

CONTROLLING THE TABLE

By "controlling the table" I mean getting more good hands than bad hands, more good hands than any table companion(s), extracting more cards per deal when the odds favor the house, and playing last with tablemates in order to see as many played cards as possible before making a play decision, all the while putting on an act that makes you look like a stupid gambler.

Playing One-on-One

When for some reason (perhaps to justify "comps") your minimum bet must be twice the table minimum (\$20 at a \$10-table, \$50 at a \$50 table, etc.) use the following strategy, which probably won't get you barred. When the odds are in your favor, play one hand. When the odds favor the house, divide your minimum bet and play two hands. At a \$10 table a \$50 minimum bet (but two \$25s when the count is in the house's favor) should get you some comps. You can let a win "ride" without much suspicion, but to be safe you might avoid increasing the bet otherwise. Of course the minimum bet can be higher if you can risk it, say \$100 for a single hand at a \$25 table and two \$50s for two hands, and then the comps should be pretty good.

Splitting your minimum one-hand bet in order to play two hands when the count is bad has a number of advantages: (1) there are 50% more cards eliminated from a bad deck residue than when playing a single hand; (2) you get some advantage in the play of the second hand by having seen your first hand's cards before making a playing decision (and you can look at both hands before making an insurance decision); (3) playing two hands reduces the fluctuation of bankroll to some degree (the variance is smaller); and (4) a pit boss may note that you spread to two hands when the count looks negative to him. Since going to two hands is usually a bullish-looking action, he probably won't be suspicious.

If the count has gone well plus, you are likely to have lost a hand or two to those small cards that the dealer got previously, so you have an excuse for going to one hand if you need one: "I need to change the order of these cards!"

If you win one hand and lose the other, the odds now good, just let the win ride on its spot and abandon the losing spot. If you have won both bets, just pile everything on one spot, how could that look suspicious?

In sum, for the same money on the table per deal, you get more deals playing one spot and fewer deals playing two spots.

When it seems that you are going to get only one more deal before the shuffle, then going to two hands is okay when the odds favor you. That sometimes gets you a shuffle, however. You might ask the dealer, "Do you have enough left for me to play two hands?" Of course then he might say no and shuffle!

As I said, even without increasing the total money wagered, playing two hands instead of

one tends to reduce bankroll fluctuation by reducing the variance of the final result. Does that need explaining? Betting \$100 on one hand or \$50 on each of two hands have close to the same expectation (close, because you get to see one hand before playing the other), but the former bet will have a standard deviation that is greater, and bankroll fluctuation is something to be minimized.

If not worried about getting barred, you can use a different strategy. When the amount you would like to bet on one hand is suspiciously large, reduce it a bit on the one spot and play another with the same amount. That means using a strategy opposite to the one suggested above. When the odds are in the house favor, play as little as you dare on one spot. That's a good way to get barred, in my experience, so you need a good "act" to get away with it.

Playing with One or More Tablemates

As always, try to sit at the far left of anyone else at the table, so that you get to see more played cards to aid your playing decisions. Play just one hand when the odds are in the house's favor and two hands when the odds are in your favor, thereby getting more good hands than the person playing a single spot. With one other at the table who is playing a single spot, you get two-thirds of the good hands and he gets only one-third, obviously beneficial to you. With two companions you get one-half of the good hands when playing two spots, and only one-third of the bad hands when playing a single spot. Encouraging others to play two hands when the odds are bad isn't nice, but who cares? They're going to lose their money anyway, eventually.

Another plus is that if you are playing the table minimum of, say \$25, you must put out twice that on each of two hands, resulting in four times as much money on the table as when playing one hand. This strategy may mean you need a pretty good act to avoid getting barred, but going from one green (\$25) to a mandatory four greens doesn't look too bad at a \$25 table. However, a \$100 minimum table gets watched pretty closely, requiring a very good "act" when using this strategy.

When doing all this, you must be careful about getting fewer rounds because of playing two hands when the odds favor you in a hand-dealt game. If a single-deck dealer is dealing three rounds to four players, playing two hands on the second round may cut that to two rounds. It is better to play single bets on two rounds than two bets on one round, as the second single spot's bet and play will be made on the basis of updated information. However, it is usually possible to play two hands on the last of three rounds, especially if you wait until the last moment to do so.

Camouflage

For those who don't know, an "act" consists of convincing the management that you are a typical gambling bozo. Douse yourself with bourbon before playing, bring a glass of ice water with an olive in it to the table to look like you're drinking a martini, get a pretty gal to hang on you while you play and occasionally scrounge chips from you, smile and laugh

a lot, and so on. Such "camouflage" acting is an art that high rollers must adopt if they want to play very long.

Card Eating

As some of the above tactics accomplish, you want to get as many cards on the table as possible when the odds favor the house, in order to minimize the number of hands you must play from that deck remainder. This is known as "card eating." One card-eating tactic is to hit a hand that is already busted. If you have been asking for dealer help in adding up your hand from time to time, as you should in order to appear stupid, you can get away with this-- but don't do it too often.

Tipping

Don't do it. I have seen players put out a token (casino language for a tip put out in front of your bet as a bet for the dealer) in order to prevent a shuffle when the count is good, but the amount of the token is greater than the expected return on the bet! A \$5 token on a \$50 bet doesn't seem like a lot, but that's 10% of the bet and expected return on a bet is rarely that good.

If you must give tokens, give the dealer 1/2 of a dealer win and keep the other half for a token on the next hand. If you win five in a row, a \$5 token will earn the dealers (they share) \$25 and get you some good will. If the house doesn't allow that (some don't) put your token on top of your bet, but offset a little. The dealer will understand what you are doing, and no one can tell you what to do with that sort of token. Just don't forget to give him his piece of a win, as forgetting will not be forgiven. You might want to token when leaving the table after a big win if you must play frequently in the same casino, but never after a loss and never if you are not going to be remembered. Dealers do make most of their money from tokens, but this is a tough game in which no quarter should be given. :))