



Know One When You See One

YOUR CASINO AND A FALSE-SHUFFLE SCAM

I seldom check my e-mail on Saturdays, but for some inexplicable reason on May 26 — in the midst of a beautiful Memorial Day Weekend — I did. In my inbox was a message from the Toronto Star with “Interview Request” in the subject line. I am often contacted by the press to either give interviews or offer opinions on casino cheating, but hardly ever on a Saturday. So, with aroused

curiosity, I clicked on the blue text and read the message from columnist Robyn Doolittle. She wanted to interview me about the “huge international Baccarat scam” that had been busted two days prior. She stressed that her deadline was the end of that day and requested that I get back to her ASAP, leaving her cell phone number.

It was already close to noon, and I wanted to head to the beach. Besides, what huge international Baccarat scam was she talking about? I figured she was exaggerating, just as the sun’s midday ascent in the sky was exaggerating my desire to hit the sand. But, as I was once compelled to pull off the world’s greatest gambling scams, I was now



compelled to hear about a scam that potentially rivaled my own. My curiosity got the better of me.

The False-Shuffle Scam

On the phone, Robyn told me it was a major Baccarat scam involving 18 casinos in the United States and Canada, and nearly three dozen people had been arrested. I immediately asked her two questions. The first: Was it an inside scam? She replied, "Yes." Before I asked the second (Did it involve mostly Asians?), I already knew the answer. She affirmed that it was headed by the Tran Organization and said she wasn't

exactly sure what the scam was. I told her that was no problem; I would explain it to her. Then she asked in a puzzled tone, "How could you know what the scam was?" I laughed softly to myself. "Because I invented it," I told her.

Whether or not I actually did, I'm not sure. However, I was — without a doubt — the first Caucasian to perform it and, if all the dealers busted in this latest scam were Asian, probably the only Caucasian to have ever done it. The ol' false-shuffle scam is actually the first tactic I ever used to cheat a casino. I was a dealer at the Four Queens Casino in downtown Las Vegas. It was 1977, and I was

Live
Table Game Experience &
Excitement!
Play the Ultimate Electronic Table Games!

Play our **NEW Ultimate** Electronic Table Games

WPT
WORLD SERIES OF POKER

TEXAS
HOLD'EM

Blackjack
dice

21

NEW! Fully Automated Option!

NEW! Fully Automated Option!
Staff your tables with dealers, hosts or cashiers!
Depending on your jurisdictional and/or staffing requirements, our tables can now be as automated as you need them to be.

Call to Order Your Tables Today!
visit www.digideal.com
call 877-747-8889

DigiDeal
Putting it All on the Table



the swing shift Mini-Baccarat dealer. One night, I was dealing a legitimate game when my cheating mentor-to-be sat down and starting shooting the breeze. Before long, he told me he was a professional casino cheat and dared me to come up with an inside scam to rip off the casino.

A week later, on a busy Saturday night, I found myself protecting a “slug” of cards as I washed, shuffled and laced through eight decks before putting them into the dealing shoe. When I’d dealt the 50 cards in the slug during the previous shoe, my cohorts had charted them on Baccarat scorecards provided by the Four Queens. By protecting that slug, the cards would come out of the new shoe in the same order I’d placed them in the discard rack during the last round. When I performed that move, which really should be called a “non-shuffle,” I was a novice dealer with less than a year behind the table. Did I worry about getting caught? Would a floor person or pit boss see what I was doing? Would the cameras?

The Camera Can’t Help

Not on your life. On the eve of launching my now-infamous cheating career, I realized how easy it was to put one over on the casinos. At the time, not all casinos had 24/7 coverage on all tables, but did it really matter?

In fact, it did, but not in the way you’re thinking. The truth is, unless your surveillance operators are clued into the move before it goes down, the cameras aren’t worth a damn in preventing this kind of scam. They only come in handy when you already know what’s happening — when you set up the crooked dealers and their agents at the table. The more advanced and omnipresent your technology is, the harder it is to catch this — or any other — casino scam in its early stage (i.e., before the big money starts walking out your doors).

In a nutshell: Casino people on the floor are too dependent on the cameras, and there is insufficient communication between the floor and surveillance.

Floor personnel and pit bosses too often take the attitude that because the entire casino is filmed 24/7, any major casino scam will be detected and busted sooner rather than later. They think to themselves, “Why should I be constantly on the lookout for this scam or that one?” This attitude is what made me so successful at cheating casinos for so long. Today, whenever I train a casino’s staff, I never leave without saying: “Remember, a camera is no different than a computer. For a computer to give you output, you have to give it input. For a camera to give you video evidence of a scam, you have to ask for it. The camera will not tap a pit boss on the shoulder and say, ‘Hey, Charlie, there’s a big

false-shuffle scam going down on the Mini-Bac game.’”

