



Improving Security in the Pit

Internal and external cheating ... I know about both. Before embarking on an infamous 25-year career as a casino cheat, I spent a year as a dealer at a Las Vegas casino, where I dealt all four conventional table games. Ironically the first time I ever cheated a casino was as a dealer in the commission of a Baccarat scam identical to the major one involving the Tran Organization that was recently busted in casinos across the United States and Canada. Just as the Tran Organization spotted flagrant weaknesses in casino table-game protection and surveillance in 2007, I was able to do the same back in 1977 while dealing Mini-Baccarat in Las Vegas.

Why do so many scams go undetected for so long by floor staffs and surveillance departments? How can groups of cheaters come into your casino and pioneer their ways around your dealers, floor personnel, pit bosses and surveillance workers? You might find my answers to these questions somewhat hard-hitting, but they are nevertheless true.

Laziness and Ignorance

From the very first time I cheated a casino until my retirement on New Year's Eve 1999, I was always security conscious of even the tiniest detail — and I believed this was the

reason I was never caught. I told everyone I was one of the few cheaters who never had serious problems, thanks to my own internal security measures.

I was only partially right — something I did not find out until 2007. Having recently entered the world of casino conferences and seminars, my first experience outside of cheating and bookwriting was at the World Game Protection Conference (WGPC) in Las Vegas. There I met several people involved in different capacities of casino surveillance operations. Most were interested in talking with me, as I am perhaps the first major long-



time professional casino cheat who has made himself available to the industry. In particular, people asked me questions pertaining not only to my personal experiences and cheating methods, but also about various scams they had heard about or imagined.

I was truly amazed at the level of inexperience and ignorance many people holding important surveillance positions had. I was nearly dumbfounded upon conversing with a surveillance shift director from a major Nevada casino. This person's comments about detecting and setting up casino cheaters actually made me think of Mickey

Mantle, who once said, "Had I known I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself." The words streaking across my mind at that moment were, "Had I known surveillance departments were this unknowledgeable, I would have been even more aggressive during my cheating career."

Another thing I learned at the WGPC was how underpaid surveillance people are, and how many people forego these careers because they often lead to "dead-end" situations for advancement and greater wages. That reality flabbergasted me. How can a pit boss earn significantly more than a surveil-

lance operator? Or a casino shift boss twice as much as a director of surveillance? I mean, which employee is in a better position to save the casino money — one who detects a major scam before it walks out the door with thousands of the casino's bankroll or one who rates customers' play and "generally" supervises the games? I am in no way demeaning the value or job functions of casino floor staffs, but, in my opinion, key surveillance people are more important to casinos' bottomlines.

A good case in point is the major Mini-Baccarat scam I wrote about in last month's issue of *CEM*. Someone like me would have

detected that scam much earlier, but the fact that it went unchecked for so long is by no means the fault of surveillance operators. Why? Because we cannot expect them to catch sophisticated cheating scams when they have not had the proper training to do so. In the old days, casino surveillance departments were staffed by people like me, ex-cheaters who knew the scams from firsthand experience. In today's surveillance system, people behind the eye-in-the-sky are taught about scams by other people who were taught about the same scams in the same fashion they're now teaching them: mainly through videos and demonstrations. I am not criticizing these methods, as they are the product of our technological revolution, but more needs to be done.

Remember, when you put a person who is not scam savvy in charge of a surveillance department, it's like putting a pilot with a recreational license at the helm of a commercial airbus; he's going to be unfamiliar with a lot of the inner workings.

In today's modernized casino world, we must educate floor staff and dealers on how to recognize basic and advanced scams because, in spite of improvements to video surveillance, cheaters are not backing down. Some are even capable of using technological advances to their advantage, capitalizing on casino floors' real-time ignorance. A major problem with on-floor surveillance in today's casinos is that the entire floor staff, from dealers up to casino managers, has become far too dependent on surveillance upstairs to do this job for them. They rest self-assured that, because every square inch of casino space is videotaped 24/7, no cheater can successfully pull off a significant scam. The common belief is that all scams will be caught by the camera sooner rather than later.

Maybe so, but what a fair amount of casino personnel don't realize is that the camera catches many scams that are ignored by the floor staff. Floor personnel and pit bosses often fail to grasp that the order of process regarding suspicious play or possible outright cheating moves is supposed to work from the bottom up. Many — even if only subconsciously — have taken

the approach that, "Why should I worry about being so observant on the games? If anything goes down, the camera will tape it and my surveillance colleague upstairs will run back the tape and catch it." But this must work the other way. The person on the floor must initiate the process. He must call surveillance and report his suspicions. Of course, this happens whenever surveillance is called, but my point is that surveillance is not called nearly enough because floor personnel rely on their confidence in video surveillance. I have a proverb for this: When on the floor, don't rely on the camera because the camera cannot tap you on the shoulder and say, "Excuse me, Mr. or Madame Pit Boss, but the player on Mini-Bac table Number 3 just pulled a move." Let's not forget that cameras are no different than computers; they need input to give you output. If you don't tell them, they don't tell you; thus, the cheaters' secrets are protected.

