

When the going got tough, this blackjack team devised a new method for foiling casino surveillance

BEATING THE

BY RICHARD MARCUS

HEAT

HE'D RECEIVED THE SIGNAL. The Big Player walked across the crowded Vegas casino floor to a blackjack table in the middle of the pit. In his hand was a fistful of purple and black chips that he'd gotten off a crap table—the first step in camouflaging his skills as a professional card counter behind the guise of a BP.

There was an open seat in centerfield, next to the \$10 bettor who'd just signaled him in. The true count was a healthy +3 and nearly three of the 6 decks remained in the shoe, two of which would be played before the shuffle. The team's bankroll dictated that the BP make a \$900 bet, but since only one spot was available—not the two or three that would have been ideal—he opted to bet one purple chip, \$500.

As the dealer dealt the face-up round out of the shoe, the Big Player reached inside his sports jacket, removed his Marlboros and his Dunhill lighter, and lit up. While doing so, he made conversation with a sexy cocktail waitress passing behind him, never once glancing at the layout until the dealer had to urge action on his hand. He looked down at his cards, and was both unsurprised and pleased to see the paint: two red kings. The dealer's upcard was a 5.

The players on first and second base both stood pat, while the third player doubled down. Their combined actions didn't change the true count. The BP knew that advanced-count strategy dictated that he split his kings. Despite this, in order to enhance his camouflage, he waved his hand across his cards to indicate he would stand with the 20, flashing the diamond rings on his fingers and the gold Rolex wrapping his wrist. His counting partner stood with 14. The last two players, also with stiff hands, did the same. The dealer proceeded to turn over a 9 and bust his hand with a 10.

The Big Player won \$500, and his team picked up a bonus when the player to the right suddenly got up and left the table. Without hesitation, the BP laid purple chips in both his own betting circle and the abandoned one. Now he had the full \$1,000 bet.

His first hand was a snapper—Bam! A \$750 payoff for the blackjack. His second was a hard 20. The dealer had a 4 showing and busted. The team raked in \$1,250 on

the round. The true count held strong, reaching +5 before the red cut-card popped out of the shoe.

CUT AND RUN

This one good shoe had put the team ahead by \$6,000. The Big Player's action seemed to draw no heat. The floorman had introduced himself, routinely rated the BP's play, and offered to remain at hand in case the "high roller" needed anything. All in all, it was a nice session.

But just an hour later, this professional and smooth operation hit a sudden bump. At his fifth table of the night, the Big Player placed two bets of \$1,000. It was a \$10-minimum table with a \$5,000 maximum bet, and there were only two players. Conditions seemed ideal, as the two were betting \$1,000 chips and winning steadily, making the table a hot attraction that would nat-

no time for play-acting. He'd been made and there was no doubt that surveillance upstairs had been filming him from every angle before the pit boss lowered the boom. They'd have close-ups of his face.

This was a major team disaster. They'd been playing together since before the MIT blackjack team gained notoriety, but had never been accosted in this fashion. Now it was time to invoke damage control, which simply meant getting out of the casino and preventing being exposed. No one on the team had ever been back-roomed or ID'd before, and they weren't about to start now.

The team laid low for several weeks. When they went back to work two months later, in Atlantic City, they substituted one of the counters in the role of Big Player. Yet they encountered another casino countermeasure during their second playing session.

A pit boss came to the table after spying their Big Player's purple chips in the betting circle. He said to him curtly, "Sir, we'd appreciate you taking your action elsewhere. I think you might, too."

urally draw more high rollers to its felt.

The BP took a seat between the high rollers. A few onlookers gathered behind them. Playing the role of the carefree whale, the BP nodded at the lady dealer and said to his fellow bettors, "Looks like she's treating you guys all right!" The first one replied with a chuckle, "She hasn't made a hand all night." The other added, "Yeah, she's dumping out the entire rack!" The BP laughed easily and quipped, "Looks like I chose the right table!"

But before the put-upon dealer could get the first card out of the shoe, her pit boss appeared. He looked the Big Player in the eye, and in a steely voice said to the dealer, "Shuffle up those cards!"

