

# The Intelligent Gambler™

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## Publisher's Corner

Chuck Weinstock

Welcome to the seventh issue *The Intelligent Gambler*. Whether your game is poker, craps, blackjack, video poker, or handicapping, this issue has something for you.

Mason Malmuth starts off answering the question "Which game is best for a serious player: seven-card stud or hold'em?" The answer might surprise you.

Ken Elliott which discusses the "Put" bet in craps. Arnold Snyder wonders if it's legal to think in casinos, while Bob Dancer's article asks if it is worth it to learn how to play video poker perfectly?

*Card Player* regular Lou Krieger makes his IG debut discussing six keys to becoming a better poker player. And Abdul Jalib M'hall discusses camouflage in blackjack.

We also have excerpts from two new books: *No-Limit* by John L. Smith, and *Gambling for a Living* by David Sklansky and Mason Malmuth.

### 1997 World Series of Poker

Our Internet coverage of the World Series of Poker was much more extensive than in previous years thanks to yeoman's effort by Tom Sims. Tom record the play-by-play for each of the final tables. If you haven't had a chance to look at the results of Tom's effort, you might want to take the time to do so at URL <http://www.conjelco.com/wsop/>.

Stu Ungar was the winner of the \$10,000 buy-in, championship event. This is the third time that Stu has won it.

Several IG readers played in events. Team ConJelCo (myself and Nolan Dalla) busted out about halfway through the Press Invitational, which was eventually won by Stuart Reuben, co-author (with Bob Ciaffone) of the new book *Pot-Limit and No-Limit Poker*.

## Blackjack Trainer

Oops! Although we thought it would be available by now, version 3.0 of our popular Blackjack Trainer is not yet ready. I expect that we'll be able to announce availability in the next issue of *The Intelligent Gambler*. We're sorry we jumped the gun and will try not to do so in the future.

### Distribution of this Issue

As an experiment to cut costs we are switching to Internet distribution of this issue of *The Intelligent Gambler*. Those customers who we believe have access to the Internet are being sent a post card telling them that the issue is available, and where to get it. (See <http://www.conjelco.com/ig.html> if you have access and did not get the post card.) Internet customers (along with those of you without Internet access) will still have the option of getting IG through the mail.

There are two key advantages to receiving the Internet version. The first is that it will be available over the Internet the day that the hard copy goes to the printer. Those receiving it through the mail will see it as much as a month after those on the Internet. The second reason is that, because we are not space limited, we may sometimes be able to expand on stories in the Internet version.

If you received this issue through the mail and would just as soon read it online, please contact us at [orders@conjelco.com](mailto:orders@conjelco.com). Conversely, let us know if you are reading this on the Internet and would like a hard copy.

Regular readers will have noticed that this issue of *The Intelligent Gambler* is arriving a little later than usual. We try to publish on a May/November schedule but this year the coverage of the World Series of Poker put us weeks behind getting this issue out to you. We hope that you find it worth the wait.

## Stud or Hold'em?

Mason Malmuth

IG: You're a new player and you have decided to become fairly serious about poker. So should you try to concentrate on seven-card stud or hold'em poker?

MM: The answer is fairly complicated and it's actually an interesting question. First, you need to realize that in certain areas of the country and certain card rooms you don't have a choice. Specifically, if you lived in the San Diego area, near San Jose, up in Washington, or probably in some areas throughout Mississippi where the river boats are, you essential have to play hold'em. On the other hand if you are in Las Vegas, Los Angeles, or on the East Coast - Atlantic City and Connecticut, you have a choice.

Let's try to look at that. We'll look at three different situations. So I can organize my thoughts a little bit, lets say you have a bank roll to play middle limit games. We can use \$20-\$40 as a model game.

I believe that if all things are equal, the expert \$20-\$40 stud player can actually win a little bit more than the expert \$20-\$40 hold'em player. The reason for that is that there is more information available to the player in stud. It's not that there are five betting rounds versus four betting rounds, it is that there are more up cards and also the fact that depending on the situation stud hands tend to change value more than hold'em hands. So this allows the stud experts to win a little bit more money than the hold'em experts. Again, this assumes that everything is equal.

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But when I say that everything is equal, I mean that the caliber of your competition is the about the same. However, what I see in the cards rooms in the west that offer both games, the hold'em games right now seem to be a little bit better. It seems like more new players who are playing poorly are coming into hold'em than into stud.

The one exception to this I think would be maybe the Commerce Club in California. The stud games there seem to be just as good as the hold'em games. I'm not sure if this also holds true at the other super clubs in LA. I'm not there enough to know.

On the East Coast I don't know whether the hold'em games are better or not, but since stud is more predominant out there it probably doesn't matter. But anyway I would say it's a very close decision if you are a middle limit player.

Now lets suppose you're a small limit player. You only have the bank roll to play at the small limits. Now the choice is clearly hold'em and there is a reason for this. It is simply that small limit stud is not stud, its actually a different game. Real stud essentially begins at the \$15-\$30 level. The reason for that is at the \$15-\$30 level the ante is now large enough that you begin to play stud correctly. What that means is that you're constantly evaluating and re-evaluating your hands, and trying to knock people out. At small limit stud, because the ante is so small, it becomes more of a trap game which isn't the way stud is normally played.

