

Interview with Richard Marcus – World’s Great Casino Cheat

By Steve Karoul

I recently had the chance to speak with Richard Marcus, the man considered the best cheater in the history of legalized gaming, who has since retired and is making a new career on the other side of the fence: consulting to casinos in the area of game protection. I spoke with him about how he was able to cheat casinos and beat their surveillance systems for more than twenty-five years without having ever been caught, and how he goes about teaching casino staffs to protect their tables from the very likes of himself. Here are some of the key points of my interview with him.

Q: Simply put, Mr. Marcus, what did it take to become the world’s greatest casino cheater?

A: Well, it was a combination of three things: balls, brains and lack of greed. First and foremost, you have to overcome whatever fear you have of getting caught. Then you have to be intelligent enough to design and carry out casino cheating moves that work. Third, and certainly as important as the first two requisites, you have to know when to stop; in other words, don’t be greedy! The old saying about going to the well too many times applies to casino cheating as much as anything else.

Q: I guess it’s hard to find people with all three of those prerequisites.

A: Very. Some guys out there have brass balls, some have rocket scientist’s brains, but few have both. And some guys have monster balls for many things but not for this. A funny story occurred back in Atlantic City a few years back. I was standing next to a made Mafia guy in a casino watching my partner do a blackjack pastpost move, which is switching in higher denomination chips after the bet wins. It so happened that the Mafia guy was an acquaintance of my partner; he had nothing to do with our casino cheating operation. After witnessing the move and my partner’s coolness under pressure, the Mafia guy chipped, “I’d sooner put a bullet in someone’s head than try that!” And, believe me, he’d put a few bullets in a few people’s heads.

Q: How hard is it to know when to stop?

A: That depends on the person. For someone levelheaded enough, as I’ve always considered myself to be, it was just a matter of surveying a casino after I did a cheating move. If the move was absolutely clean with none of the casino personnel having been bothered, then I would go right back and do it again, and again, as long as no one was picking up on what I was doing. But once a little heat started coming down, I would just cash out and go to another casino, even another gambling town if it got hot enough. Some cheaters take the attitude to keep working under adverse conditions, until they’re taking tons of heat. This is imprudent and often leads to getting caught. I always had the attitude that the casinos were always there for the taking, so if conditions were not right, I’d just let them hold on to “my” money until the next time.

Q: What was your specialty in cheating the casinos?

A: I was a chip (check) manipulator. Either I pastposted bets after they won, or did the opposite: greatly decreased the size of my bets when they lost, which is called dragging or pinching.

Q: The first part about pastposting, I understand. But what about decreasing the size of your bets after they lose? How is that possible? Once they lose, doesn't the dealer take them?

A: (Marcus chuckles here) Yes they do. But it's actually a dragging move that I'm most famous for, or should I say "infamous?" I came up with a roulette move where I bet a \$5,000 chip underneath a red \$5 chip on outside roulette bets. When the bet won, I collected either five or ten grand, depending whether it was an even-money or 2 to 1 bet. When it lost, I lost only ten bucks. I named the move "Savannah" after a stripper I knew at the time. This move is widely considered by the upper echelon surveillance people as the best casino cheating move ever. I surely agree with them. I demonstrated it at the recent World Game Protection Conference in Las Vegas, and the audience, which consisted of casino personnel from all over the world, was quite impressed.

Q: But how the heck did you do such a move?

A: (Marcus chuckles again, louder) Well, the key was I placed the \$5,000 chip underneath the \$5 chip in a way that it was hidden from the dealer. In other words, the dealer knew there were two chips there but couldn't make out the denomination of the bottom chip, therefore assumed it was another \$5 chip. So when the bet lost, I raked it off the layout before the dealer could sweep it. If I was caught, I'd just go into a drunken routine and claim in slurred words that I didn't realize that the ball had dropped. Then I would put back the two \$5 chips I'd had palmed in my hand. Since the dealer believed my original bet was just that, two \$5 chips, there was never much of a problem.

Q: What happened when the bet won, especially if the dealer didn't know the \$5,000 chip was there?

A: I immediately started ranting and raving with joy, pointing to the bet, screaming, "There's my \$5,000 winning chip!" The beauty of it was that when they went to surveillance to verify that it was a legitimate bet and not pastposted, the cameras backed me up every time! The move sounds ridiculous, right? Well, maybe so, but it made millions and the casinos never figured it out until I wrote about it in my memoir, *American Roulette*.

Q: So now you're no longer a cheater. You're actually helping the casinos?

A: Well, I retired from cheating seven years ago and have since written four books, the first of which, "*American Roulette*," is being made into a feature film. I'm not yet ready

to completely retire, so what better way for me to stay busy than by consulting to casinos? Gaming is the only thing I know in life, so that's what I'm doing to keep occupied.

Q: What services do you offer casinos?

A: Complete game protection training for their floor staffs and surveillance departments, everyone from dealers to cage employees. I teach dealers how to be less vulnerable to cheaters and what methods they can employ to sharpen up their defenses. I actually give them a mental checklist to perform before each deal of cards, roll of the dice, or spin of the roulette ball. I teach floor people how to spot the scams, and how to spot the ones that their very own dealers are a part of. I teach surveillance observers to recognize things their cameras are showing them. It's not always evident.

Q: What do you find to be the casinos' major weaknesses against cheaters?

A: On the floor, it's that dealers, floormen and pit bosses are all too dependent on the cameras. They figure that since every square inch of casino space is taped 24/7 they don't have to be on their toes. Not so. I like to say, "Remember, a camera is not going to tap a pit boss on the shoulder and say, 'The guy on blackjack table number four just made a move.'" It has to work the other way. The people on the floor have to know what they are looking for, as well as looking at. The cameras are just like computers. If you don't give them the input you don't get the output. So I teach not only the scams but the subtleties that indicate a scam might be in the works.

Q: Are high-level surveillance people comfortable with learning from the world's greatest casino cheater? I mean, is there ever reluctance on their part?

A: If so, it dissipates quickly once they listen to me. After all, who better than to teach this stuff than someone who's spent most of his adult life doing it? Practically all of the so called experts who teach game protection to casinos have never been out in the actual field like I have. They've never been cheaters so there is a limit on their knowledge. In fact, at the WGPC in Las Vegas, two surveillance directors from major Las Vegas casinos told me they came to the conference only to see my presentation. Both admitted they were enlightened by what I had to say like never before. I certainly appreciated those comments. I really do enjoy teaching casino people the tricks of the trade. And I do guarantee prospective casino clients that my services will save them thousands and thousands of dollars each year.

Q: Do you ever miss it? The thrills of cheating, getting over on the casinos and all their multimillion-dollar surveillance equipment.

A: I guess that's like asking a retired athlete if he misses the spotlight. You know, sometimes I think about those days and say, "Boy, I had fun," but as long as I stay busy, I don't really miss it. I do, however, love telling war stories about my experiences.

Q Would you tell me one?

A: No, Steve, for that you have to read my book!