

Ex-con man recognizes swindle

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By **Robyn Doolittle** staff reporter

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Richard Marcus says he knows exactly how \$2 million was allegedly scammed from Casino Rama. After all, he came up with the idea in the 1970s.

Marcus was a Las Vegas baccarat dealer when he devised a scheme similar to the one outlined by American investigators following Thursday's arrests of 15 people in Ontario and 16 in the United States. Seven others are still wanted.

Within two weeks of developing the cheat, Marcus, 50, estimates he and his accomplice stole \$40,000 (U.S.) from the casino, which was a lot of money back then, he said.

"It's very easy. Just take a deck of cards and shuffle them, (but) protect a certain amount of it. That's called the slug," he said. "It's harder for the eye in the sky – the surveillance cameras – to catch; even on a zoom-in."

An accomplice would be writing down the order in which the cards appeared, which is allowed. That way, when the first few cards of the slug start appearing, players know to start betting big.

"I did it in a way that I wasn't even on the table when it happened. I fixed up the shoe (where the cards are kept) and left the shoe there to be dealt by the dealer who was relieving me," he said.

Cheaters play only one shoe, collect their winnings and bolt so the scam is over by the time casino staff notice the huge hit the table is taking.

Marcus estimates he has scammed \$20 million from casinos over 30 years – including ones in Windsor, Niagara Falls and Montreal – but he didn't start out as a con artist.

A lucky score of \$20,000 took him to Las Vegas where, armed with fake I.D., he won another \$100,000.

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For weeks, he lived the life of a high roller, complete with an all-expenses paid room at the Riviera hotel, lost everything on his 20th birthday and later became a baccarat dealer on the strip.

One night Joe Classan, who turned out to be from the same part of New York as Marcus, sat down at his table.

"We started talking and there was just a vibe between us. ... He wanted to know why I had never tried to scam the casino. He told me about the money I could make. He said `come up with something good.'"

Within two weeks of developing the scheme, Marcus had stolen \$40,000 from the casino, quit his job, and launched his professional career as a con artist. It wasn't until 1999 when he read the book *Catch Me If You Can* that he felt inspired to quit the game and write his own story, *American Roulette*. The book is set to become a movie in 2009, he said.

Today, Marcus teaches casinos how to protect themselves against advanced scam artists.

"If I'd been in (Casino Rama) where they got busted, it would not have gone on as long as it did," he said.