I know a lot of your readers probably play small limit stud and I see questions from players on the Internet who play small limit stud, and they probably won't like hearing this, but the reality is they're not playing seven-card stud. They're playing a game that looks like seven-card stud, but it really doesn't require seven stud skills. And since most small limit players want to become successful and play higher they should be playing hold'em.

You might say that at hold'em the small limit games play a lot differently from the higher limits in the sense that a lot of small limit games have many players playing too many hands and going too far with their hands. But the reality is that even when that's the case you still essentially use the same concepts to make your decisions. It's just that these concepts lead you to make completely different decisions.

A simple example of this would be: "When do you play small pairs in an early

position?" Well, if you're in a game where a lot of people are playing too many hands and going too far with their hands you certainly want to play all small pairs, even up front. If you're in a game where that's not the case you don't play them. So you're using the same concept to make that decision. It's just in the higher limit game where the play might be tighter, you would play your hand differently. In this example you would throw it away as opposed to playing it. In small limit stud you use a different set of concepts to make your decision. So if you're a small limit player I would recommend that you play hold'em and not play stud.

Now suppose you have the bank roll to play much higher limits, well a very interesting thing happens in poker in general. For poker to be successful you need a proper balance of luck and skill. The one thing that clearly happens as you move up in limits is the regular players get better. This is because it's usually the successful players who move up. But live ones tend to be live ones and tourists tend to be tourists and what this means is that at high limit stud (and let's use \$75-\$150 as a model game) you have some of the best poker players in the world sitting at these tables and yet they're up against the same kind of live ones and tourists who play in the lower-limit games.

So why don't they wipe out these players? Well the reality, I believe, is if you take the best \$75-\$150 stud players and you put them in the \$15-\$30 limits the \$15-\$30 limits would just simply disappear because these people play so well.

But yet the \$75-\$150 games seem to thrive. Well there is a reason for this, the reason is simply that the ante is proportionally larger at \$75-\$150. At \$15-\$30 stud you have a \$2 ante, at \$75-\$150 you have a \$15 dollar ante which is the equivalent of having a \$3 dollar ante at \$15-\$30 stud. And essentially what it does is it takes these super great players and handicaps them and that helps keep the balance of luck and skill intact.

Now the best players at \$75-\$150 stud obviously do quite well. The best players at high limit hold'em don't do very well because they wipe out their opposition so fast that the games don't thrive.

Right now here in Las Vegas and Los Angeles there are some fairly good \$40-\$80 games. The \$40-\$80 game here in Las Vegas is sporadically good, the \$40-\$80

game in LA seems to be fairly good on a consistent basis. And I know there are other big hold'em games here and there at times, but generally, when you get above that limit at hold'em the game either just doesn't last, or when it is spread it is just not very good.

The stud high limit games are consistently good on a day in and day out basis. And I believe it's because the balance of luck and skill is kept intact by the progressively higher ante. So if you're interested in playing high limit poker, the answer is you want to be a stud player. If you're interested in playing middle limit poker, it's either hold'em or it's a close decision depending on where your card room is located. And if you're interested in playing low limit poker, I would recommend you play hold'em.

IG: I have a couple of questions as a follow on to that. The first is if mid-limit stud had a proportionally higher ante, then it would play identical to high limit stud. Is that one of the things to take away from this?

MM: Well the answer to that is yes and no. It would play identical to high limit stud providing the best \$15-\$30 limit stud players were as skilled as the high limit stud players, but they're not. At the \$15-\$30 game you still make a fair amount of profit by playing a big pair against a smaller pair. It's still not correct to automatically play smaller pairs in high limit stud, but because of the larger ante, it's frequently right for the smaller pair to play, especially if there is some chance the person representing the bigger pair doesn't have it.

So the emphasis in higher limit stud is more on play later in the hand than it is on play earlier in the hand even though third street is still the most important decision. And that's one area these really great players excel at. So I guess the answer is probably not. If they went to the same ante structure at \$15-\$30 as they did at \$75-\$150 the game would become too much luck oriented because the best players just aren't good enough.

IG: Is there a way that the low limit stud game could be changed to make it less of a crap shoot?

MM: The low limit stud game is not a crap shoot. It's essentially the opposite of that. It's a game of trapping. It's a game of getting a good hand and trapping the tourist who will play anything. So the way you would change that is you would add an ante to it, but then again to me real stud

begins at \$15-\$30. \$10-\$20 and below the ante is not large enough for many of the real stud concepts to come into play.

*Mason Malmuth is a regular contributor to the Intelligent Gambler. An excerpt from his new book, Gambling for a Living, can be found later in this issue.*

### Making a "Put" Bet Ken Elliott

Several casinos in Atlantic City, and elsewhere offer a bet known as a "put" bet. A put bet is placing a base bet on a number and taking a certain number of "odds" on that bet, without having to have the shooter roll that number to get the base bet out there (as you do with a come bet). For instance, I could "put" the 6 for \$5 + \$25 odds (which is what you'd tell the dealer, assuming that 5x odds were allowed on put bets), and if a 6 rolled before a 7 I'd get paid 1:1 on the \$5 and 6:5 on my odds.

additionally you "get" to go through the come box. I use that phrase because going through the come box is actually something to your advantage (there are 8 "instant winners" and only 4 "instant losers"), which reduces the house edge on that base bet once it gets up to a come point. This is why the put bet is never better than a corresponding come bet, although as I mentioned above, you don't get to "pick" your numbers with come bets the same way you do with place or put bets.

