gambling to live on if they choose, but they make more money elsewhere—and these were not counted in our definition, either. So, don't be discouraged by the small portion of Americans who make a living gambling. There are really a lot of winners, and if you stick to the games where your decisions matter—rather than games like craps and roulette where the odds are fixed against you—you can be a winner, too. If you're really dedicated, you can even gamble for a living, and then I'll have to increase my over/under to 32,814.

Mike Caro is a regular columnist in Card Player and the author of many publications on gambling. His Pro Poker Tells Video is one of the fastest selling new products in our catalog. You can mail suspected cheating incidents to him at 4535 W. Sahara, Suite 105, Las Vegas, NV 89102 or E-mail him at caro@caro.com .

The Definitive Poker Vocabulary *Michael Wiesenberg*

You sit down for the first time in a lowball game, and hear this from one of the regulars: "I got Union Oil a-b-c pat, and I go seven bets with this Georgy producer. He comes off a rough ten, takes three cards,

and we go four bets after. So naturally he shows me the Brass Brazilians. I mean, three cards and he makes Kansas City.” At the next table you hear: “I got pocket rockets and hit one on the flop, so I cap the bet each time, and this live one is hanging in with a pair of ducks, and whaddya think he ends up with? A backdoor flush, and of course I can’t catch a running pair.”

What is this strange language? Of course, it’s all part of the wonderful demimonde of poker cardrooms. Cardrooms are legal in a large number of states. Many forms of poker are played, and each has its own unique vocabulary. My book, *Poker Talk: A Complete Guide to the Vocabulary of Poker*, is the most complete dictionary of these terms ever assembled, 186 pages containing more than 3000 definitions. Modesty forbids my repeating the kind reviews this book has received from respected poker authorities, so instead I present for your delectation a few samples of colorful terms heard in cardrooms.

a-b-c.(n) In lowball, 3–2–A, as “8–6–a–b–c” for 8–6–3–2–ace.

ace-to-five.(n, adj) The version of lowball draw in which the lowest card is the ace, and straights and flushes have no significance. The best hand is A–2–3–4–5, sometimes called a LOWBALL or a WHEEL. Ace-to-five is also sometimes called CALIFORNIA LOWBALL, particularly when the SEVENS RULE is in effect (but all ace-to-five games do not necessarily have the sevens rule). Also see DEUCE-TO-SEVEN.

backdoor.(v) 1. In hold ‘em (and sometimes seven-card stud), catch two cards to a straight or flush on fourth and fifth street when a player had only three cards to the hand on the flop (or fifth street in seven-card stud). The term often applies to a hand made on the end that the player of the hand wasn’t trying to make, implying that the player had something else to go for on three cards than the straight or flush. For example, a player starts with A♥–8♥, and the flop is A♠–6♣–4♥. The turn is 9♥, and the river J♥, causing the player to *backdoor* a flush. See RUNNER-RUNNER. Sometimes the term refers to making four of a kind when a player had a pair in the hole (and nothing else on the flop). “I had a set the whole way, and he backdoored a straight on me.” 2. (adj) Part of the phrase *backdoor straight* or *backdoor flush*.

backdoor flush.(n phrase*) See BACKDOOR.

Brass Brazilians.(n phrase) The NUTS; usually preceded by *the*.

deuce-to-seven.(n, adj) Lowball in which the lowest card is the deuce, and straights and flushes have significance, that is, unlike ACE-TO-FIVE, they count against a hand. The game is usually played no-limit, and generally for high stakes. Currently it survives principally as one of the contests of several of the Nevada tournaments, notably the *World Series of Poker* and the *Super Bowl of Poker*, although it is sometimes played on the riverboat of the South. This form of lowball is the exact opposite of high poker; hands are ranked exactly opposite (with one exception, A–2–3–4–5, which is not a straight, but the best ace-high hand, one hand worse than K–Q–J–T–8 of mixed suits, and thus ranks lower than any pair), again unlike ace-to-five, which is mainly a game of numbers and trying not to get pairs. In deuce-to-seven, the best hand is 2–3–4–5–7. This game is also known as *deuce-to-seven lowball* and *Kansas City lowball*.

duck.(n) DEUCE.

George.(adj) Good, great. “Sit down. It’s a George game.” Opposite of TOM.

Georgy.(adj) GEORGE, that is good. “Sit down, it’s a Georgy game.”

hidden hand.(n phrase) A good hand that none of the other players knows about because it never has to raise due to other action.

Kansas City.(n phrase) 1. KANSAS CITY LOWBALL. 2. In ace-to-five lowball, the specific hand 7–5–4–3–2, so called because that is the best hand in Kansas City lowball.

Kansas City lowball.(n phrase) DEUCE-TO-SEVEN.

