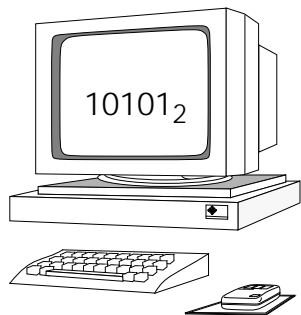
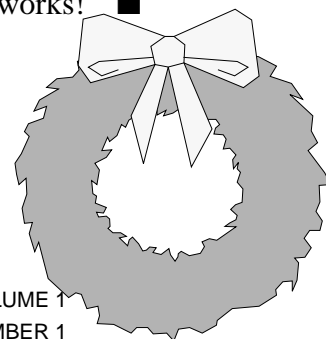


■ The monthly newsletter of blackjack news hot off the computer networks! ■



21 NEWS



VOLUME 1
NUMBER 1
DECEMBER 1990
FREE!

21 News is a monthly summary of blackjack news gathered from the rec.gambling computer newsgroup and from other sources as well. Each month's issue has informative articles and up-to-date reports of blackjack conditions observed during the previous month, covering **Las Vegas, Reno, Tahoe/Carson City, Atlantic City**, and more!

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“:-)” is a sideways “smiley face”, which means “just kidding” or “ha ha” or “I’m happy.” You’ll see some of these sprinkled through **21**. [Editor’s comments are in italics and brackets.]

Editor: Michael Hall

Contributors: see attributions (in many cases computer addresses are used to protect the identity of the authors.)

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ABOUT REC.GAMBLING

[Rec.gambling is a computer newsgroup subscribed to by thousands of users over USENET. Amongst these thousands are hundreds of blackjack players. 21 is composed largely of material gathered from this source.]

jacko@cbnews1.att.com:

One beef I have is that my Sept. 1990 Blackjack Forum is already wrong about what clubs are offering what games. For example, BJF says the Sands is all 6 deck (may have been 3 months ago when the article was submitted); and worst of all it says the Frontier is all 8 deck. Maybe this intimidated them into adding 1/2 dozen single deck tables.

hall@wildthing.bellcore.com:

In general, I’d say that rec.gambling... [and hence **21**] is a better source of information than all these blackjack magazines put together. We’re not quite as comprehensive, but then I think a lot of the information on casino conditions in the blackjack magazines is either fabricated or dated and not rechecked each time.

As an example, the Taj Mahal has been offering \$3 tables during the day since at least June (this is a big deal, since \$5 minimums were the lowest seen in A.C. since the demise of Atlantis.) This was reported on rec.gambling on August 2 by Ken Siegal. Even though Mr. Siegal wasn’t especially

prompt in informing us and he didn’t remember whether he played for \$3 or for \$2, I confirmed and clarified (\$3 not \$2) this information shortly thereafter. This was still quicker than the blackjack ‘zines, which to this day still report \$5 as the lowest minimum in A.C.!

As another example, the reports in blackjack ‘zines on penetration for A.C. games are way off, mostly because penetration usually changes on a month by month basis, whereas the reports in rec.gambling are timely and accurate.

Hip, Hip, Harrah’s for rec.gambling. Please keep those casino reports rolling in!

jacko@cbnews1.att.com:

Yes, and don’t forget that you heard it first [on rec.gambling] that Resorts was offering six tables of double deck back in June. Or that the Claridge was down to one four-deck table at \$100 minimum bet.

MATCH PLAY CHIPS

[If you had \$600 in match play chips, such as with the Vegas World offer, what would be the best way to convert them into as much cash as possible? Match play chips are worth about half of the stated amount, since you lose them whether you win or lose and only get paid one real dollar for

one match dollar when you win. In Blackjack, they often take match play chips on pushes and/or pay blackjack 1 for 1, which results in a huge casino advantage on those match play chips. Roulette would be better than blackjack, and craps would seem the best game to get rid of these match play chips. But what is the optimal way to convert the \$600 match play chips to real money in craps?]

jacobs@cs.utah.edu:

Place \$300 of the action chips on Pass, \$300 on Don't Pass, and \$10 of your own money on 12 (this assumes that 12 is barred on the Don't Pass line; if 2 is barred, this bet should be placed on 2 instead of 12). This gives a guaranteed net win of \$290 if any number other than the barred number comes up, and a win of \$300 when the barred number does come up. Not much better than Roulette, but every little bit helps.

bouchard@star.dec.com:

Actually I think you can do better by placing the match chips as follows: \$300 pass, \$300 don't pass and only \$5 on the barred number (2 or 12). On most numbers you net \$295. On the barred number you net \$150, but you still have \$300 in match chips from the don't pass bet (which "pushes" on the barred number).

THE OVER/UNDER BET

Richard Marks:

In some Reno casinos there is a side bet on the total of the first two cards dealt you. The bet is if the total is over 13 or under 13. The Ace is considered a one for this bet. If you bet on over and the total is more than 13, you win even money. Likewise if you bet on under and the total is under 13, you win even money. Otherwise, you lose the bet; there is no tie.

The straight odds of winning this bet are:

.465 for over
.451 for under.

Without the aid of a counting system, this is a losing bet. I have developed a counting method that can win. The payoff can be:

1.80 units/100 hands for over bet.
1.05 units/100 hands for under bet.

The payoff depends on the penetration (how much of the deck remains before the shuffle). The above payoffs assume a 70 to 80 percent penetration or about 1/2 deck remaining before the shuffle from a two deck stack. For a 60 to 70 percent penetration the payoff is 1.16 over, 0.59 under.

The count is: count +2 for every A,2,3 played, count -1 for every 8,9,10 played.

This is called the over/under count. There are 12 of the A,2,3 cards in a single deck and 24 of the 8,9,10 cards. So when you count through a deck, the over/under count should be zero at the start and end.

Before betting, factor the count to the full deck count. For example, if the count is 6 and you estimate that 3/4 deck remains, the full deck count is 8 (6 divided by 3/4). If you are playing against a two deck stack and the count is 3 with 1 1/2 decks remaining, the full deck count is 2 (3 divided by 3/2).