There are, however, some circumstances when the put bet *is* better than a corresponding place (buy) bet. In order to reach that, you have to get to a point where the amount of odds you're allowed to take offsets your disadvantage on that base bet. This point is delineated by shading in the table above: for the 4 and 10 it's at 6x odds, 5,9 at 4x odds, and 6,8 at 5x odds.

Odds	4 and 10			5 and 9			6 and 8		
	Put	Come	Buy	Put	Come	Buy	Put	Come	Buy
1x	16.6%	.848%	4.67%	10%	.848%	4.0%	4.54%	.848%	1.52%
2x	11.1%	.606%	4.67%	6.6.7%	.606%	4.0%	3.03%	.606%	1.52%
5x	5.56%	.326%	4.67%	3.33%	.326%	4.0%	1.52%	.362%	1.52%
7x	4.16%	.250%	4.67%	2.5%	.250%	4.0%	1.14%	.250%	1.52%
10x	3.03%	.184%	4.67%	1.82%	.184%	4.0%	.826%	.184%	1.52%

People seem to like this bet for a number of reasons. Being able to get "true odds" on the odds portion of the wager seems to offset the even-money disadvantage of the base bet, making it seem better than a corresponding place or buy bet. Others like the fact that they get to "pick" their number with a put bet where, with a come bet, they have to go through the come box and the number has to "hit twice" (this is actually a myth; after the bet is made, the number only has to hit once. It doesn't help you if you've got a favorite number you like to bet, though) in order to pay off.

So is a put bet better than a come or place bet on the same number? The answer is—it depends. The table compares a put bet (p.c.-wise) with the place bets (buy for the 4 and 10, since that what everyone does anyway because the p.c. for a 4,10 place bet is outrageous) and come bets. The numbers in the table represent the house p.c. for each of the bets. As you can see, the p.c. on the put bet will change according to the amount of odds you're allowed to take because the house is paying "true odds" on that portion of your bet, so they're making all of their money on your base bet. However, you can also see that the come bet has the same property and

To wrap up the discussion, then, if you normally make come bets there's no advantage in switching to put bets. However, if you normally make large place bets, the put bet (if offered) may give you more bang for your buck. If the casino doesn't offer at least 5x odds on the put bet, though, it looks like you'll be better off staying away from it.

*Ken Elliott's CrapSim Professional is the most complete simulation of casino craps available today.*

### Only at Vegas World John L. Smith

*The following is an excerpt from John Smith's new book No-Limit: The Rise and Fall of Bob Stupak and Las Vegas' Stratosphere Tower. ©1997, Huntington Press.* With a casino set smack on the edge of a rough neighborhood along a section of Las Vegas Boulevard that no one but Stupak called the Strip, the vicar of Vegas World was forced to constantly promote his place, face, and games. He touted himself as a gutsy gambling innovator. Early advertisements for Vegas World showed a caricature of Stupak shouting the incredible gambling deals available only at his casino. The ads called attention to his

sense of humor as well as his hustler's heart.

INTRODUCING POLISH ROULETTE!  
WE LOSE MONEY ON EVERY SPIN, BUT WE HOPE TO MAKE IT UP IN VOLUME.  
NO ZEROS

Las Vegas casinos have seldom let the truth get in the way of a good sales pitch, and Stupak's strategy was part of the great tradition.

BLACKJACK AS YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED IT BEFORE!

SEE THE DEALER'S HOLE CARD  
PLAY DOUBLE EXPOSURE "21"  
BOTH DEALER'S CARDS  
DEALT FACE UP!

Stupak's newfangled blackjack seemed so easy to play, it was hard to imagine how anyone could lose.

"How often have you wished you knew the dealer's hole card?" the ad asked. "How

often have you had a 13, 14, or 15 and hit and busted when the dealer had a 10-count card turned up? Then the dealer turned over a 5 or 6, hit it, and busted too. You could have won if you had known his hole card.

"Now, for the first time you can play 21 and see both of the dealer's cards. Both dealer's cards are dealt face up. You know exactly what the dealer has before you decide what to do yourself. Stand, hit, double, split, etc. It's all new! It's fun, and it's only at Vegas World!"

The newspaper ad was marred by some graffiti next to Stupak's image that read, "He's Polish." Someone in the newspaper ad department had attempted to play a practical joke on Stupak, who initially was peeved but quickly grew to incorporate it into the act.

"I said, 'Well, geez, this is great. It looks like it just ties in with the game, given its personalized Stupak way, you know.' So from that time on, for the next few years, everything I ever did had Bob Stupak with little black hearts saying: 'He's Polish,' with the 's' backwards.

"And I was always considered a maverick with these special games, so one day

somebody wrote something in the paper and they referred to me as the Polish Maverick, putting the two things together. I sort of liked that handle, too. And I used that for a few years.

“Double Exposure was an immediate success. Every day broke a record from the previous days. Then I started advertising on billboards, in the in-flight magazines-in every place that I could legally advertise the game. After two years, I just had an absolute marvelous run. No other major casinos put it in.”