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The Dealer's Checklist

Let's take my aviation analogy regarding inexperienced pilots flying super jumbo jets a step further. You all know that before any aircraft takes off, there is a checklist that must be adhered to. Pilots must confirm that instruments are in good working order and that all preparations for takeoff have been made. Why not initiate this process for casino dealers? What if they had a certain checklist before dealing cards, spinning Roulette balls and passing dice to Craps shooters? Would this effectively reduce the casino's risk of being cheated?

You bet.

To give you a strong example of this, let's return to my infamous "Savannah" move. For those unfamiliar with it, the move consisted of hiding a \$5,000 chip under a \$5 chip on even-money and 2-to-1 bets on the bottom of Roulette layouts so the dealer believed only \$5 chips were placed there.

This was done by jutting the \$5 chip slightly off the \$5,000 one. When the bet lost, I raked it off the layout before the dealer could sweep it. When caught, I replaced it with two \$5 chips I had palmed in my other hand, going into a drunk routine to deaden suspicion and avoid surveillance. When the bet won, I was paid either \$5,005 or \$10,010, depending on which bet had been placed. Naturally there were surveillance verifications each time the bet won, but because it was a legitimate bet, the casinos had to pay.

Never once did a dealer, floorperson or pit boss detect the \$5,000 chip before I claimed the winning bet, which made this the "perfect move."

But was it really so perfect? Or could a simple procedural dealing tactic have rendered it impossible? After casinos saw it hundreds of times and suspected something was wrong despite the video evidence, you would think they would have stopped it. And they could have. If Roulette dealers had been instructed to follow a checklist, with one of the items being to visually verify the bottom chips of all outside bets, making sure that no high-value chips were set there, I never would have gotten paid on the move — not once!

But this counter measure was never implemented by suspicious surveillance departments, nor were any other procedural changes made to give the casino a chance of defending itself against what was really a very simple cheating move. Mental checklists can be used by dealers to combat cheating on all the table games. They will not wipe out cheating, but they will greatly reduce both failed and successful cheating attempts. I would say that with effective dealer checklists (which floor people must make sure are being adhered to by their dealers), overall cheating on table games would be reduced by as much as two-thirds.

Lack of Communication

I have found an integral shortage of communication between personnel on the floor and observers in the surveillance room. Aside from basic regulations dictating when floor persons should call surveillance, there has to be a more hands-on approach from both levels of the casino. The simple performances of verifying questionable bets and settling disputes between players and the casino are not enough. Both the person on the floor and in the sky must be able to properly communicate a situation to the other, and, on top of that, inject some versatile thinking.

Looking back over my cheating career, I remember a prime example of this lack of communication and “thinking on your feet” relating to game protection. I had been pastposting dark brown “chocolate” \$5,000 chips underneath black \$100 chips on Blackjack tables up and down the Las Vegas Strip. After dozens of successful payoffs, word of these audacious moves finally reached surveillance departments. Eventually, a move was caught on tape, but it was long after I had left the casino with the money. However, surveillance departments teamed with Griffin Investigations put out bulletins that were distributed in gaming pits throughout Las Vegas. The warning was: “Beware of pastposters switching in chocolate chips underneath black chips on Blackjack tables.” Even my name and photo were attached to the warnings. You would think that I was soon put out of business, right?

Wrong.

Knowing that floor staffs, surveillance departments, Griffin and gaming agents were all on the lookout for chocolate chips being

pastposted under blacks, I decided to try something else. Well, it was really the same thing, but I suspected casino staffs would not recognize it. I went back into the same casinos, well aware of the bulletins, and made the same exact Blackjack moves, slipping yellow \$1,000 chips underneath green \$25 chips. I was paid time and time again, as if there were no flyers on the podiums warning the floor staff that I was loose in the casinos. (I even saw the flyers in the pits!)

This is a classic example of streamlined communication that doesn’t really communicate. Pit bosses received the warning from surveillance, then relayed that information to floorpeople, who then relayed the same information to dealers on the Blackjack tables. So while everyone on the floor was waiting for me to pastpost chocolates under blacks, I went from casino to casino pastposting yellows under greens. Amazingly — or maybe not so amazingly — even when I took heat on the yellow-under-green moves, no connection was made to the chocolate-under-black moves depicted on the flyers. Surveillance was not notified by floor personnel that

“unseen” winning yellow \$1,000 chips were showing up on Blackjack tables.

This is what I mean by a lack of lateral thought. People on the floor need to be trained so that they may be versatile enough to recognize that the yellow-green move was the same as the chocolate-black move. This type of oversight is very prevalent in today’s casinos because people, relying way too much on technology, are not trained to use their own common sense.

Remember, at the end of the day, it’s humans who bust the cheaters, not the technology. 🎲

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