Bets are made as follows:

full deck count equal or greater than 4: bet on over.

[full deck count] equal or less than -5: bet on under.

I have run simulations using typical blackjack counting methods of +1 for low cards and -1 for high cards. I did not find a good correlation between these methods and winning bets for over/under. Since the over/under count is quite different from the blackjack count, I doubt if many humans can keep both counts.

However, the payoff rate for blackjack for good card counters is also about 3 units per hundred cards. So if you can play a good basic blackjack strategy, which is about 1 to 2 units per hundred loss, you can play this over/under strategy and profit by about 1 unit per hundred.

Now notice that a positive over/under count means the deck is rich in tens. When the over/under count gets to the +4 level, it is quite reasonable to increase your bet and make that 1.8 payoff bet on over 13. If you triple your bet at the +4 level, the over/under payoff will be 5.4 units per hundred hand and I would expect that the payoff for blackjack would also be favorable. (Caveat: the blackjack payoff versus over/under count has NOT been simulated.)

By payoff I mean how much will be won per 100 hands, not the percentage of win. A 51% win rate means that of 100 hands, 51 would be won and 49 lost for a 2 unit payoff per hundred hands.

If you profitably use this system please remit \$25 to:

Richard E. Marks
931 Sulgrave Lane
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

With this remission, you may request simulation program source and the raw simulation data.

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[Note: an easier system is A, 2, 3, 4 counted as +1, and -1 for tens. When the true count is +3 or more, the over bet is profitable, and when the true count is -4 or below, the under bet is profitable. Snyder's Over/Under Report costs \$25 and explains this in full.]

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

markd@cygnus.la.locus.com:

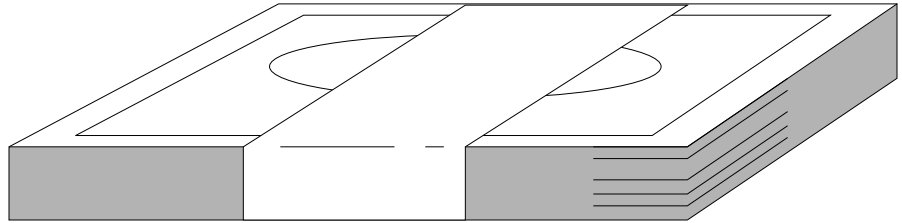
Does anyone know of all the Casinos in Vegas that offer the double exposure blackjack game (the one where you see both the dealer's cards, but you lose on ties). I know of the Marina, Vegas World, Lady Luck and Fitzgerald's. And the Sahara has an even stranger variation where if the face-up card is 10, it becomes a double exposure game, and if it's not a 10, it stays a regular game.

As I can remember the rules [at the Sahara] are:

1. All pushes are ties
2. No splitting or doubling
3. Blackjack pays even
4. 6-7-8 same suit or A-J [some suit] pays 1.5 (or something like that)
5. 6 cards totaling 21 or less is an automatic win

The best double exposure rules I've found are at the Lady Luck. They let you double on anything, while the other 3 places will let you double on only 9,10,11. The worst rules are at Fitzgerald, where they won't let you split uneven 10's (like J-Q), and also if you double on A-8 and draw a 2, they will force you to count that as 11 and not 21. All 4 places deal from 6-deck shoes, but I've still found all of them to be very profitable (and without counting). Now I want to avoid making a pest of myself, but I haven't been able to find the game anywhere else. Bourbon Street had it a while ago, but they've discontinued it.

[If you're winning but not counting cards, you may just be getting lucky. However, a few blackjack games do have a positive expectation for basic strategy. Make sure you've got one.]



BLACKJACK RICHES

attmail!granjon!msm:

The mathematics for some serious profits *are* there. A fortune will not be made, though, because it requires far more patience than anyone with any intelligence can muster. Take, for example, the following ulcer-inducing table:

You are squeezed over on third base, trying to fit on the tiny chair without getting thrown into the pit. Your eyes are a crimson red, since you've had your contact lenses in for a good portion of the weekend, and your stomach is bloated from a perfect blend of fast-food burgers, chocolate, and plenty of gin-n-tonics. First base consists of probably the slowest player ever to play the game, and possibly the most intoxicated. He's spilled two drinks already, so I guess he *could* be more liquored up. Next to him is an old lady, who glares at you every time you bust by drawing a ten. Once more, she says, and she'll go right back to the slot machines. Then there's the lady from the Orient, who plays perfect basic strategy, but holds up the game for five minutes every time an ace comes up, searching for change to take insurance. She absolutely refuses to buy in for more than a single chip at a time. The guy next to you is still glowering from the \$20 you cost him by hitting that soft 18, which is probably why he

keeps blowing his cigarette smoke in your face. Oh, and there is one empty chair, which fills up whenever the count reaches greater than +8, causing the dealer to shuffle. The dealer knows enough about the game to be an idiot; he's shared that with you by explaining, in great mathematical detail, why you shouldn't have taken insurance last time, even though you had 5 units out on the table. And now he's hinting for a tip: "Yep, the cards go well when the dealer's happy." The pit boss keeps looking at you every five seconds, and has the remarkable knack of bringing in a new deck only at positive counts.

The above situation is tolerable when you're up a significant amount, but when you're losing, it's simply unbearable - especially when the cowboy who split 5's is up thousands of dollars. Also, keep in mind that I'm not just talking about being down for a night, but when you hit a 'losing streak' for months on end, beating all mathematical logic (not really)!

