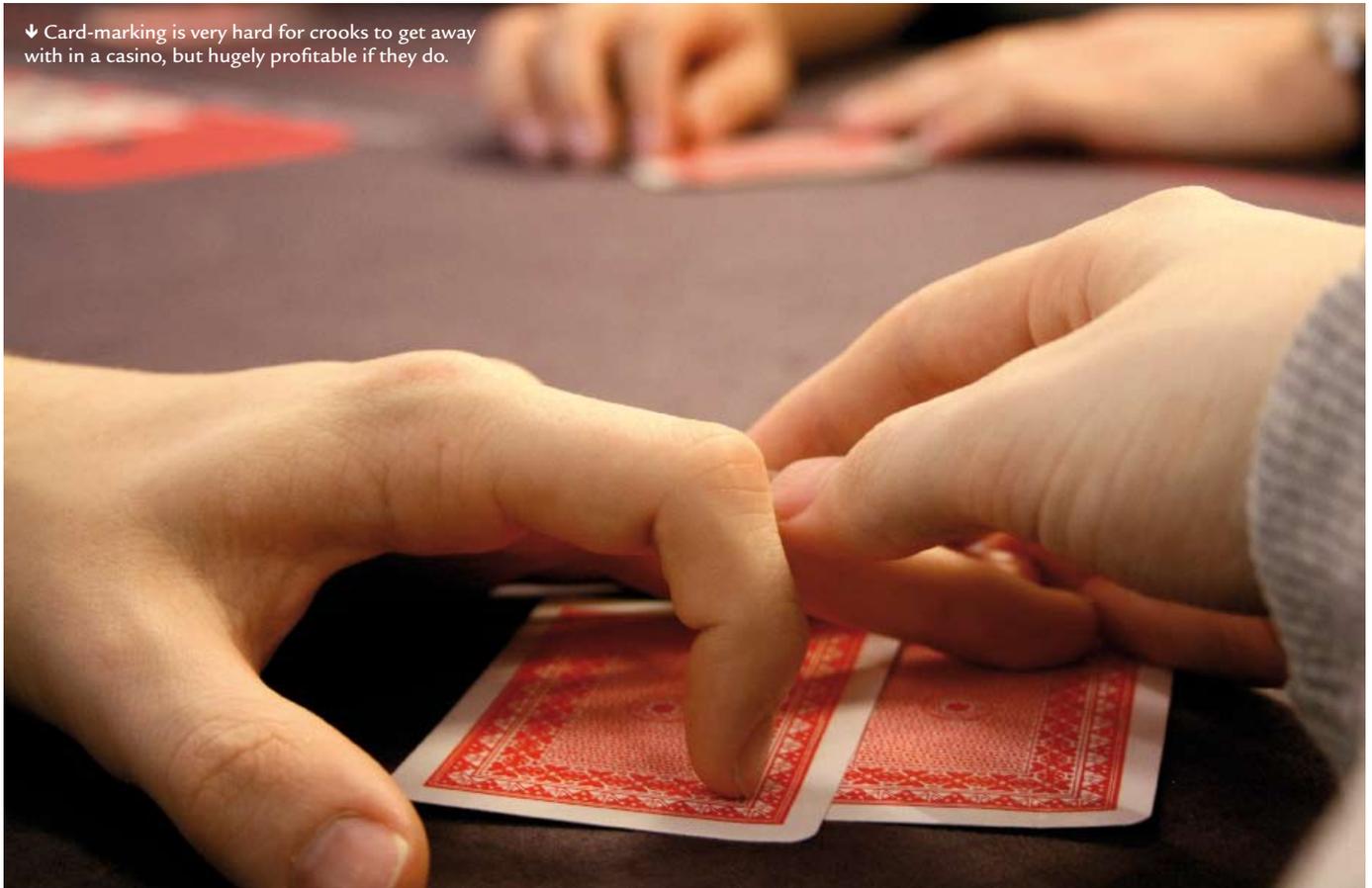


↓ Card-marking is very hard for crooks to get away with in a casino, but hugely profitable if they do.



Mark Of Shame

It's an oldie but a goodie, and Richard Marcus finds out that card-marking may be the big comeback threat in today's poker rooms.

As recently as last November, Connecticut State Police arrested a man identified as Sholem Weisner for marking cards at the Mohegan Sun Casino while playing Texas hold 'em in its poker room. Upon searching his hotel room, they found \$55,000 in cash, which means Weisner was doing quite well marking the cards, or he was just in the habit of carrying a more than ample bankroll in case something other than getting busted went wrong. This has been the first major case of card-marking that I've heard about in a while. But what does it mean? Is it that card-marking is on the decline or are the operations employing it getting better and more sophisticated and therefore less likely to be detected?

SMEAR TACTICS

First, let's take a look at this recent Connecticut case. Apparently, Weisner was already well known to both the Mohegan Sun's and the neighboring giant casino Foxwoods' security and surveillance staffs. Evidently

he'd been booted from both, as recently as September 2006 from the Mohegan Sun, and although I don't know which type of card-marking method he employed (probably card-bending or marking the backs of cards with his fingernails), I don't believe he was top-rate. But regardless of Weisner's case, let's examine what the reality of marking cards is in today's modern poker rooms.

