

FORGET WIFE SWAPPERS – CARD SWAPPERS ARE ON THE LOOSE

by Richard Marcus

I HAVE SEEN OR PARTICIPATED IN some really brazen poker scams, but nothing like this: There is a liberated married couple loose in the poker rooms swapping not spouses but...you guessed it...cards! And they are darn good at it.

I first saw them ten years ago from the rail at the L.A. Bicycle Club while watching a \$20-\$40 hold'em game. In two adjacent seats across from the dealer sat a man in a baseball cap and a woman with medium-length dark hair. The man was to her left. Neither was dressed obtrusively; they blended in perfectly with the other players at their table. To probably everyone's eyes but mine, their actions warranted no double-takes.

What I noticed first was that the man's right shoulder and the woman's left shoulder bobbed simultaneously. It was the slightest movement but somehow it caught my attention. Out of curiosity, not really thinking something was up, I continued watching. After the flop, the man folded and the woman stayed in the hand. From where I stood I couldn't see the community cards on the table, but I could tell who was playing and who wasn't. The woman chucked her hand in the muck after someone bet on the turn.

I saw the dealer sweep the pot to the eventual winner, then watched him deal out the next round. As soon as I determined that the couple had received their

cards, I put my sights on them closely. At that instant, their shoulders bobbed again. The man put in a preflop raise while the woman folded. I watched a pretty decent pot unfold, and when it was over the dealer slid him the chips.

BOB'S YOUR CHEATER

The third time I saw their shoulders bob told me they were cheating. To confirm my suspicions I decided to make a pass around their table. On the next deal I descended the steps and headed directly toward the couple's rear. As they were receiving their second cards, I slipped right up behind them. I froze for an instant to get a good peek, and my growing curiosity, which was rapidly turning into fascination, was not disappointed. In that split-second – and I mean split – the man and woman exchanged a card. It was one of the deftest movements I had ever seen, and,

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believe me, I've seen more than a few.

With a bare minimum of shoulder and arm movement – the man using his right hand and the woman her left – each palmed one of their cards and slid it down underneath their wrists along the inside of the arm to the other. The length of their arms also served to hide the action from the dealer and everyone else at the table; it simply blocked their view. And for added protection, they used their crooked free arms to create a barrier against anyone who might have a side view. It took me a few more episodes of this to see how truly gifted they were, but I surely enjoyed the show.

I wanted to see more of it and eventually got in their game. I lucked into a "box seat" directly across from the cheaters. I now noticed that the woman was wearing dark glasses. At first I thought that was foolish, that wearing sunglasses would draw attention to her. However, upon looking around the poker room, I saw at least two people at each table wearing shades. In fact, I regretted that I didn't have similar glasses to conceal my eyes. I didn't want this couple noticing how interested I was in their game.

I didn't want to spook them.

The first hand I watched them play close-up, they both threw their cards in the muck. I took that to mean that even with all four cards they couldn't make a

single playable hand.

The next hand they went into action. I timed my glance at them so it would pick up their move without lingering. I watched the woman receive her second card and the man his an instant later. There was a tiny hesitation before their shoulders bobbed and their hands and arms jerked ever so slightly. By moving their heads a bit while shifting backward, they stole a glance at each other's cards. Then they made an instantaneous decision as to which cards to switch, and followed through. It was all lightning quick.

DISGUSTING TALENT

I threw my hand in the muck as soon as the action was on me. I just wanted to watch the couple and the outcome of the hand. Instinctively I knew they were

a top-notch cheating team, and of course I appreciated their display of talent. In fact, I was truly amazed.

The flop came K-9-8 with flush possibilities. However, when the woman raised the initial bettor, I doubted she was chasing a flush. I secretly put her on at least a pair of kings and maybe even trips. Her partner folded his hand and lightly feigned disgust.

A queen came on the turn, followed by a four on the river. There were no possible straights or flushes. The woman bet out, got called and won the pot. What did she reveal at showdown? You guessed it: a black pair of kings to form a set.

I stayed at that table until they left two hours later. They really cleaned up the game, \$1,500 profit between them. And I'm sure they exercised some restraint.

They simply could not show strong pocket pairs every time they entered a pot; that would draw suspicion.

Over the years I have seen the same couple half a dozen times. Once I saw them plying their scam with another couple, and then months later that second couple working alone, which means there's probably a small army of "swappers" working today's cardrooms.

How can you protect yourself from cheaters this skilled? Well, if you don't have the eyes of a hawk or the instincts of a badger, you better hope that someone like me happens upon the game to point them out to you. ♠

Richard Marcus is the author of Dirty Poker: The Poker Underworld Exposed, and is often considered "The World's Greatest Casino Cheater."



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