Speaking of math, now it's time to defend the game of blackjack, and the art of counting. However, the emphasis placed on how expenses just chew up your winnings cannot be over-stressed. Below is one of many results of a computer simulation that I have run for far more hours than you can imagine. I'll show the chart, and then explain the relevance of it:

Results of 200 Unit [Double or Nothing] Trials

(10000 trials per betting range)

	<u>1-4</u>	<u>1-5</u>	<u>1-6</u>	<u>1-7</u>	<u>1-8</u>
wins:	8807	8723	8619	8458	8414
losses:	1193	1277	1381	1542	1586
millions of hands:	54.76	41.38	33.81	28.05	24.39
profit/100 hands:	2.78	3.60	4.28	4.93	5.60
P(200):	.8807	.8723	.8619	.8458	.8414

Derived probabilities:

P(100):	.7310	.7233	.7141	.7008	.6973
P(150):	.8175	.8086	.7979	.7819	.7776
P(250):	.9241	.9170	.9080	.8936	.8895
P(300):	.9525	.9470	.9397	.9278	.9244
P(350):	.9706	.9665	.9610	.9516	.9488
P(400):	.9820	.9790	.9750	.9678	.9657
P(450):	.9890	.9869	.9840	.9787	.9771
P(500):	.9933	.9919	.9898	.9860	.9848
P(600):	.9975	.9969	.9959	.9940	.9933
P(700):	.9991	.9988	.9984	.9974	.9971
P(800):	.9997	.9995	.9993	.9989	.9987

The chart was created by simulating the game of blackjack, given that a player has 200 units, and will quit when he has either doubled his 200 units (a win) or lost them all (a loss). This quitting constitutes a single trial; the chart was created by running 10000 such trials at each of five different betting ranges. The blackjack rules used are those of northern Nevada: single-deck, double on 10-11, no [double after split], hit on soft-17. The counting strategy employed is the Uston APC, played 100% perfectly by the computerized "player". Only a single player is at the table, and the shuffle point is at 15 cards remaining. (These conditions are a bit too optimal.) The numbers show basically how many times the player was able to double his bankroll, and how many times he busted.

Using this, and how many hands were played for the 10,000 trials, it's quite simple to calculate the number of units won per 100 hands. As you can see, in your example of a betting range

of 1-5, a player should win 3.60 units every 100 hands (or 3.24 per 90 hands, if you prefer).

At a dime unit, this is greater than \$30/hour. Granted, these conditions are far, far too optimal, but finding a good game is one of the most important factors in counting. But let's look at the probabilities of busting out, prior to double your bankroll. In your case, with a betting range of 1-5, and with 400 units, you would have a 97.9% chance of doubling your BR prior to busting. Add expenses in there, and the chance of busting probably rocket out to 5%. Tell you what, though, let's live on the edge a little bit, and go with a \$15 [unit]. Although our chances of busting may go as high as 10% (with expenses), we are now making over \$45/hour! I'm sure that in reality, one could only get about \$30-40/hour at this rate, and the chance of busting is kind of high.

The point is, that the money you win will remain gambling money, and as your bankroll increases, your unit-size also increases, but not quite as fast. Soon, your bankroll consists of 600 units of \$25, and your expenses are negligible compared to your winnings, and you have very little chance of ever losing it all. I believe it is possible -- to win 3.00 units per hour means you can double your \$4,000 in as little as 100-120 hours. The most important quality is that of patience, because the game is really not worth it until you have a bankroll of at least \$10,000.

So far, I have not been able to have that patience. My first experiment, although resulting in a profit, ended on a miserable losing streak. I believe, as others have said, that the key is team-play, but I have yet to find an acceptable partner. I did find someone who understood the game quite well, but his laziness and hatred for idiocy resulting in him despising the game of blackjack. I am about to begin a second venture, on my own, with a bankroll of approximately \$2000. With casual playing (is there such a thing?), I hope to have turned this into either nothing or ten grand within a year. Although this is only a profit of \$8000, the 900 units won per year will equal a \$25,000 profit the second year, etc. The goal is that soon the unit-size will be so large, that just varying the bets from 1-2 still results in a significant profit.

Obviously, this is dreaming. But the numbers *are* there, and I am certain that, although they are somewhat unrealistic, there is an opportunity for profit. The problem is, you can't spend the money you win, because it all has to go back into your bankroll! Not to mention the fact that you have to be willing to sleep in a car until you're at least a \$15 player.

Hmmmm.... I started this out by saying that only a fool could expect to make a fortune at the game, and ended it with the hopes of retiring from my job within a few years...

BLACKJACK CONDITIONS

[The blackjack conditions here were observed during the month of November.]

Conditions Legend

? Insufficient data (question mark)

 Good conditions (thumbs up)

 So-so conditions (thumb clenched)

 Bad conditions (thumbs down)

 Heat (torch)

 Over/under bet (up/down arrows)

Numbers by symbols refer to number of decks

Las Vegas

loch@robotics.Jpl.Nasa.Gov:

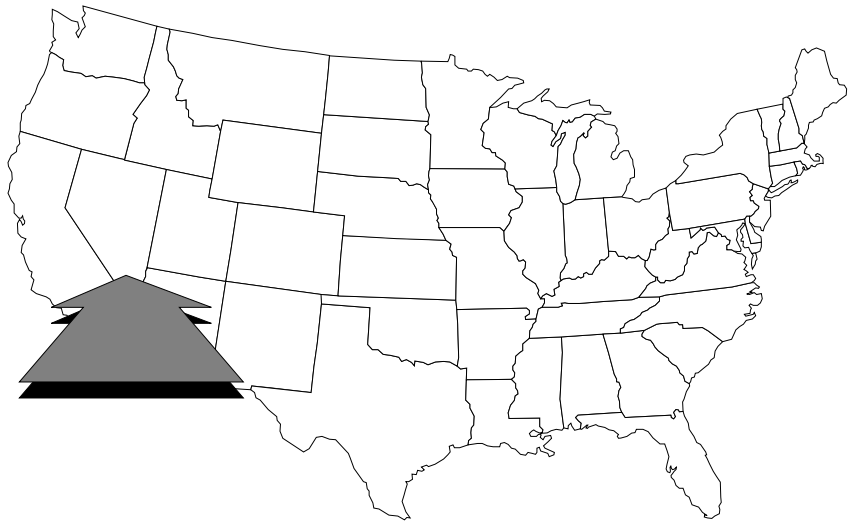
I've got some great info for any card counters interested in gambling in Vegas during the week. I just got back from a 3 day trip starting Sunday night and finishing Tuesday. I left Vegas up \$1000 starting with a \$200 bankroll betting mostly \$5 to \$20. The good news is that the conditions are ideal for counters during the week. The bad news is that the pit bosses suffer from severe paranoia during this time as well.