The advertisement, of course, failed to mention that the trade-off for viewing the dealer’s hole card was that pushes, or ties, went to the house instead of the usual return of the wager to the player, but that was a minor detail the player would accept after he had placed his bets and taken his chances. In addition, a player’s natural two-card 21 won even money, instead of the industry-wide 3-to-2, and players were not allowed to double down or split cards. Double Exposure 21 played as it was at Vegas World gave the house a .5-percent edge-which was about the same as the usual advantage cooked into the game through regular house rules-but only if the player played Double Exposure basic strategy flawlessly. A player with a looser strategy faced even steeper odds, and almost everyone who tried this new game made mistakes. Despite the obvious disadvantages, blackjack fans flocked to Vegas World for the opportunity to look at the dealer’s cards.

Double Exposure lured the players through the door and the wonders of Vegas World did the rest.

Stupak’s Experto 21 game, in which a single deck was dealt down to the last card, gave Vegas World a 2.3 percent advantage over basic-strategy players, but the ploy was successful in attracting card counters as well as the curious.

By counting the cards, or keeping a weighted average of the ratio of high cards to low cards that have been dealt, the skilled player improves his odds of beating the house as the deck diminishes. The tradeoff in Experto: a blackjack, which normally pays 3-to-2, pays even money.

Experto 21 was an honest game, if not exactly a square deal for the average player. The uninitiated would be attracted to a single deck dealt all the way through and might not realize that the even-money adjustment for blackjack put even the

experienced basic-strategy player at a minimum 2.3 percent disadvantage. Standard single-deck 21 deals to a nearly flat house advantage.

It’s something California card counter Alan Brown was thinking about as he took a seat at the Experto table and began working the deck. Brown, a U.S. Department of Defense engineer, had been making weekend runs to Las Vegas as a serious blackjack player for a little more than a year when he stumbled upon Stupak’s intriguing proposition.

Playing with an uninterrupted deck is every counter’s dream, but he proceeded cautiously. Even after only a year of visiting Las Vegas, Brown was well aware of Bob Stupak’s reputation.

He approached the floorman, who explained that the game had only been open a few days. Most players, a superstitious lot, were spooked by it.

Brown’s hesitancy was based on math, not mysticism; he was well aware of the impact of the even-money payoffs on naturals. The lone player at the table, he began playing \$25 a hand. As the deck diminished, and the situation warranted, he bumped his bets up to \$100.

“That doesn’t seem like a lot of money today, but back then playing \$100 a hand was serious money,” Brown recalled. “As a card counter, you always want to get deep in the deck. That’s where you get your advantage. The impression I had of Stupak was that he often did this kind of gimmicky stuff to attract customers. Jumping into a game where you’re right off the bat losing 2.3 percent, you’ve got to make it up somewhere.”

So he counted down the deck until he was certain of the make-up of the final cards, then spread his wagers to the maximum allowed-and began to win.

“The next thing I know, I look over and Bob is sitting right next to me,” Brown said. “He said, ‘Hi, I’m Bob Stupak.’”

“We shook hands. He had the softest hands I’ve ever felt, like he’d never done a day’s work in his life.”

Stupak was intrigued by the counter, who had begun piling up chips.

“He sat there with me all day. He left the table occasionally to go to his office or take a phone call, but he came back and watched me play. He was just fascinated by the game.”

After Brown had accumulated approximately \$3,000, Stupak’s curiosity turned

to playful inquiry. It wasn’t the money that bothered him; it was the mechanics of the game he was attempting to straighten out. “Do you think you can beat this game?” Stupak asked.

“I’m not sure, Bob,” Brown answered. “But I think so.”

“He was trying to find out how good I was, but more than that he was trying to find out about the game. Because of all the conversation and interest, I assumed I was the first good player to come in and try it. It’s unusual for a casino owner to come down and sit for that length of time with a player. He was really very cordial, not intimidating at all.”

He also implored Brown to return the next day. When Brown returned, he jumped back in and gradually lost more than \$2,000 back to the house. He walked with \$800, and Stupak eventually reduced the betting spread to a 3-to-1 ratio.

*John L. Smith is the lead columnist for Nevada’s largest newspaper, the Las Vegas Review Journal. He is also the author of Running Scared, the unauthorized biography of Steve Wynn.*

### **Is It Legal to Think in Casinos?** *Arnold Snyder*

If you’re the type of person who lets the word out among your friends and acquaintances that you are a serious blackjack player—one of those notorious “card counters”—you may have noticed that quite a number of people, upon discovering this character flaw of yours, will cock their heads and say, with a disapproving grimace, “Oh... Is that legal?”

In the twenty years that I’ve been a card counter—writing about the game for seventeen of them—I have been asked this question at least a hundred times. It still flusters me.

My immediate response, which is always something on the line of, “Of course, it’s legal! Card counting is just thinking while you’re playing. How can it be illegal to think?” is usually met with something on the line of, “Oh... The casinos let you do that?”

This always steams me, the suggestion that I must first get “permission” from the casinos to think while I play. But I usually stammer something like, “Well, if they know you’re counting the cards while you play, they’ll throw you out... But it’s not illegal to count cards.”

“I see...” they say, obviously not seeing anything.

With most people, this is the end of the conversation. A handful of intrepid souls will want to probe deeper into this curious avocation of mine, and I’ll find myself knowledgeably discussing the innkeepers’ right to refuse service to anyone. I’ll expound on how the trespassing laws are utilized in Nevada to eliminate card counters from the blackjack tables, as opposed to New Jersey—where innkeepers’ rights don’t extend to the blackjack tables, so that the Atlantic City casinos routinely have card counters arrested for “creating disturbances,” so that the local trespassing laws may be applied.