Okie buster.(n phrase) The JOKER.

producer.(n) Someone who brings lots of money to a game and keeps it in circulation. This term is usually used by cardroom management to describe someone they can build a game around, because others like to play with him, or by professionals to describe a rich live one.

runner-runner.(n*) In hold ‘em, flush or straight cards that arrive on the fourth and fifth cards, appearing for someone who, on the flop, had only three to that particular hand. For example, Loose Larry starts with hole cards 2♥ 7♥. The flop is A♠ K♣ 8♥. The J♥ 5♥ that appear on the TURN and RIVER (fifth community card) are called *runner-runner*. Larry probably beats Salty Sam, who started with A♣ A♦ and bet it all the way. Sam

said, “How can I beat this game? I start with pocket rockets, it’s capped before the flop, I flop a set, I’m betting all the way, the live one stays with deuce-seven suited and of course catches runner-runner, while I’m just praying to pair the board, because I know what’s gonna happen when I see two hearts and him hanging on.” Also called PERFECT-PERFECT.

running pair.(n phrase*) In hold ‘em or seven-card stud, a pair made by the appearance of two matching cards in a row that do not match any already on the board. Compare with RUNNER-RUNNER.

Union Oil.(n phrase) 1. Lowball: a 7–6 low hand. 2. High poker: two pair, 7s and 6s. 3. Hold ‘em: 7–6 as one’s first two cards.

Michael Wiesenbergs Aunt Sophie is a regular in Card Player. This article is based upon his new book Poker Talk.

Love Your Pit Critter Abdul Jalib M’hall

You’re sitting at a blackjack table, doing quite nicely thank you, when you feel a tap on your back. You turn around and there is a smiling pit critter who says to you “You’re too good for us sir. You’re welcome to play other games here, but we don’t want your action at blackjack.” You’ve been barred, and that may be a sign that you need to improve your act.

Ian Anderson’s book, *Turning the Tables on Las Vegas* may be the single best book on the act, and the act is the single most important aspect of counting cards. The act is something you must work hard on now that you are public enemy number one in the casinos’ eyes. Today’s topic is simple personal relationships.

Casino personnel, like all other people in the world, are equipped with jerk detectors and can usually recognize people who are jerks. If you are really a jerk at heart, they will know it, and they will treat you rudely as a result and look for any excuse to remove you from their presence.

Assuming you are not radiating negative “vibes”, then a big plus will simply be acting civil. Many gamblers, especially high rollers, are class A jerks, and act like it. I once sat next to a casino-hotel owner who was betting \$2000 a hand—he alternated between insulting and making (unwanted) sexual come-ons to the poor female dealer. Therefore, just acting normal and civil counts a lot towards endearing you to the pit critters’ hearts. Extend the usual courtesies of “please” and “thank you”, don’t

fling cards or yell, don't get angry at anyone, and don't ask for the name of anyone's lawyer so you can sue them. These simple things get you at least half of the "act" benefits.

You can go a step further by establishing personal relationships with the pit critters. This is not as daunting a task as it seems. Again, see Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Viewed tritely, this book is about how to get people to help you using a few tricks at a superficial level. You can get started by sharing your true emotions with the dealer. Only real feelings that the dealer can empathize with will do. Maybe, "My cat died..." or "I just discovered true love..." or whatnot. It has to be real, something from your life today, and you have to let them see inside you.

Once you have opened up to the dealer, you should wait and see if they reciprocate by opening up to you. If they say anything about anything, do not disagree, and take an instant fascination in the subject. If they say, "I'm upset because I bet on the 49'ers", then say, "Yeah, I thought they would beat the Cowboys too...what do you think went wrong?" Even if you have little to no knowledge or interest in the subject, you can just keep asking questions like it's the most important thing to you.

It really works. In one case, I talked about my wife leaving me, and the dealer responded by telling me about her former fake marriage to give a friend U.S. citizenship. A few months later, this dealer became my girlfriend (it *really* works). When I reminded her that I knew about that marriage, she was shocked that she had been so open with me, as it was something she had told very few people.

Basically, people's favorite subject is themselves, and while you may get the ball rolling by talking about yourself, you should quickly switch to making the dealer the center of attention. (A side benefit is that many dealers, even some of the most experienced, make a lot of mistakes when talking, and you can be a bit selective in which mistakes to point out.) You can score big if you make the dealers feel important, because they are typically made to feel like machines or punching bags.

Towards that end, remember names. You've got it easy in most casinos, as their names are plastered right on them. Remember their names anyway, so that you can call them by name from afar or

when they have forgotten their name tags. Many dealers and pit critters remember my name, and it's mighty embarrassing when I forget theirs. People love to hear their own names. Use their names liberally when saying hello and good-bye and getting their attention.