Alladin



dg10+@andrew.cmu.edu:

For a short time a went to the Alladin. I wouldn't recommend it at all.



No DAS or Resplitting. The place was extremely crowded and you could die before a cocktail waitress will come by. \$2 minimum though.

Barbary Coast



dg10+@andrew.cmu.edu:

On Sunday morning I went to the barbary coast where they had \$2 BJ double deck, DAS, Resplitting, dealt face down. I decided to try counting for the first time. (Note to other beginners: ITS EASY!)

I found it easiest to sit at first base so that I could finish my hand and then concentrate on counting. When I sat at third base the dealers arm kept on getting in my way and I couldn't see what he was dealing. [Note to beginners: The most important thing is to make sure you have a pattern so you won't have to remember which cards you counted and which ones you didn't. I didn't even count my own hand until the dealer turned it over.]

I bought in for \$20 and played \$2-\$6 and after numerous hours cashed out with about \$180. In the early morning penetration was very good (about

half a deck from the end), but by the time I got more experienced by the middle of the day they were cutting of close to a full deck.

What constitutes heat? At one point I quickly upped my bet from \$2 to \$5 (I know BIG MONEY :-)) and the pit boss quickly rushed over and picked up the cards from the discard pile and looked through them face up. Was he checking the count? Being a neophyte I was practically shitting in my pants. He was standing over my shoulder for a minute or two before he walked away. I left the table soon after.

loch@robotics.Jpl.Nasa.Gov:

[I experienced] super severe paranoia at the Barbary Coast. I started playing there around 1 P.M. Monday starting with \$100. I played at \$5 minimum double deck with DAS and all the good rules, betting two hands at \$10 for the first deal and dropping to one hand at \$5 for negative counts and going to two hands at \$15 for +6 count or more. I started with \$100 went down to \$30 and was coming back up to \$70 all in about a 40 minute period when from behind me I hear a woman say "We don't like the way you play Blackjack here." I turned to see the pit boss and asked what the problem was. She said "You can play craps or keno or any other game here but we don't want your action on the Blackjack table." So

being totally taken aback, I made some random comment, picked up my chips and left. I wasn't there long enough for her to really determine my play and I was actually down from my \$100 so go figure this.

Binion's

?

wilding@cs.utexas.edu:

The most amazing thing happened on [one] Sunday afternoon. I sat down at Binion's and two hands later saw a fellow at third base double with an 8. I noted that he'd played it correctly - the count was high - but marked it off to coincidence. As I watched him bet a few hands with the count, I became sure he was counting cards. Finally, on one hand he hesitated for a moment before standing against a 10. I had two faces down, and I knew from his perspective the (Hi-Opt I) count was 2, and the true count > 3, not including his own cards. I figured him for a 15, since the strategy deviation for 15 against a 10 says stand ≥ 3 , and I always need a moment to think when a decision point is between the count and the true count. I was very happy when he turned over a 15, because I knew that after 3 years of playing I was looking at the first stranger I'd seen who was a quality counter.

Caesar's



loch@robotics.Jpl.Nasa.Gov:

Only shoe games, no double deck at all.

alan@mq.com:

Nothing ever changes in The Empire. All games are six-deck with about 1.5-2 decks cut away. Rules are good, though: double on anything, DAS, resplit to 4 hands (except Aces), late surrender. Most of the main casino is \$25-\$10,000, although there are \$5 games

during the day. The Olympic casino is mostly \$5-\$10,000 games, with a few \$3-\$300. There are also 9 Over/Under 13 games. Saturday night, the main casino is mostly \$25- and \$100-\$10,000, with a few \$500-\$10,000 and an occasional "Reserved" table with \$20,000 lavender chips in it.

Dunes



dg10+@andrew.cmu.edu:

The Dunes is a nice place but fairly small. The casino was never over crowded like some of the other larger places. The cocktail waitresses provided great service (coming by every 10 minutes) although they were nothing great to look at.

Anyway, about the blackjack game... All of the games were six decks dealt face up, but the rules were favorable. Double after split, resplitting to 4 hands. The cards were shuffled perhaps 1.5 decks from the end.

There are two casinos: the main casino and the "oasis". The main casino had minimums of \$3 at slow times and \$5 at busy times. The oasis had \$2 minimums at all times. (Although late night / early morning they only had one table open in the oasis).

All in all, I was very impressed with the dunes and I would go back there. After playing eight hours of basic strategy at \$5 flat and playing the match play chip (\$5 of real money + \$5 of match play) we ended up about \$55 up.

(Note: the pit bosses and dealers are a little confused about the match play chips. While playing in the main casino, when I wanted to double down or split, I put down another \$5 cash + \$5 match chip. But later I saw someone try to do the same thing in the oasis and they told him he could only put down extra real money and no more match chips.)

Excalibur



dg10+@andrew.cmu.edu:

I decided to check out the Excalibur. Very BIG and very fancy. They had a few tables of double deck BJ with \$5 minimums... Actually they dealt pretty deep (close to 1.5 decks out of 2), but they don't use a cut card to tell the dealer when to shuffle, rather the dealer uses his discretion when to shuffle.

loch@robotics.Jpl.Nasa.Gov:

This was one of the best spots to gamble for counters [in Vegas]. They had a at least 4 double deck, \$5 minimum, DAS, + all good rules and had 80% penetration. (I know, I couldn't believe it either.) Sunday night I won \$500 in ~5 hours from 1 A.M. to 6 A.M. playing the above strategy. Between 5 and 6 A.M. paranoia set in and the decks were changed 4 times in an hour and penetration dropped to 25%. I made a comment to the dealer about wearing the cards out with all the shuffling and got the dirtiest look I've seen in a long time. I left shortly after.