From here, the conversation inevitably turns to the extraordinary surveillance methods the casinos typically use to identify players as card counters, and the extraordinary methods card counters resort to in order to hide their identities, and their level of skill, from the casinos.

Recently, an hour or so into such a conversation, the woman I was talking with said in an exasperated voice, “Why didn’t you just admit it in the first place: card counting is illegal!”

“It’s not illegal,” I insisted. “This is America! They can’t make it illegal to think!”

“Who are you kidding?” she asked in all seriousness. “You admit that you have to hide it from the casinos, and that once they know you can do it, they put your picture in a ‘mug book’ that gets circulated to the other casinos, so that you have to wear a disguise and get fake I.D. if you want to keep playing. But, if they see through your disguise, they can have you arrested for trespassing. So, obviously, the police are on the casinos’ side, as are the courts. And you’re saying it’s not illegal? You’re like a cat burglar trying to convince someone it’s not illegal to break-and-enter, provided you don’t get caught.”

“It’s not the same thing at all!” I protested. “A burglar is stealing someone’s property. A card counter is following all the rules of the game, as set by the casino, just like any other player at the table. He’s not stealing anything.”

She thought about this for a moment, then said. “Obviously, there’s one rule you’re breaking.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“You’re not allowed to think while you play,” she said matter-of-factly.

Unfortunately, matter-of-factly, she’s right

*Arnold Snyder publishes Blackjack Forum magazine, a quarterly journal for professional gamblers. He has recently founded the “Counter Surveillance Network” to fight the underhanded and illegal casino surveillance techniques. See the Blackjack Forum website at [www.rge21.com](http://www.rge21.com) for more information.*

## **Six Keys to Becoming a Better Poker Player**

*Lou Krieger*

Do you want to become a better poker player? Read on. Here are six things you can take to heart.

**Know Your Numbers:** If you don’t learn, understand, and use poker’s mathematical parameters, you can’t expect to win much in the long run. If you flop a four flush in hold’em, and don’t know what your chances are of making a flush, how will you ever know whether calling, raising, or folding is a play with a positive expectation? Playing with positive expectations is the essence of winning poker, and it’s no more complicated than recognizing situations that would show a profit if the same scenario could be rerun time and again.

Since poker has a large element of short-term luck, it doesn’t matter whether any single effort is successful. What does matter is knowing when a positive expectation is associated with a given play, then making it. Imagine you’re faced with a \$20 call into a \$100 pot, but the odds against making your hand are only 3:1. That’s a positive expectation. Repeated 100 times, you’d expect to lose \$20 on 75 of those occasions, for a loss of \$1500, but on 25 occasions, you’ll win \$100, for a total of \$2500. Your net win of \$1000 (\$2500 - \$1500) is what’s important—not whether you won or lost on any particular hand. Divide your \$1000 win by the 100 times this situation occurred, and you’ll see that in the long run, each correct decision was worth \$10 to you.

Want to learn more about poker mathematics? Read my three-part series in *Card Player*, Volume 10, Numbers 2, 3, and 4; or Mike Petriv’s *Hold’em’s Odds Book*; David Sklansky’s *Getting the Best of It*; or Mason Malmuth’s *Gambling Theory and Other Topics*.

**Know Your Opponents:** How many times have you made a strategic move that’s doomed to fail because you chose the wrong opponent? Have you ever tried to run a bluff against a veritable calling station? We all know it won’t work, but far

too often we do it in spite of our better judgment.

If mathematics was the only skill required for winning, the best players would all be mathematicians—and they’re not. Knowing your opponents is also critical. Observe their actions at the table. Analyze their decisions and the choices they make. Are they in every hand? Do they raise with hands that don’t warrant it? Are they rock-tight? It’s easy to get a read on most players within a half hour. The best time to do this is when you’re not in a hand. If you find yourself waiting for a game, observe your opponents-to-be, so you can adjust and temper your game strategies to their play before sitting down at the table.

**Keep Your Ego Out of the Game:** Never, never let your ego dominate your play. Someone put a bad-beat on you? So what! It’s anything but personal, even if he looked you right in the eye and laughed like a loon while he gathered in your chips. The minute you decide to “...get him,” you’re sure to miss other opportunities and squander some chips chasing him down. If the old adage, “Living well is the best revenge” holds water, then playing well—and walking away with a few racks of chips is a giant step in that direction.

**Keep Records—Even When It Hurts:** If you don’t keep records how will you know if you’re winning or losing in the long run? Every player who fails to keep records deceives himself. When asked, most players say they’re life-long winners. But we both know that’s not true. Ask players about their records. If they don’t assiduously record wins and losses, they’re seeing only what they want to—and it’s not a true picture.

While few things are more painful than recording a big loss in your notebook, records are critical, since the human mind is blessed with an endless capacity for self-deception.

**Choose the Best Game:** Much as we’d like to believe otherwise, the truth is this: Most of our winnings come from opponents’ stupidity, not the excellence of our play. Choose the game with the weakest opponents. A game full of weak players who call too often but are reluctant to raise with strong hands will do fine. After all, if you can’t beat players who call too much, who can you beat?