Employees on the floor must be able to spot suspicious activity and scams, and then call surveillance to get verification or, in some cases, be told that nothing but a hot streak went down. They must not depend on surveillance operators to spot these scams as they happen. It’s rarely going to work like that. In my 25-year cheating career, not once did a surveillance operator call down to the floor and prevent me from making a successful cheating move, nor did one catch me after the fact.

“What about today’s ultramodern tracking systems?” you might ask. Sure, they may tell you that a group of players is winning inordinately at the Baccarat table, but they cannot tell you if a scam may be taking place or what kind of scam it might be. Staff members have to put it together, and the caper will likely be complete and the perpetrators long gone before that happens.

As Good as it Gets

How good is the false-shuffle Baccarat scam the Tran Organization was using? It’s good enough to have warranted a chapter in my latest book *The World’s Greatest Gambling Scams*. A chapter titled “The Kowloon Baccarat Scam” covers an identical scam that was launched by Vietnamese gangs in Kowloon and carried out in Macau in the late 1990s. In both instances, dealers were bribed to maintain slugs of cards that

eclipse is here

eclipse Compliance Testing
The ALL NEW testing division of NFA

eclipse Compliance Testing
We Don't Play Games...We Test Games.

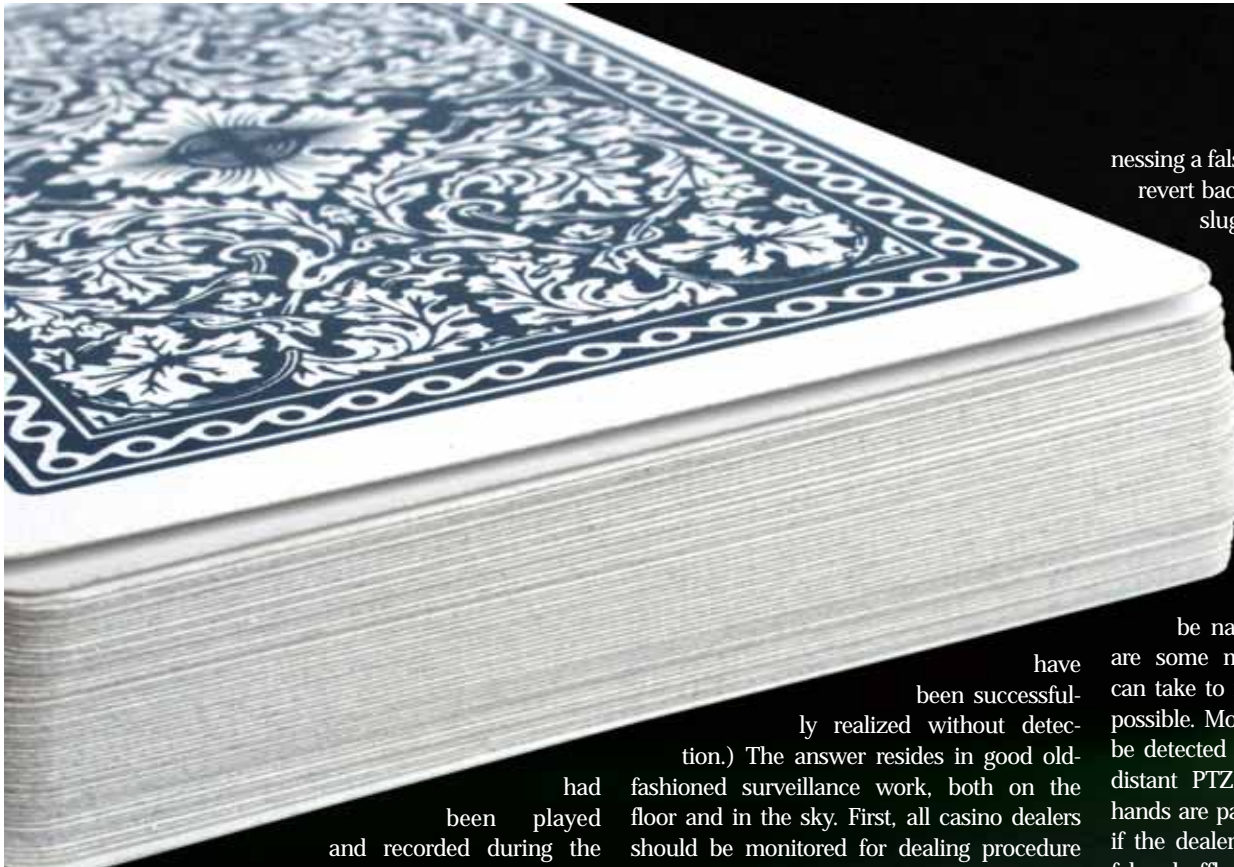


eclipse
NFA

440.914.TEST (8378)