Fitz



loch@robotics.Jpl.Nasa.Gov:

Very interesting place! Same as 4 Queens with good double decks but they have a very special table here. When I walked in a saw a table with a sole gambler and a very hot female dealer. So I couldn't resist playing even though the minimum was \$25. But there's more! There are only 4 playing spots at this table and it's a single deck with the same rules as 4 Queens double deck [see below]... and about 60% penetration.

Anyway, Brooke (the hot dealer) made \$40 in tips while I preceded to turn my \$100 into \$400. This with flat

betting and occasional \$50 when +6 count. I got a LOT of attention from the pit bosses who wanted my name and my address for their "mailing list." They also wanted to know my occupation, how often I came to Vegas, etc. So if you play at this table (you can't miss it) be prepared to say you're a plumber from Wisconsin who just happened in.

Flamingo

?

loch@robotics.Jpl.Nasa.Gov:

Like Excalibur but \$10 minimum on double deck. Don't know about penetration though.

4 Queens



loch@robotics.Jpl.Nasa.Gov:

Good selection of double deck games with \$5 minimums, but no DAS, max 4 resplitting, and dealer hits soft 17. Good place to play because there are more tables to choose from and I felt less conspicuous there. I won about \$200 in one and half hours.

Frontier



jfr@locus.com:

The Frontier (and I believe a couple of other casinos as well) were advertising an interesting payoff variation... If you got a same-suited BJ (i.e., Ace-ten-card of the same suit), the payoff was 2:1 instead of 1.5:1... In addition, this payoff would occur whether the dealer had blackjack or not, i.e., insurance was not necessary if you had a same-suited blackjack... Since approximately 1/4 of all blackjacks are same-suited, this would increase the player expectation slightly (maybe even a lot, I have not done the math

yet)... However, the Frontier also took away double-down on anything but a dealer's 10 or A which takes away from your expectation, and I bet the reduction is greater than the increase...

Golden Gate



bhoughto@cmdnfs.intel.com:

11pm Saturday. Sat at a \$2 BJ table alone (on a Saturday night!) and broke even for a dealer or two. The Golden Gate has all one-deck tables, bow.

Gold Strike



bhoughto@cmdnfs.intel.com:

Stopped in at the Gold Strike to see what it's like. Not bad. Mostly slots, unfortunately, and 4-deck BJ.

Las Vegas Club



bhoughto@cmdnfs.intel.com:

1:50am Sunday. Made the mistake of sitting down at a \$2 table at the Las Vegas Club just because there was an interesting woman next to an empty seat (there were three other empty seats at the table :-). I like the LVC because it's got a baseball motif (logo is a slugger, lots of memorabilia in the back, dealers in softball shirts, etc.), but I hate their BJ tables. Four decks and all face-up dealing (excluding dealer's hole card).

Little Caesar's

?

dg10+@andrew.cmu.edu:

I also checked out this hole in the wall called Little Caesar's. They had double exposure blackjack at \$1 mini-

mum. It was interesting to try something different, but since I didn't know what I was doing I didn't stay long. They also had "Crapless Craps" where you win on 7 and everything else is a point. I later figured out that the house percentage is about 4% on this game. This leads me to believe that double exposure blackjack that they had might also be a suckers game.

Mahoney's

?

bhoughto@cmdnfs.intel.com:

I hit Mahoney's, one of the small casinos on LV Blvd. just north of the Palomino. Played 21 for a while and broke even. Doubling allowed only on 10 or 11.

Mirage



loch@robotics.Jpl.Nasa.Gov:

Monday and Tuesday afternoon all I saw were shoe games (? decks) and one double deck game at \$100 minimum with a bored dealer.

jacko@cbnews1.att.com:

They have one pit of double deck, about a dozen tables...it's next to one of the bars, sort of in the back-middle of the casino. Last time was there it was all \$25 minimums. However, they were not strict about enforcing 2 times table minimum when you played multiple hands. Two hands of table minimum seemed fine with them.

The Stardust



alan@mq.com:

Great game. All (I think) double-deckers with about 1/2 deck cut out of play. Mostly \$5-\$300 (\$500? I forget), although a couple \$3 games were seen.

Rules are double on anything, NO DAS, re-split to 4 hands (except Aces), no surrender.

wilding@cs.utexas.edu:

At the Stardust they're trying out a new "Ace detector" at a few of the BJ tables. When the dealer has a 10 up, he runs his cards over a little device that lights up and allows the dealer to see if there is an ace underneath.

The Tropicana



alan@mjq.com:

It seems that AC management has taken over. The 4 and 6-deck games have become 8-deckers! There are 7 6-deck games left. The 6-deck games cut off 2 decks and the 8-decks leave about 3 decks out of play. Rules are double on anything, DAS, re-split to 4 hands (except Aces), no surrender. Limits are mostly \$5-\$500, with a few \$25 and \$100 games sprinkled in Saturday night. Yuck.

Here's the odd part. Among these terrible games lie 2 double-deck and 2 single-deck games. I'm told that in AC, the favorable games have HIGHER minimums. These were \$3-\$300! Rules were not very favorable, though.

Doubling is allowed on 10 and 11 only, no DAS, re-split to 4 hands (except Aces), no surrender. The double-deckers cut off 1 deck, making it not particularly good. The single-decks always dealt two full rounds to a 7-hand table (about 35-40 cards?).

Just a general observation: the single-deck games were ALWAYS full, and the people playing them had more money in front of them than the 8-deckers. Whether you count or not, this is a great game.

Union Plaza



wilding@cs.utexas.edu:

A friend got barred from Union Plaza betting \$10-\$50.

Vegas World



wilding@cs.utexas.edu:

I visited Vegas World for all of 5 minutes. I have never seen a clip joint like it. The BJ tables paid even money on Blackjacks. Many of the craps tables were "crapless". Even the video poker machine payouts were cut back. If you have a sick sense of humor and want a laugh, stop by. Otherwise, steer clear.