**Commit to Excellence:** Want to be a great poker player? Commit to greatness. Declare your excellence tonight, starting

with the next hand you play. Visualize yourself as the greatest poker player ever – and act accordingly. It does not take long to make changes. It takes forever to maintain change, but changes of the most dramatic, fundamental and far-reaching sorts, can be had instantly and made today.

You can reach excellence in a heartbeat, and you can do it today. If you want to be a winning, excellent player, go ahead and do it. It takes no time at all to achieve change, but it will take forever to maintain it. It's that simple. Really.

*Lou Krieger is the author of Hold'em Excellence and a regular columnist for Card Player. This is his first appearance in the Intelligent Gambler.*

### House Quinellas

*David Sklansky and Mason Malmuth*

*The following excerpt is from the new book Gambling for a Living by David Sklansky and Mason Malmuth, ©1997, Two Plus Two Publishing.*

Many of the race books in Nevada, even those that are parimutuel in general, will offer some bets that they book themselves. One of these is known as the quinella bet. It is simply a bet that a particular two horses will finish first and second in a race but their order of finish relative to each other does not matter.

There are a few tracks that offer this bet themselves on a parimutuel basis, but most don't. If a particular race does include a parimutuel quinella there is usually no house quinella offered. (The reason we say usually is that there is one race book that we know of that will give you the higher of the two payoffs if there was in fact a track quinella. Needless to say, this is a very nice deal. If you are betting quinellas and you know of a race book that offers this option you should certainly be doing your quinella betting there.) Parimutuel quinellas can be a good bet if you are a good handicapper or see a discrepancy in the quinella pool. But when there are house quinellas offered you can occasionally find truly great bets.

To see how this occurs you must understand the way that house quinellas are calculated in Nevada. What the books do is take the win price of the winner, multiply it times the place price of the second place horse and divide by 2. This is the quinella payoff for a \$2 bet.

Here's an example. Suppose the horse that finishes first pays \$5.60 to win and the horse that comes in second pays \$3.00 to

place. Then the house quinella will pay \$8.40.

In general, this method of calculation will result in a payoff that gives the house a nice advantage. However, there is a situation where house quinellas can be highly advantageous to the player. To show you why we will look at an extreme case. Imagine that there are two horses in a ten-horse race that are almost dead equal but are far, far above the rest of the horses in the race. (A good example was Sunday Silence and Easy Goer. An even better example was Affirmed and Alydar.) In this case, a win bet on either of these two horses would pay about even money or less. You might find them both 4-to-5. Because of the almost certainty of them coming in first and second, the winning horse will pay about \$3.60 and the place price of the second horse could be as little as \$2.10. This will produce a house quinella of \$3.80. But the quinella truly should pay only about \$2.20 because there are no other horses that can compete with either of these horses in this race.

So in this situation you are getting approximately even money on something that could be as much as a 1-to-10 favorite. However, for the quinella bet to have a nice edge the situation doesn't have to be this extreme. The general rule is that if there are two horses that are quite a bit better than the third horse and approximately equal to each other, the house quinella "if they will accept it" is advantageous, and you need to know almost nothing about the horses except their odds.

It would be helpful if you were a handicapper and were able to see that this is in fact a race where these two horses deserve their odds. But even if you don't have any handicapping skills and you just automatically bet every quinella where both horses were 8-to-5 or less you will have an edge. In addition, if there is a race where there are three horses at 5-to-2 or less and you bet all three combinations that are available, you will have a small edge. (We will leave the math to those readers who are so inclined.)

Now if you are a handicapper, you can extend the envelope. It might be possible to find a few more good quinella bets that take advantage of this syndrome as long as you bet two horses that are relatively short prices. However, once the odds of the horses go significantly higher than 8-to-5, it is no longer an automatic bet. When you like two horses you may be better off bet-

ting an exacta in both directions. When the horses odds get above what we recommend, house quinellas are not usually worth messing with.

(One exception occurs where you see a horse significantly underbet in the place pool. It may work out that the best way to take advantage of this is by betting it with other horses in a house quinella rather than by simply betting it to place. This is especially true if your place bet would be a large one at a parimutuel book. Place prices are discussed in the next section.)

### Is It Worth It to Play Perfectly?

*Bob Dancer*

You have the charts in this book which will allow you to play standard Deuces Wild at virtually a 100% level. Most of the items in the charts will stick in your memory if you are a regular player, but there are some charts that only a masochist would memorize. Dedicated players might bring the charts with them. Is it worth it to use them?

Let's assume that you are playing \$1.00 Deuces Wild at the Fiesta. Playing this game at 600 hands per hour is worth about \$20.00 during that hour. That is worth a little more than 30¢ per minute.

Let's say you are dealt  $K\spadesuit Q\heartsuit 9\diamondsuit 7\clubsuit 8\clubsuit$ . The general rule (which you will have memorized if you play much at all) is to pitch all five cards because of the 9 penalty card. But you know there are some exceptions, and can't remember if this is one of them.

If a chart is handy, and you are generally familiar with it, it might take you 15 seconds to look up how to play a particular hand. That "lookup" has cost you 8¢ in lost revenue. The chart will indeed tell you to hold KQ on this hand. Holding KQ instead of pitching all five cards is worth about half a cent.