Let's dismiss the rinky-dink marking scams usually carried out by amateur and desperate cheaters. Attempts such as nail-marking (which should be caught onto quickly in spite of whatever success Weisner may have had with it), bending, corner crimping, punching "blisters" with hidden pin-like devices, sanding cards with sandpaper glued to fingertips and applying Vaseline—which actually does happen—more often than not earn their perpetrators very small profits before they find themselves in handcuffs.

The next group of what I'll call intermediate card-markers, those using a better method known as 'playing the paint', can be a significant threat where players, dealers and

floor supervisors aren't very observant. But beware—sometimes the two latter groups may be in on the scam with one or more of the players. However, for the sake of argument, I'm assuming no help to the cheaters is coming from inside. Playing the paint is applying a daub to the backs of cards. It's a pastelike substance made from various formulas and often has the feel of women's lip rouge or eye shadow. The best of these card-markers use what is known as juice dust. The main advantage of the dust is that, unlike regular daub, it won't dull the finish of the cards and will work on both the paper and plastic types. Those who use juice dust also go through the pain of learning how to read their marks on the cards. The marks are harder to see without special glasses, but with training, these cheaters can do away with special glasses or contact lenses that would facilitate the reading while increasing the probability of drawing suspicion.

But discarding those glasses and contact lenses is becoming less necessary for professional card markers, not only because of

CRIMINAL CREATIVITY

Using history as a guide, some will stop at nothing to get an edge by dubious means. A hidden pin is produced.



When a distraction diverts the attention of others, it gets put into place as the next hand is dealt.



With a crafty drop of the palm, the card gets marked and no one is any the wiser, especially the cheat himself.



advanced technology in optometry but also the proliferation of players at the tables wearing sunglasses to hide tells. So cheaters can slip these contacts in their eyes without a second look from other players. The problem with these special lenses, however, is they need to be tinted red in order to spot the usually green marks on the red printed part of a card design (the same problem exists for blue-backed cards). However, this dreaded 'red-eyeball effect' for the cheaters has been lessened over the past few years with improvements to monocular contact lenses often used by the colourblind to distinguish certain colours and as such have been adopted by cheaters looking to be less obvious. Now, for the cheaters with light eyes wearing these lenses, the unnatural darkness of their eyes looks less artificial, and for those who have brown eyes, the lenses covering them are not noticeable. Some cheaters will even wear tinted glasses over their contact lenses for additional cover.

NO STONE UNTURNED

These sophisticated operations will get the job done. But what can you do to spot them in your game? First, you can try to observe

players you're suspicious of and see if you can pick up on where they carry the daub and how they transfer it to their fingers. Daub can be concealed in many places. I've seen it on eyeglass rims, beer bottle labels, clothing buttons, watches and rings, even on currency and chips. In fact, one notorious card-marker was caught with daub in a small concave hole in the bottom of a chip that he'd carved out, keeping the chip inconspicuously in the middle of one of his chip-stacks. I've seen it as well on a sponge in a woman's handbag.

Your next chance to sight the markers is when they load the daub onto their fingers. But this is very difficult when it comes to modern daubs, which are more of a powder than a paste, and a single load of it can mark an entire deck. Professionals will never be clumsy in making this transport and will then proceed to mark the cards with a soft touch. Those not as skilled, however, might give themselves away by making a swiping or brushing motion with their fingers instead of a smooth touch.

The last chance of catching on to card-markers is to watch the eyes of people you suspect. Although professional markers rarely stare at the top of the deck or their opponents'

hole cards, they must glance these cards to read the marks. Maybe you'll notice the same passing glance on numerous occasions, and if it becomes constant, you might have evidence of a card-marker.

Also be aware that professional card markers, just like other types of professional poker-cheating teams, normally work in twos and threes, so the person you suspect of card-marking may not be the actual reader but the marker, or just a player who is receiving strategy signals from the marker or the reader across the table. With multi-member cheating groups, the person who reads the marks will change accordingly with situations at the table. For example, a person sitting next to you can see marks on your hole cards much easier (in most cases) than someone directly across the length of the table. Also, try not to be too obvious when looking at a suspected person's eyes. If that person is right next to you, it will be difficult to look into his eyes without him noticing you. So you need to be discreet in your detection attempts.

HIGH-TECH TRICKERY

The last—and most dangerous—form of card-marking is when cards are already marked before they hit the table. Although this is rare outside of home games, it has happened, and in that case the marking methods and equipment used at the table to see the marks will always be state-of-the-art. The top-of-the-line luminous and ultra-luminous daubs designed to be read by the human eye with the use of filtered lenses have now given way to a new generation of luminous technology. Video luminous daub uses marks that can't be seen by any human being, even if they're looking through a luminous filter. These marks can only be read by using custom-designed electronics and filters, and displayed on a TV monitor in another room to a cohort. Then the card values may be signaled or transmitted to the player who needs to know. Don't worry too much about this as it can only happen with cards marked long before you see them. But if they ever get into your game and you don't see them, that blindness will cost you lots of money. **GOM**



↑ Rainbow's end: a red-tinted contact lens can spot green marks on red-printed cards.