The benefits of good relationships with dealers is getting good games without preferential shuffles or other countermeasures. You can also sometimes get more blatant help, such as two incidents in the last week with two different dealers, who saw the 10 they were about to bust me with and gave it instead to my second hand or to themselves, clearly cheating for me, not against me.

Everything I said about dealers works for higher pit critters too (and for everyone else in life.)

Let's take a look at a couple of relationships I've got with shift managers:

Me: "Hi Susan!"

Manager: "Andy!!!!" [she gives me a close hug (it *really* works)]

Me: "It's been a long time. How have you been?"

Manager: "Oh, I had a rough few months and took a personal leave, but now I'm feeling much better."

Me: "I'm glad things are better. What happened? Job? Boyfriend?"

Manager: "I've got to run since it's really crazy tonight, but come back on a calmer night and I can sit and chat with you about it. Let me know if you need anything."

Me: "Okay, see ya Susan."

And then there is this:

Everyone loses to a dealer blackjack, but wait, there was a dealer misdeal, sort of, not really altering the outcome but raising the possibility that the manager might call the hand dead. I have a large bet out and there are other big bets out on the table. Unknown floor manager comes by and rules that everyone loses, which I have to agree is the proper thing.

Manager1: "Take their money, dealer."

Me: "FRED!" (Fred is the shift manager, a few tables away.)

Manager2: "What's the problem, George?"

Me: "It looks like the dealer misdealt, and he's got blackjack."

Dealer: [explains the situation] Manager2: "Call the round dead. Redeal."

Manager1: "But, but, but..."

Me: "Thanks a lot, Fred."

Manager2: "No problem, George."

Manager1: "But, but, but..."

My memory is a bit hazy on the quantities involved, but I think the shift manager gave me at least \$2000 there, and it wouldn't have happened if I had not built some sort of superficial relationship with him over the years.

The shift manager is by far the most important person to befriend. Do you believe the shift manager with whom I'm on a hugging basis would ever think of barring me?! Baring me, maybe, barring me, never. Maybe if I went in with a 1-50 spread and threatened to sue if they shuffled early, then she would bar me, but then again I just wouldn't do that. If she knew I was counting but I limited myself to a 1-4 spread on their single deck game, she would probably just be happy for me as long as I didn't make her bottom line look bad by making a pig of myself. The shift manager normally has the ultimate decision about whether you get barred or not. Get in good with the shift manager, and you're in good for life at that casino (on that shift.)

Despite all my talk of superficial niceties, it is not really so superficial. It works best if you really do care about the other person. If you really do care about a person and really are nice to them, you are giving them some of the most valuable things in life, and they will appreciate it. It implies that you will sometimes do something nice for someone *without* expecting anything in return.

For example, sometimes I play heads up single or double deck with a shuffle machine. The number of hands I can play per hour this way is pretty staggering, and it's rough on the dealer. If I can tell that the dealer is getting fatigued, perhaps having back pains or something, then I'll tell them to take a five minute stretch break while I go to the restroom, even if I don't have to. It costs me a lot to leave such a table, but if I care for the dealer I'm willing to make some sacrifices without expecting anything in return.

Gifts are a great way for you to personally reward those dealers, managers, and hosts who have helped you most, or whom you would like to help you in the future. Christmas and birthdays are nice "excuses" to give gifts. Remember that tips are usually pooled, so it's best to be stingy on tips, and generous with gifts and *very* generous with the free niceties and relationships. Ian Anderson advises to not leave the upper management out of the gift loop, as otherwise they could get jealous.

Indeed, one shift manager at a casino was pretty pissed that I gave a bottle of champagne to a floor manager—I should have spread a few bottles around.

Call me a wimp if you wish. I'm laughing all the way to the bank. And I'm really bad at remembering names and establishing personal relationships. I'm a math weenie and computer nerd, after all. If I can do it, then surely you can do it too!

Abdul Jalib M'Hall is a professional gambler currently based in California.

Blackjack Trainer 3.0

Paul Crumley

ConJelCo is happy to announce that Blackjack Trainer 3.0 for Windows is in beta test and we expect that it will be available by about February 1997. Blackjack Trainer 3.0 for Macintosh will follow. Current registered users of Blackjack Trainer will receive upgrade information as soon as we are certain of its release date. Purchasers of Blackjack Trainer for Windows 2.0 after 10/1/96 will be able to upgrade for a modest shipping and handling charge, with proof of purchase date.

This version of Blackjack Trainer incorporates many of your requests along with our own ideas. Space precludes us from listing all of the changes, but here is a sample.

Play and Drill Exercises: Performance information is kept making it possible to review strategy mistakes to create drills that focus on trouble areas in your play. Response time is tracked to help estimate your performance in casino conditions.