www.eclipsetesting.com

6401 Davis Industrial Parkway, Suite A, Solon, Ohio 44139



had been played and recorded during the previous shoe. When the dealers arrived at a slug during the next shoe, the signals to bet big were given and the casinos were quickly beat for millions.

The same scam happened in Las Vegas a few years before it hit Macau, when a group of Chinese nationals recruited several Chinese Baccarat dealers at the Desert Inn, Hilton and MGM. This scam was only busted because one of the dealers involved cracked under pressure while being interrogated by Nevada Gaming Control Board agents. The dealers performing the false shuffles in those casinos were so well trained that surveillance video of them actually doing it provided no evidence that would have held up in court without a confession.

There are also several documented cases of the scam in Atlantic City, the last major one hitting the Borgata in 2003. This is a very popular scam because it is both easy to pull off and very profitable — plus, no technology is needed to aid the scammers. Some of the news accounts of this latest bust claim that the cheaters used cell phones and other electronic gizmos to communicate. This does not appear to have been the case, and technological equipment is not needed for this type of scam.

Stop the Scam

How can casinos stop the scam? (Believe me, it will be tried again many times in the future — I would guess that for every false-shuffle scam busted, more than a hundred

have been successfully realized without detection.) The answer resides in good old-fashioned surveillance work, both on the floor and in the sky. First, all casino dealers should be monitored for dealing procedure and erratic behavior, which might suggest personal problems outside the casino that could make them vulnerable to participating in a scam. Any evidence of drug use or compulsive gambling should be addressed, as addictions account for the vast majority of dealers who go bad. I saw many cases of this during my short tenure as a dealer. Remember, the dealer is in the best position to cheat the casino, more so than anyone else inside or out.

Next, casinos need to monitor their Baccarat players. Of course, it will be difficult to weed out the potential cheaters from legitimate high-rolling players before the scam takes place, but there are certain telltale signs. The most blatant sign of a scam in progress is when, at a certain point in the shoe, Baccarat players who have been varying their bets suddenly team up and take the same side. By varying bets, I do not mean switching from “player” to “banker.” I mean that there is a repetitive and somewhat equal distribution of bets on the layout. Cheaters in this type of scam will usually bet an equal total amount on both sides, even though their individual bets will vary greatly. The key is that the total amount wagered on the Mini-Bac table will be evenly distributed between player and banker before the slug is reached. This is known as an “offset” procedure, used so the cheaters do not lose significant amounts of money while waiting for the slug. If all jump to the same side and win several hands in a row at the maximum bet, you might be wit-

nessing a false-shuffle scam. Especially if they revert back to an offset formation after the slug is over. Observing this is harder than it sounds, but the one thing you can almost always count on is, when the scam is going down, everyone playing at the table is involved to maximize the total amount of money they can take from the casino.

Assuming all casinos will not exclusively use automatic shufflers and that future false-shuffle scams are not going to be nabbed before they happen, there are some measures surveillance personnel can take to recognize cheaters as quickly as possible. Most false washes and shuffles can be detected by using the low-angle view on distant PTZ cameras, even if the dealer’s hands are partially concealing the slug. Also, if the dealer tempts fate and tries a second false shuffle, watch for variations in his dealing procedure. There has to be one in order to maintain the slug.

If you’re suspicious a scam has happened, call surveillance to review video of the hands during the winning streak. Have the operator record the sequence of cards that was played during the streak. Then have him review all the cards dealt from the previous shoe. If cards that appeared during the streak are in the same order (or are in perfect reverse) as cards in the previous shoe, you have incontrovertible evidence of the scam.

Remember, it’s all about humans before technology. The Tran Organization was not busted because casino security and surveillance personnel were efficient; it was busted because it got greedy and involved too many people. Hopefully, we will see this scam broken up much sooner in the future — and without a four-year FBI investigation.



Marcus is the author of four books: *American Roulette*, *Dirty Poker*, *The World’s Greatest Gambling Scams*, and *Identity Theft, Inc.* He can be reached at richard@richardmarcus-books.com.

