



↓ Thank or blame Kevin Spacey's role in *21* for casinos welcoming card counters.

Counting the Cost

Card counters have always been the bane of casino managers. But Richard Marcus tells us that since Hollywood stepped in, the welcome mat for the mathematically inclined is being rolled out all over Europe.

Ever since the ingenious blackjack card counting strategies of Edward O. Thorpe, the father of modern card counting and author of the revolutionary card counting bible *Beat The Dealer*, and Ken Uston, the innovator of blackjack card counting team-play and author of *Million Dollar Blackjack*, became known to casinos, a worldwide casino crackdown on card counters went into effect.

It started in the late 1970s in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, and by the early 1980s, London's casinos were leading the anti-card counting crusade in Europe, which had been mustered to thwart the American professional card counting teams looking to take advantage of Europe's naiveté concerning organised team-play at blackjack. The most significant anti-card counting measure introduced by UK casinos was the abolition of the dealer's hole card, which soon followed suit in the rest of Europe.

The ensuing difference between blackjack dealt in Europe and the rest of the world is that in Europe the dealer does not

take his hole card until after all the players have played out their hands. The result is that players doubling down or splitting their pairs risk losing both hands when the dealer pulls an ace or 10 to make blackjack at the end of the round. Knowing that, knowledgeable counters balked at doubling down or splitting pairs they normally would in other parts of the world, unless, of course, the true count was sky high and the dealer's exposed card was a 10 and not an ace. That added advantage for the casino served to neutralise a significant part of the players' card counting advantage. Ever since, European casinos, especially those in the UK, have been paranoid about getting beaten by card counters. I experienced that firsthand as several times in my casino-cheating career I was mistaken for a card counter after performing cheating moves on European blackjack tables.

This global casino warfare on card counters has continued to the present day—or has it? You might be surprised that suddenly there is, in effect, a global cease-fire. In fact, what's happening now across the world, and



↑ Ken Uston was an early pioneer in card counting.

surprisingly in the UK and Europe, is that casinos are drastically altering their outlooks and policies concerning card counters. Believe it or not, not only are most casinos in the US and UK relaxing their restrictive attitudes toward card counters, many are actually inviting them to come and play at their blackjack tables. Why this sudden change in latitude? Some of you probably guessed it: it's due to the tremendous success and publicity surrounding the Kevin Spacey blackjack movie *21*.