"Wasting" 8¢ to make a play which gains you half-a-cent clearly does not make economic sense. And much of the time your lookup will cost the same 8¢ but will result the same play you would have made anyway.

But this isn't an entire waste. The information gained from many of these lookups will remain with you. You will find yourself memorizing these hands. Then you will gain your half-cents without having to go through the looking up process.

For those players who play deuces every day, if their memory is good they will have

even these complicated charts down quickly. For players like this, it makes a lot of sense to go through this learning curve. Spend some 8¢ lookups today for a nice return of many more half-cents down the road.

For occasional deuces players, forget these fine points. The memory-process will take much longer because you will forget between lookups, and you don't play enough to cash in on the points you did remember.

### The Not-So-Fine Points

Looking up the "obscure" points might be optional, but knowing the strategy on the main page shouldn't be. Take 2 A♣ K♣ 3♥ 4♥. It is over 5¢ better just play the 2, even though all other authors recommend 2AK. This is part of the core knowledge you should know, and it is expensive not to do so.

What if you don't want to work that hard? What if you want to play at a profitable level, but \$12 an hour is okay, so why work any harder than you have to? I can't fault that feeling, if that is what you believe. Obviously, it's your money, time and energy, so you decide what your priorities are. For me personally, if I can earn an extra few dollars by concentrating, I'll concentrate.

### Concentrating Takes Time

I am implying that once you learn the correct strategy, you will be able to recall it almost instantly. That isn't true, at least not for most people.

Even if you aren't looking up the correct play on a chart, you are still doing a mental lookup. The more complicated strategy you are trying to master, the more things you have to consider, and the slower you will play.

I have a friend who plays who believes that he can play 800 hands an hour at about the 100.6% level. He believes that if he slows down to play at the 100.7% level, he will only get 700 hands per hour. And to get 100.75%, he might only get 600 hands per hour. He argues that playing the first way gains him \$24 an hour (.6% edge x \$5 per hand x 800 hands per hour), playing the second way gains him \$24.50 (.7% x \$5 x 700), and playing the third way gains him \$22.50 an hour (.75% x \$5 x 600).

These numbers are very close, especially since his accuracy and hands per hour are pretty rough estimates anyway. He's happier playing faster and less accurately. Playing very fast is more fun for him than

is concentrating. I would rather play slower and more accurately. I know that my speed will increase as I get better. As I get faster, my profit will increase.

### Perfect Play on Progressives

The previous examples assume that the machines will be there all day. The \$20+ per hour opportunity will be around tomorrow too (we hope). But for many progressives this is patently untrue.

A progressive might be worth \$30+ an hour right now, at 600 hands per hour, but every machine is being pounded. Here if we look up several hands, our total number of hands will be reduced. On progressives, instead of 800 hands per hour, we might have 1000 hands period. If we reduce our speed to 400 hands per hour, we would be giving up 500 total hands because as soon as the progressive is hit, school's out. Everybody packs up and goes elsewhere.

Using the above numbers, each hand we play is worth 5¢ (\$30 per hour divided by 600 hands). Losing 500 hands will cost us \$25 in expected value. Playing approximately will cost us much less.

Many good players briefly glance at a chart before the start of a progressive play. They generally know many of the breakpoints at the current meter level. And then they put the chart aside and play like hell. After a few hours if the royal hasn't been hit and the meter has risen appreciably, it makes sense to look at the chart again for a minute or two at the new level. But once they've looked again, the chart goes down and the speed goes up again.

Every pro has his own rough measure of how much speed is worth on a progressive. A successful one I know uses a rule of thumb of 15%. He feels that if the errors made from fast play cost him 15% or less of the maximum possible, he is doing all right. If he estimates that he is making more mistakes than that (because he is unfamiliar with playing progressives on this particular type of game), then he'll slow down and look up enough hands until his accuracy improves. He has played enough progressives that he has memorized quite a few breakpoint numbers for every game. He plays very fast without looking at charts, and does quite well.

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## Camouflage Blackjack

*Abdul Jalib M'hall*

The most important part of winning blackjack, especially for high stakes is camouflage to protect you from sky critters. Sky critters are a problem, but they are a problem that can be addressed, rather than running away and labelling the problem unsolvable.

To be alert to danger from sky critters, you should keep you heat antennae tuned to heat on the ground. Ringing phones, scowling pit critters, attention, or a spooky absence of pit critters are all early warning signs. They are also business as usual when nothing is wrong, and tuning your heat antennae is just something you have to do with experience. Don't be too paranoid, nor too careless.

Some casinos are slick enough to bar from the sky, without the ground critters ever having a clue anything is wrong. You therefore should assume the sky is *always* watching, and you should take steps to deceive the sky critters. All the nice guy stuff I discussed in my last article doesn't protect you from sky critters, who can't usually hear a word you say (though if the shift manager is your friend, you are probably safe.) So this article will be different than the prior ones.

### Step one: visual camouflage.

Dress the part. Look at what people who are betting the same amount as you are wearing and mimic them. For black action, you may be surprised to find the clothes high rollers wear are often not all that nice. They often wear work-out suits, but note that they are *designer* work-out suits. Also note that despite the work-out suit, they are wearing an expensive watch and expensive jewelry—these are important accessories for counters. There are many things to wear instead of a work-out suit—maybe a really expensive white shirt, slacks, sports jacket, and really expensive shoes. Or even simply an expensive designer t-shirt, jeans, and expensive shoes. Whatever you wear, the watch and jewelry is a must, and it must be the real thing, solid gold.