The BP knew well enough that this was

This one differed from what had happened in Vegas. A pit boss came to the table after spying their new Big Player's purple chips in the betting circle. He said to him curtly, "Sir, we'd appreciate you taking your action elsewhere. I think you might [appreciate it], too."

A week later in Connecticut, they met with similar obstacles. Mississippi extended them less-than-red-carpet treatment as well. They realized it was over. The revered concept of team play, conceptualized and made famous by Ken Uston, was in danger of becoming extinct.

The five members of the disbanded counting team returned to lives far from from blackjack tables. They stayed away a year. But "Carl," the founder of the team,

was aching to get back in business. He came up with an idea he fancied would once again make team play viable.

A BRIGHT IDEA

Carl contacted his four ex-partners. "I think I've found the new way to card-counting riches," he told each one of them excitedly. One of them misunderstood and responded, "The new wave to card-counting riches?" Carl liked the way that sounded and would later name the second coming of his team, "The New Wave Card Counters."

Carl explained that they had to completely revolutionize the concept of team play, starting with doing away with the old method of counters signaling BPs at the table. Casinos were hip to that, especially after all the publicity surrounding the MIT team. According to his new idea, the BPs would no longer be signaled in. Instead, three or four members of the team would play together at the same table. They would all count down the shoe, then bet and play accordingly.

and the last two stay at the minimum \$25."

Aggregately, the team would be making a \$200 bet—but with only two increasing their wagers, it wouldn't be obvious to surveillance that each of them knew that it was the right thing to do.

If the true count went up to +3 two rounds later, the quartet would want to increase its bet to \$400. Now the player who earlier had bet \$100 could drop to \$50, while the player who'd previously bet \$50 increased to \$150, and the two players who'd been betting \$25 went up to \$100 each. In this manner, the team could effectively increase its bet to four units, but in a non-uniform—even haphazard—way from an individual standpoint. Who in the eye could possibly follow what was going on?

If the count stayed at +3 and the group wanted to maintain the four-unit bet at \$400 (and further dispel the appearance of card counting) the second player could cut that bet in half while the first player stepped it back up to \$125. Players three and four remained at \$100. Again, the team

chips, the team wouldn't stand out, as long as it avoided the purples. It could, however, use purple chips on \$100-minimum tables or on \$25 tables with black and purple action. Whenever the count skyrocketed, team members could increase their betting accordingly, hopefully under the cover of a hot table where the other players would be winning, too. In that case, the group's increased bets would look like normal hot-streak play.

It all sounded great to the once-and-future team. But what about the negative-betting progression when the count turned downward?

"We just do the same thing," Carl said. "We vary the decreases between the four players. So, what do you guys think?"

They were back in business a week later.

The New Wave card-counting team hit Vegas with a hard right hand at the blackjack tables. They alternated between seating three, four, and all five of their members at the tables, depending on playing conditions. They were able to maintain the 1-



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None of his teammates grasped the concept at first, so Carl painted a simple scenario. With multiple players from the group sitting at the same table, the goal would be to get a *collective* bet spread of 1-16 units. If the group as a whole could bet \$100 to \$1,600, they could still play with a significant edge, even while playing the shoe starting from the first hand (as opposed to swooping in on rich situations).

"Say it's a \$25 minimum and four of us are at the table," Carl explained. "We each bet \$25 to start, and stick with the minimum until the true count hits +2. Now say we want to get a total bet of \$200 on the layout. Instead of us all going up to \$50 bets, one of us can bet \$100, another \$50,

would be wagering perfectly in the aggregate but, one by one, each player would be dismissed as a potential card counter. This could be done in innumerable permutations, throwing off surveillance regardless how long they wanted to count down shoes along with them.

GOING INTO ACTION

Carl realized that in order to catch on, the casino guys would have to combine all four bets for each hand and compare them with the true count. That would be hard to figure out, as they first had to identify the players *as a team*. If they played at a \$25-minimum table and everyone played above the minimum in green or black

to 16-unit bet spread most of the time. When they couldn't, they still spread enough to maintain an edge while staying below the casinos' radar.

The method continues to be used by both the New Wave team and others. Surely casinos will develop countermeasures, but detection will never be as easy for them as it was during the days of the old team-play concept. 🍀

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