



# Roll With the Punches

*How should honest punters really look at crooked gambling?*

*Richard Marcus wonders whether, sometimes, ignorance can be bliss.*

**W**ith all the gambling scandals we've witnessed and read about lately, mainly those revolving around the professional tennis and online poker worlds, I, as both a gambler and cheater, have been asking myself a question: How should honest gamblers deal with cheating? It's a question that all honest punters ask themselves, and each chooses to deal with it in their own way. Some may avoid certain gambling propositions, while others may selectively gamble at certain casinos, cardrooms or online where cheating could be less likely an issue. But there may be some more astute and practical ways of looking at dishonest wagering than meet the eye. Since I've played both sides of the fence, having spent many years both punting aboveboard and underneath the table, the issue seems to me very important. And it was in the UK where I picked up some relevant knowledge.

Years ago, while on a casino cheating trip across England, I took a day off with my cheating buddies for a little legit gambling amusement. It was a crisp autumn day and



↑ Even if you suspect that not all races are entirely honest, does that make gambling any less fun?

we went to Brighton & Hove Greyhound Stadium for an afternoon of dog racing, which has seen its share of gambling scandals and is considered by some to be largely crooked on the whole. However, I ended up having a very enlightening experience that day. While ripping up some losing tickets I got into a conversation with a punter named Phil. I could see right off that he was very intelligent and well-read. We got to talking about literary classics and then gambling in general. I have to say that what Phil told me stuck as one of the greatest truisms about gambling I've ever learned.

First, I was basically along for the ride with my buddies, as dog racing had never been one of my gambling pastimes. But I noticed Phil studying a dog-racing handicapping form. He looked like he was analysing a scientific formula in trying to figure which dog was going to win the race. My buddies had already made their selections for the upcoming race, and while they were off to the betting windows, I decided to interrupt Phil's concentration on his racing form with an offering.

"Phil," I said, "everyone knows these dog races are all fixed. And obviously you know a heck of a lot about gambling and dog racing, so why the hell do you waste your time trying so hard to figure out which dog is gonna win? I mean the outcome is probably already predetermined, right?"

Phil, who was about 15 years my senior, gave off a condescending smile. Then with the brightness that most inveterate and even degenerate punters possess, he paralleled his favorite author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in explaining it to me. "My dear Watson," he said in lofty but serious tones, "you are absolutely



↑ Predicting whether Barack Obama (right) will be president, or Javier Bardem (left) will win an Oscar is one way of making sure your bet won't be affected by cheating. Or, at least, you'd assume so.

right that lots of these godforsaken races are as fixed as your horoscope. But that doesn't matter worth a damn. No, not at all, mate." I looked at him rather vaguely. "You see," he continued, "that the race is fixed only matters when you know exactly how that fix is in. For instance, if you know the three-dog is going to win, then it matters. But since I don't know which of these bloody dogs has been fixed to win, then it's the same as if the race hasn't been fixed at all." He paused to see if his logic sunk in. "You see what I'm saying, mate?"

It made perfect sense. If you're a punter looking to predict the outcome of a football game you assume might be fixed, but you have no knowledge as to which way that fix would go, then you should simply ignore the fix and handicap the game according to the same criteria you use in situations where you know the game isn't fixed. After all, if you don't know the direction of the fix, then it's a 50-50 chance the fix went with you or against you. So effectively, whatever the fix, it gets nullified because you don't know which way it goes.

So how does this apply to honest poker players pursuing live ring games and online games even though they know there's plenty of cheating out there? Well, the fixed-race analogy applies somewhat to poker but is only a piece of the riddle. Lots of honest poker players have the attitude that cheating is always going to be present, so it's just an added tangible in the game that has to be overcome. They might look at cheating as kind of a 10th opponent sitting among the other nine in a full game. That outlook is certainly commendable as long as the players supporting it don't think they're actually going to beat the cheat at his own game. However, if they strive to make enough money in order to overcome whatever losses they may incur to cheats, then their reasoning flies.

Many so called 'gambling experts' say that not only are the majority of poker cheaters bad players, but also that by playing smarter yourself, you can overcome these cheaters and their methods—without cheating—and actually beat them at the table. Who are these authors trying to con? Take it from me. I was a cheater for a long time and no casino ever beat me.

Another reason honest players stay in the game with dishonest ones is that they simply can't help themselves. I am not going to pull any punches in saying that poker has become one of society's newest fashion drugs. So it's difficult to believe that knowing cheaters operate online is going to curtail those diehards from playing. Same theory applies to brick-and-mortar cardrooms as well as sports-betting events. There is, however, one form of gambling where you can't be cheated and not have to deal with the issue: proposition bets offered by London's bookies. You know, stuff like political elections, criminal trials and the Academy Awards. You can surely bet, without cheating, the upcoming American presidential election, even if that turns out to be fixed. [GOM](#)



↑ Despite the fact that we know online cheats are out there, online poker still retains its lure.

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