Tahoe / Carson City

jfr@locus.com:

Basically, all casinos in Tahoe that I have ever been to (High Sierra, Del Webb, Holiday Inn, ???) - except Caesar's - offer downtown Vegas rules (no double after split, no surrender, dealer hits soft 17, double only on hard 10 or 11) and are pretty much house games... Most are 4-deck although there may be some 2-deck lurking around. Caesar's uses standard Caesar's rules (DAS, double on anything, surrender, stand on all 17), but it is usually 6-deck only and has pretty steep limits... I remember only one or two \$3 tables with mostly \$5, 10 and \$25 tables... If you don't want to ski, go to Vegas...

Ormsby House (Carson City)



mannys@thebookstore.Eng.Sun.COM:

Saturday at Ormsby House/Carson City. All single deck, \$2-\$200 and

\$5-\$1000 tables. No discard tray. This might make it hard to estimate a true count (not a problem with Red 7), but it also makes it hard for the dealer to gauge the end of the deck. I never saw anything less than 75% penetration, and it was usually between 80% and 90%. Standard Reno rules. I went in around 9PM and got a seat at a \$2 table. I sat next to first base. In the center of the table some guy (I'll call him the jerk) was making all sorts of noise. He had a hot (as in good looking) girl sitting on the stool but not playing. He was playing from 1 to 3 hands at \$5 to \$20 each. And get this, he had a \$1 or \$2 toke on EVERY hand he played! He was giving the dealer some crap about making her \$100 in tips, and he kept giving us a ration for not toking more. Honest to God, this guy did not make a bet without a toke. The chick with him wasn't gambling, and was trying to control him. He wasn't drunk, just obnoxious. He and the chick kept getting into arguments.

After about an hour, I noticed that the chick (she was sitting next to me and the jerk was standing on the other side of her) was telling the jerk how much to bet. I started paying attention, and it was apparent that she was keeping the count, although the jerk didn't seem to notice. He'd argue with her over how much to bet. She'd say put \$20 on 2 spots when the count would get to +4 or higher, and sometimes he would and sometimes he wouldn't. She was good. A couple of times she said "I can't gamble". Never said don't, she said can't. I was too shy to ask her why.

Anyway, we all had a good time except for the jerk who was losing. If this was idiot camouflage, there was too much idiot and not enough correct plays. As the night wore on, we talked, joked, bet, won, lost, and had one hell of a time. Turned out that the jerk is the graveyard shift manager at the Sands in Reno. Invited us all to come up and see him for a free dinner. The chick was a dealer, but she never said where. Perhaps at the Sands also. The dealer at our table made \$125 in tokes in about 2 hours. The jerk left the table whining

that he was about \$100 down. The first baseman and I laughed so hard we nearly fell off our stools.

At one point during play, the pit boss came up and counted the tips to color up for the dealer. The jerk watched him and said "Kind of makes you want to be a dealer again, doesn't it?" The pit boss gave him a look that melted the ice cubes in every drink on the table. When I left, I was down \$5.

Sunday, back at the Ormsby House. My wife and I sat down at a table with two other guys. One was betting quarters and was using some kind of betting progression with basic strategy. He had to leave once to get more money (shows you how well that worked). My wife played straight basic strategy, and I used the Red 7. The count seemed to stay negative for long stretches, then jump high for one hand or so, then settle back down on the negative side. Made it kind of tough to camouflage the spread (I was using 1-3).

Two things happened here. At one point, the quarter bettor mentioned that years ago he had learned basic strategy, then how to count cards, but gave it up because he never was successful at it. I wasn't sure if he had spotted me, or was just making conversation. Later, the pit boss came over with a new deck of cards. I was at third base, so he stood next to me and checked the deck for flaws while the dealer finished the hand. I had a 15, and the dealer had a Queen up. As I motioned for a hit, I thought some conversation with the Pit Boss might be in order, so I asked him if they ever actually found flaws in the new decks of cards. Just then, the dealer hits me with a 6 (giving me 21) and the Pit Boss says "Yea we find flaws all the time. Like that 6, it was supposed to be a 7." Then he turned and walked off. I laughed out loud. After about an hour of play, I left up \$14.

Reno

Peppermill



mannys@thebookstore.Eng.Sun.COM:

Friday at the Peppermill/Reno. This place was VERY crowded. Every table was double deck with standard Reno rules. Limits were \$3, \$5, \$25, and \$100. Mostly \$3 and \$5. 70% penetration. Later, they opened up a pit with 10 \$2 tables but by 9PM they were all \$3 and \$5 (and full with people waiting).

Since this was going to be my first try at counting, I thought I'd start out slow and back count to get the feel of the pace. Talk about dirty looks! Jeez, for a while I thought I had on a sign or something. I tried not to be obvious. I'd stand back about 3 or 4 feet, and just watch the action and count the cards. I didn't try to jump in at a high count, but the dealers would glare at me like I was retarded or something.

By the way, they had one table with Over/Under. It was a \$5 double exposure table.

Laughlin

wilding@cs.utexas.edu:

We spent a couple days in nearby Laughlin. It is card-counter's heaven. Single deck, fair rules, and really great penetration... On the bad side, there is absolutely nothing happening in Laughlin [that's not] not casino-oriented. (Well, there's a movie theatre - in the Riverside casino.) Rooms are very cheap.

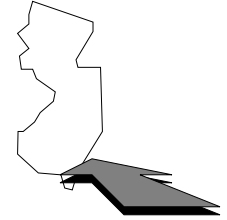
Pioneer



wilding@cs.utexas.edu:

The Pioneer is a particularly great place to play.

Atlantic City



[Our coverage of Atlantic City is somewhat lean, because most of us have gotten too disgusted with AC to go there!]

hall@wildthing.bellcore.com:

Even during the summer, the Taj Mahal's extra capacity made all of A.C. seem relatively uncrowded. You can even find \$3 BJ tables at the Taj during off hours and \$2 Craps at Bally's Park Place. Claridge offers 3X odds at craps, and Resorts offers more (5X?) If you can't even find a \$5 table, then go to another casino.

jacko@cbnews1.att.com:

Last time I was at Trop World I talked to a girl at the Diamond Club booth and she said they were getting rid of some of the levels of the Diamond Club...it sounds like there will soon be only Red and Platinum levels. I had to wait months and months but I finally got a platinum card. For December, I got a booklet with one \$10 coupon per week between Thanksgiving and Christmas (5 of them), plus a free room night for each of those 5 weeks.

