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2nd Edition

Casino Gambling

for
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through a typical casino

Improve your odds at blackjack,
craps, video poker, and slots

Enjoy online casino games
from the comfort of home

Kevin Blackwood

King of Cards, First to the Buffet

Swain Scheps

Recommends a parlay with
Sports Betting For Dummies



Casino Gambling

2nd Edition

by Kevin Blackwood
&
Swain Scheps

**for
dummies®**
A Wiley Brand

Casino Gambling For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2022933146

ISBN 978-1-119-87312-9 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-119-87313-6 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-119-87314-3 (ebk)

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Introduction

At the moment Julius Caesar and his army crossed the little stream known as the Rubicon in Northern Italy, he became a capital criminal back in Rome. To preserve the Republic, no General was allowed to bring troops into the capital, but Caesar suspected he would be welcomed by the Senate and people rather than executed.

You might think the words he uttered at that pivotal moment would be exhortations to the gods or pleas to the Senate about his patriotism and intentions. Instead, he simply said, “*Alea acta est*” — the die is cast. Caesar had pushed all his chips on the 7 and sent the dice flying in hopes of a lucky roll. His fate, and that of history itself, hinged on what number turned up.

It shouldn't surprise us that Caesar alluded to a dice game. Gambling was already an ancient form of entertainment. In fact, we've been gambling since the beginning. Nearly every major ancient civilization — from the Chinese to the Babylonians, from the Greeks to the Incas — played games of chance. You might say it's written into our DNA as humans.

And there's more to it than entertainment. Gambling has advanced philosophy, economics, and of course, mathematics. About the time Vesalius revealed the workings of the human body and Copernicus demoted the Earth from its status as center of the universe, their lesser-known high school classmate Girolamo Cardano released a seminal tome on gambling that laid down principles on statistics and probability. This work — as much as any other in the Renaissance — helped launch the world toward modernity. (And no, these guys weren't actually high school classmates.)

Gambling has always been a democratic pastime. It brings people together, just as it does to this day. Dice and cards don't care about your class, your status, or your wealth. In fact, gambling helped *launch* democracy when 13 restless colonies helped fund their revolution and their new nation through government-run lotteries.

So, when you step into a casino, you're doing something essentially human. You're joining a long line of people that stretches around the world and back into the mists of time. They knew that putting some small piece of your livelihood in the hands of fate confirms we're alive. They saw that the ups and downs of a game are like miniature rehearsals for life itself. When you try your luck, you open a peephole into the machinery of the universe, hoping to get a sign of what it has in store for us. You've bought this book and joined a long tradition. You're already a gambler. Let's see what happens next. *Alea acta est.*

Casinos and Gamblers

Whether we're talking about casinos, horse races, sports bets, lottery scratch-off tickets, or even church bingo night, gambling is a legitimate and accepted form of entertainment. But, as popular as it is the world over, it's not a path to riches, and it's not without its risks.

Here's why: The folks who run the casinos are professionals who are astute business people with a successful formula for profit. They have the technology and resources to conduct research and development on how to take advantage of human desire and weakness. They know how to turn raw data into a fine-tuned operational strategy, and most of all, they know how to separate you from your money in order to grow their businesses and pay their shareholders.

And the average casino patrons? They are not likely to be professionals. These are the people thinking they can win their way to retirement just because they clean up in the neighborhood card night. They might be the ones on the cruise ship, communing with the universe about the optimal time of day to play the slots. Or they could be that bright young couple who went to Vegas just for the entertainment, and now when you talk to them, you see little roulette wheels spinning around where their pupils used to be.

The theme of this book is simple: A poorly prepared player — someone who doesn't understand the games or the odds behind them — has virtually no chance to beat the house at its own game. Remember this fact: The Las Vegas Strip is an impressive stretch of elaborate resorts built one brick at a time from the losses of clueless sheep. The same story holds true for the casinos in Atlantic City, Kansas City, Chicago, and Tupelo, cruise ships, Native American reservations, riverboats, and every gaming establishment in between. Inexperience, intuition, and lucky guesses are poor guides in casino gambling.