Interrupt and save your place then complete an exercise at a later time. Profit, high and low bankroll, and variance results can be exported for import to other programs or for printing.

Simulation: Better control of bet size is available. Shuffles can be forced to simulate Wonging. Strategy errors can be simulated allowing the estimation of their effect on your EV. Multiple small sessions can be simulated to better understand how stop limits or "risk of ruin" concepts effect your profit. Statistical information is tracked to monitor bankroll fluctuations, expected profit, the effects of strategy errors and casino rules on your profit. Simulations can be interrupted and resumed at a later time. Results can be exported for use with other programs or printing.

User Interface Improvements: The basic structure of Blackjack Trainer has been enhanced rather than redesigned. Interface changes provide a more consistent and

convenient way to control the simulator and practice your skills. Shortcuts are available for more functions and provide a consistent way to use the strategy tables, alter betting and use the drill exercises.

What's the Same: Blackjack Trainer continues to be a tool for the serious blackjack player. The focus remains on substance over flash. A key goal is to excellent simulator performance. By taking advantage of new performance enhancements in computer systems and allowing more control of simulations, you can explore more playing and betting strategies and collect better performance statistics.

By allowing user comments and suggestions to guide the selection of new facilities ConJelCo has strived to extend Blackjack Trainer in ways that will help most users without altering the elements of Blackjack Trainer that work well.

System Requirements: Windows 3.1 or Windows95, 2 MBytes of disk space, 386 or newer Processor

What's New?

Chuck Weinstock

Las Vegas Blackjack Diary. ConJelCo will soon be publishing a re-edited edition of Stuart Perry's wonderful *Las Vegas Blackjack Diary*. This book follows the true-life adventures of a mid-stakes card counter as he attempts to ply his trade in Las Vegas. The book has attracted excellent reviews. Don Schlesinger says that "this is a book not to be missed by anyone on the blackjack scene." Michael Dalton calls it an "outstanding book you will find hard not to finish in one sitting." *Las Vegas Blackjack Diary* will retail for \$19.95 and should be ready to ship to customers by the end of January. Through the later of January 31, 1997 or the day the book is ready to ship you can purchase this book for \$17.95 plus shipping.

Poker Chips. We now offer ten gram clay casino quality chips. These are the same "hat and cane" chips used by many casinos. The chips come custom embossed on both sides and are available in nearly 60 colors. Chips are 55¢ each or 65¢ each with edge spotting. Minimum order 250 chips. Chip cases are also available. Contact ConJelCo for ordering information.

Consulting Services. As a ConJelCo customer you can receive written expert answers to your questions from your choice of experts David Sklansky or Mason Malmuth for the introductory price of \$30.00 per question.

Send us a clearly written, succinct question indicating which of David Sklansky or Mason Malmuth should answer your question. Include your name, address, phone number, and payment information. Your written answer will come via return mail from ConJelCo.

David Sklansky or Mason Malmuth will answer your questions to the best of their ability. At their sole discretion they may decide not to answer a question, in which case there will be no charge. More complex questions which require longer amounts of time may require a higher charge. You will be notified before your credit card is charged.

You explicitly give permission for David Sklansky and Mason Malmuth to use your question in their writings. All answers are © by their author and remain their property.

The preciseness of your question will help determine how the answer applies to your situation. Neither David Sklansky, Mason Malmuth, nor ConJelCo guarantee that applying the answers provided will improve your game or make you a winner. We specifically disclaim liability for your use of the information, including all consequential damages.

Other Items. Masque's *World Series of Poker Adventure Deluxe Casino Pack* will be available for the Macintosh around the time you see this. The *New Gambler's Bible* by Arthur S. Reber is perhaps the best of the current crop of books of gambling in general. The *Card Player Digest* is compendium of the best articles from the *Card Player* since 1988. *Poker Talk* by Michael Wiesenbergs is a compendium of poker terminology, both commonplace and obscure. The *1995 World Series of Poker* video takes you live to the action at Binion's Horseshoe. *Fool Proof* is the new way to learn how to play Texas Hold'em, billed as a thirty-day plan to Hold'em success. Jazbo Burns has created "perfect" *play strategy cards* for Atlantic City video poker. Dan Paymar has compiled articles from past issues of his *Video Poker Times* newsletter into *The Best of Video Poker Times*. *Knock-Out Blackjack* by Olaf Vancura and Ken Fuchs is a hot new book on blackjack which introduces the Knock-Out count. *Knock-Out Blackjack Workshop* is companion software to make learning the new count easy. Finally, Karel Janecek's *Statistical Blackjack Analyzer* is a new full featured high-speed blackjack simulator.