Claridge mostly sends coin coupons in response to your play there. However, about every two months lately I get a card redeemable for a free gift at the "Claridge Boutique". The first time it was a heart shaped crystal picture frame, nice thing. The next time it was for a cheap silver plate tray. I've also talked to people who got room coupons in the mail. The good stuff from them comes in BLUE envelopes.

The best coupon dropper by far is the Castle. I get a batch of bi-weekly coupons for \$15 each every month or two from them. Get their Player Card and use it a little. Trump Plaza cut me off, too. I was getting \$10/month the first 6 months I had their card. However I recently got a card for a free night at the Trump Regency, so I guess I can't complain.

In my experience, Friday night is the only reasonable time to gamble on the weekend. Saturdays all day and Sunday afternoons are a zoo. Sunday nights after about 9:00 are usually OK too.

The Claridge

?

jacko@cbnews1.att.com:

The Claridge has rearranged their baccarat pit again, and moved all the blackjack tables into one big circle in the middle of the room. This includes both 6 and 8 deck tables. It is possible that the 4 deck game is now gone. I didn't notice the characteristically short discard rack on any of the tables, but only a few of them were in use. I may have missed it. Also the large baccarat table was moved to the front right corner (big deal). They are still offering only 3x odds on craps. Looks like they have ceded the high ground to Resorts.

Caesar's

?

jacko@cbnews1.att.com:

In Caesar's, they use a stutter shuffle. It is slightly different than the other places, but still uses two passes. Amazingly, the night I was there, there was a guy at a reserved table on the main casino floor playing three hands of \$10,000 each. Quite a crowd of spectators too.

Trump Plaza

?

jacko@cbnews1.att.com:

I can reconfirm that Trump Plaza uses the standard 2 pass stutter shuffle [used at several other AC casinos.]

Foreign

Puerto Rico

markd@locus.com:

I was there 2 weeks ago, and played at the Caribe Hilton and the Clarion. I was told by one of the local people that the Clarion was supposed to be the biggest in San Juan. Indeed it had about 12 BJ tables vs. about 6 for the Hilton.

It appears that most of them are in San Juan. I took a trip to Ponce, on the south side of the island, and the cab driver said that there was one casino there. San Juan has at least 8. I don't know about Maguayez.

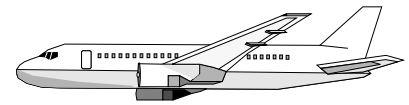
At the Hilton, there is a sign by the entrance describing how you are supposed to behave. It says that you may not make any loud noises, or shout, or otherwise disturb others. No alcohol is allowed. There is also a section describing a dress code, which sounds very formal, but I was told that it used to be formal in the past, but isn't anymore. I was there at night in a T-shirt, and no one said anything. Supposedly, shorts are OK during the day. (P.S. It's hot and humid there)

I played BJ at the \$2 tables. They allowed doubling on 9,10,11 only and did not allow re-splitting. However they did allow double after split. The dealer only draws one card for himself (face up), and doesn't draw another to put underneath it. I seem to remember that someone mentioned this before. Am I just paranoid, or does this give the house a bigger advantage? It seems

that if a dealer draws a large card, he is more likely to draw a small card next, and vice versa. So when his first card is 5 or 6, he never seems to bust. It almost seems he's more likely to bust if his first card is a 10. (Of course I'd rather still have a 6 :-).

[If the dealers take doubled/split bets when they have blackjack, then it's the European no hole card rule, which is bad. Otherwise, it has no effect.]

PACKAGES, LODGING, & TRAVEL



Las Vegas

dg10+@andrew.cmu.edu:

...to anyone going to LV from the east coast, don't take the red-eye flight back. I took the midnight flight on Sunday night and arrived in Pittsburgh at 7:20 AM Monday. I had planned to go to class on Monday but I was completely wasted and I slept all day on Monday. So I should have just taken the morning flight.

dg10+@andrew.cmu.edu:

...I took a deal with Jet America and stayed at the Dunes. The deal was \$412 (for two people) for three nights including meals and drinks. After 8 hours (per person) at \$5 blackjack we got back \$200 cash and \$400 in matching chips. Be careful when calculating the net cost. The matching chips only give you face value if you win with them. So if you win 50% of the time, \$400 in matching chips are only worth \$200. Still it works out to \$12 net cost for three nights of food and lodging for two people.

bruceh@hpspdra.HP.COM:

Some quick notes about the "too-good-to-be-true" Vegas World offer:

1) The \$1000 in action is extremely deceptive, and actually amounts to about \$300-\$400. Here's why:

- you get \$400 in action on the slots and miscellaneous useless wagers. These bets have a very low expected return.

- The \$600 in table action is actually only worth \$300, because the bets are paid off at 1 FOR 1 (i.e. -- you win an even money bet like blackjack, they take your \$1 funny money bet and give you only \$1 in return.) THESE BUCKS ARE ONLY GOOD ON EVEN MONEY BETS.

- All the other garbage: free gifts, shows, cocktails, etc. is a waste of time.

Still, it's not that bad a deal. Figure to win maybe \$20 bucks at the non-table action, and if you play blackjack proficiently, you may get about \$250-\$300 on your table bets. This deal amounts to a hotel stay for the weekend and some fun at the tables for about \$100 net.

NOTE: If Vegas World still uses the weird craps and blackjack tables, your \$600 in table action is worth even less. You may want to look into this: they used to play blackjack so that you get to see both dealer cards, but you lose ties. This amounts to about a 5% greater house edge than normal rules, if not more.

wilding@cs.utexas.edu

We bought Gambler's Spree packages for the Holiday Inn and the Stardust. With each \$200 package you get 3 nights lodging and food, a show, and \$200 if you gamble 8 hours with a \$10 minimum. (For us, \$200 x 2 packages x 2 Wilding brothers = \$800 cash back and \$800 original cost.)