Once a young white male came to my table betting black but wearing a cheap Timex. I had him nailed as a counter before he so much as placed a bet, and the bets quickly confirmed my suspicions. I tortured the little nerd mercilessly by quizzing him on his profession, making him uncomfortable and unable to keep count.

He left, which was my goal, since playing with another counter at the table is a good way to get barred.

The most important fashion accessory of all is a Hot Babe™. Counters are stereotypically alone. Break the stereotype, have a babe. As much as you might like girls with great legs, pretty faces, and nice butts, the sky will see none of that clearly. As Bryce Carlson suggests in *Blackjack for Blood*, apparently, a girl with bodacious ta-tas is what will keep the sky critters entertained. They won't want to bar you—that would mean the girl goes too. If she is really incredible, they won't even be able to concentrate enough to count the deck down on you.

I apologize profusely for the American females reading this, who may be offended. My only excuse is that I was recently gone from America for a long time and that I am a creature of logic. It is profitable to have a well-endowed woman at your side, so why not do it? It is valid advice for women counters as well, as women look strange alone, even stranger if with a man who is not betting as much as she; women travel in packs, so do it to look normal.

And *any* woman is better than no woman at all by your side.

### Step two: strategy camouflage

Proper insurance, 16 vs. 10, soft 18 versus 9/10/A, and surrender strategy is what critters look for to identify potential counters. Here are some things you can do, which will cost you money, but which may keep you from being barred:

- do not insure stiffs, unless the count is very high
- take even money on blackjack vs. ace, unless the count is very low
- never split tens
- misplay soft 18 vs. A by standing when not too expensive, and always hide soft 18 hands if playing face down; stand soft 18 vs. 9/10 only if experiencing critical heat
- stand 16 vs. 10, except when it costs too much to do so
- put out a very small bet and do something that looks really dumb, like splitting 3's versus 10 (preferably with no peeking, and lose only one bet to dealer natural.)

You can also do some things that make you money and provide cover:

extreme count stands and surrenders, e.g. 16 vs. 7, look dumb even though they are correct

- extreme count doubles (or nondoubles) can look dumb while being correct
- hitting two aces in very negative counts can look dumb while being correct
- if you play two hands, you have two excuses to take insurance

### Step three: betting camouflage

This is by far the most difficult subject, and also the one I'm least willing to write about, so just realize that you have to think carefully about this, because I'm not going to be willing or able to tell you everything you need to know.

There are a number of heuristics for betting limitations:

- never more than double your bet, except as a parlay
- try not to increase to a max bet after a loss, unless mock-steaming
- try not to decrease your bet after a win
- try not to plunge your bet, but occasional quartering after a loss can be okay

Mix your colors, so that when you increase your bet, the size of your chip stack decreases, and vice versa. Sky critters look only at the size of the chip stacks. Do not bet big towers of chips no matter what the count. Keep the stacks to 5 chips or less.

By far the most important concept is the "casino critters can only count one round" concept. Therefore, do not move your bet in the direction the running count went last round; move it opposite if not too costly. Yet, try to keep your bets consistent with the true count. This is especially important when there was just a huge change in the running count. Here is an example for single deck:

Round	Running	True	Bet
1	0	0	2
2	6	6.4	1
3	3	3.5	2
4	1	2.0	4
5	6	13.0	4

In this case, none of the four betting changes were consistent with the running count change, and three of them were *against*, and yet overall the betting is still pretty consistent with the true count. It would probably be okay to leave the 2 units the same on the second round, by the way, unless experiencing severe heat.

Note the 2 unit bet off the top; it's good to mix up the initial bet.

Use a count other than high-low, because the critters use high-low almost exclusively. Use a big bankroll and pound some of the marginal count situations, where your count says you have only a small advantage—because the critters' high-low may be negative at this point!

As for appropriate betting spreads, a very very weak 1-4 or a not so weak 1-3 spread is okay on single deck, whereas a weak 1-6 or not so weak 1-5 is okay on double deck. These spreads will usually be tolerated, if done appropriately, and the profit per hour is nontrivial.

The timing of your bets is also important. Suppose the count is -52, you have busted, and the dealer still has a couple of player hands to turn over. What the hell are you waiting for? What cards could you see that would possibly impact your bet? Get that minimum bet out. You can do the same for big bets in max counts. You can infer the hole cards of players in order to get those bets out before you see their cards. If your bet turns out to be a little wrong by the time you see all the cards, well, so be it, you can afford quite a bit of deviations from the optimal bets when playing single and double deck. Just get those big bets out in big counts and you'll be fine.

### Step four: obey the limits.

Don't normally play for more than half an hour, so prevent sky critters getting a lock on your play. Don't win too much in one session, shift, or trip at the same casino. Don't do too many suspicious things before packing your bags—for example, if you have bet big into two good decks, hit soft 18 vs. 10, and insured a stiff, well, you have already more than worn out your welcome for that session.

### Summary

You must assume the sky is always watching and never listening. Dress the part, have a girl with you, and make some playing and strategy sacrifices, and you'll be well on your way to getting away with it, only rarely experiencing countermeasures or getting barred.

I am just a simple nomadic shepherd, so all this advice must be taken with a big grain of salt.

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