The packages were OK, but I don't think we'll buy them again. Our limited bankroll makes \$20 our max bet, and a 1-2 range is not very much in BJ. More importantly, a package limits your ability to move from place to

place because you're always worrying about getting time on your card.

[About the free show...] If you're not a high-roller and you see a show you'll probably get seated in Outer Mongolia. These shows are much better if you can sit up front, and the guy who actually seats you is the guy to bribe. Give him about \$3 for each person in your party (rounded up to something easy to pass) AFTER he's led you to some crummy seats. Tell him you'd hoped to sit closer. He'll act like he should have thought of that himself, say something like "Why, sure!", and lead you to a nice table.

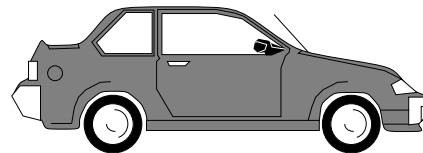
bhoughto@cmdnfs.intel.com:

You should always try downtown. I went this week, and they were all giving weekday rates through thursday night. I stayed on the top floor of the Plaza for \$40 a night. Unfortunately, I neither win enough to pay for it nor lose enough to get comped for it -- especially in the Plaza's casino, which is definitely set up for two-bit gamblers, with several \$1 BJ tables, poker games with \$1-\$3 limits, and 25¢ craps tables that also let you bet 10 times your original wager when you take odds (most places only let you bet 2 or 3 times, because odds-bets have zero vigorish built into them).

Other places had rooms for \$30 (Circus Circus: the place even Stupak wouldn't stay) or \$35 (Binion's). I took the Plaza because I'd never slept there before. I'm glad of it. The construction (the original tower, the one that overlooks Fremont St.) reminds me of the mob/union-built hotels in NYC. The sprinkler system is an unattractive retrofit. The cafe is dull (but did make the best \$4.95 prime rib I've had yet in Vegas). And, there was a rather un-mysterious stain on the floor (check the yellow pages under "entertainers" if you want to learn how to make your own overpriced stains in the Vegas tradition).

The Mirage, in comparison, wanted \$79 each night for Tuesday through Thursday, and \$159 for Friday or Sat-

urday night. I've never stayed there, either, and doubt I'll want to.



wilding@cs.utexas.edu:

We got a car for a week from Thrifty in Las Vegas for \$130.

Laughlin

wilding@cs.utexas.edu:

At Sam's Town in Laughlin you can check your hotel bill and do other things through your room's TV set and remote control. \$20/night.

Atlantic City

jack@brahms.udel.edu

I've stayed at the Trop several times. Their rooms are quite nice and well insulated from exterior sound. I've stayed in a room not too far from the slots and the room was absolutely quiet. Rooms on the weekend go quickly, so if you want to take advantage, call early. I called to reserve rooms on 3 weekends during December as soon as I got the coupons and not all dates were available.

To obtain an issue of **21**, you can do one of two things:

- 1) For a free electronic version (postscript format only) send computer mail (USENET) to:
21@ishmael.leis.bellcore.com
- 2) For a hardcopy, doubled sided, nicely stapled, send \$3 to cover printing and U.S. mail costs to:

21 News

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575 Easton Avenue
Somerset, NJ 08873-1974

Specify the issue you want by date.

FOOD, FREEBIES, & FUN

bhoughto@cmdnfs.intel.com:

I went back into the cafe [at the Las Vegas Club] and had a \$5 T-bone (lots of places were advertising \$2 prime- ribs; Vegas a-go-go!). Ugly waitress. Great steak. Autographed photos of baseball players on the walls.

bhoughto@cmdnfs.intel.com:

I hit the buffet at Circus Circus. Even got a table to myself. \$2.29, a \$2 purpose-defeating tip for the lightning fast table-server, and a heapin' helpin' o' everythin' later, I stopped by the BJ tables out front. I don't remember seeing a \$2 table, but I took the \$3 table for five bucks in five minutes.

PRODUCT REVIEWS

Classic Blackjack Books

jacobs@cs.utah.edu:

I would recommend any of the following three [blackjack books] fairly highly:

- 1) *1,000,000 Blackjack* by Ken Uston. Uston is honest about what you can expect to achieve by counting cards. His counting strategy is probably too difficult for most players. This

book covers a broad range of topics related to blackjack.

- 2) *World's Greatest Blackjack Book* by Cooper and Humble. This book is a pretty good all around BJ book, although the authors are excessively paranoid about cheating. They seem to attribute all of their losses to cheating dealers, and this simply isn't realistic. The counting strategy is probably one of the best. These guys hate Lawrence Revere, and don't hesitate to say so.

- 3) *Blackbelt in Blackjack* by [Arnold] Snyder. The "Red 7" count presented in this book appears to be both simple and effective. Snyder has some interesting chapters on "depth charging" and other techniques, in addition to card counting. I wouldn't particularly recommend any of Snyder's other books.

[Other good books...]

Beat the Dealer by Edward Thorp. This book is a classic, although there are known errors in the book. Entertaining.

Turning the Tables on Las Vegas by Ian Anderson. Good advice on how to avoid looking like a card counter.

Theory of Blackjack by Peter Griffin. This book is excellent if you are mathematically inclined. Unlike many

other BJ authors, Griffin doesn't take himself too seriously.

Professional Blackjack by Stanford Wong. Some people really like this book, but I'm not that enthused about it. Much of the material is a bit dated, and much is a bit hard to follow.

Some books to avoid:

Anything by John Scarne. This guy thinks he is the worlds leading authority an anything involving cards. I don't know how good his advice is on other games, but he simply does not know what he is talking about when it comes to blackjack.

Any book that also contains advice on how to win playing Keno, roulette, or craps :-)

[And any book by John Patrick.]

[A place to order books:]

Gambler's Book Club
630 South 11th St.
Las Vegas, NV 89127
1-800-634-6243 (orders)
(702) 382-7555

To get there, head down the strip (or I-15) to Charleston, then east to 11th St. Tell 'em Steve sent you (they won't know what the hell you're talking about, but what the hey :-)

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