But you don't have to follow the flock to slaughter. This book arms you with the knowledge to turn casino odds in your favor. So, settle in, educate yourself, and get ready for a positive — even profitable — gambling experience.

About This Book

If you're heading to a destination with a casino sometime soon, then this is the book for you. From blackjack to baccarat and from sports betting to slot strategies, prepare to receive the essential information you need to succeed and broaden your casino experience.

Casino games range in complexity and risk, so it's critical that you choose the ones that match your brainpower commitment. For example, you should know that blackjack and poker require skill, while the average golden retriever is fully qualified to win at slots and keno. Feel free to gamble your dollars any way you want inside the casino. Bet big, bet small, play one game, or play them all. But the mission of this book is the same no matter what: steering you toward the best games and away from gimmicks and bad bets.

In addition to the nuts, bolts, and winning strategies of each casino game, there are important universal concepts, such as probability, money management, and the role of luck in gambling. Too many people neglect these dynamics. By mastering them, you improve your chances of winning.

Look. Casinos don't have to be seen as evil empires of sin and vice. American casinos are well regulated and run fair games. But fair doesn't mean you have a 50-50 chance to win. And it doesn't mean they bend over backward to keep you away from dumb bets. Such information runs contrary to the primary goal of their business: to part you from your money. Reading *Casino Gambling For Dummies* is your act of defiance and your way of striking back at the empire. And as the ultimate poke in the eye to the evil empires, you might just come home a winner.

Each game of chance covered in this book comes with its own vocabulary — gambling jargon — that helps you become a successful player. For example, to play craps correctly, you must know what a *field bet* is and why you should avoid it. To make money at blackjack, you want to understand the terms *double down* and *insurance*.

Starting to sound like the first session of a foreign language course? Don't worry; it's much easier than you think. Look for the following conventions in this book to help you:

- » When a new gambling-specific word shows up, it will be *italicized* just before its definition.
- » The most important tips and warnings will have their own logos.
- » The appendix contains a helpful summary of resources you can use when you're ready to go.
- » **Bold** text indicates keywords in bulleted lists or highlights the action parts of numbered lists.

What You're Not to Read

If you only care about the games, you can skip the sidebars (framed in gray boxes) throughout the book. They serve as asides, anecdotes, or examples, but they aren't critical to your understanding of the game. In many cases, however, they clarify the principles and tactics in that chapter.

Foolish Assumptions

People pick up this book when they're gambling-curious or when their travel partner is a gambler and is tired of explaining how to count up a blackjack hand. Maybe this fits you to a tee, maybe it doesn't, but here goes:

- » You're preparing for an upcoming visit to a casino and want to understand the basics and correct protocol before entering that foreign world.

- » You may be familiar with most games, but you simply want some tips to improve your performance and skills.
- » You want to win when you gamble in a casino.
- » You also just want to have fun. (Sure, casino gambling is entertainment, but it's a lot more fun when chips are flowing in your direction.)

Are you an expert who doesn't really identify with these assumptions? Don't worry. We'll cover a few advanced tidbits for the more experienced gambler as well, so you don't feel left out.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons are a signature feature of *For Dummies* books. They help draw your eye to specific types of information. And after you have read the book, the icons provide a great guide for a final review before hitting the casino.



TIP

This bull's-eye denotes a suggestion that can potentially save money, win money, or help you play better. Mastering these tidbits can keep you on the winning road.



WARNING

Casinos have numerous pitfalls that trap novice gamblers. This icon acts as a caution, a red light that guides you away from an action or aspect of gambling that's potentially harmful.



REMEMBER

When you see this sign, look for critical information that you want to take away with you — key concepts that come up repeatedly when you're gambling. Remembering these pointers can help you stay on the road to success.

Beyond the Book

Cheat Sheet: On the Cheat Sheet, which you can find by searching for this book's title at www.dummies.com/, you'll find the inside line on casinos, sports betting, horse racing, and much more. Start your transformation from Zach Galifianakis to Bugsy Siegel right here!

Where to Go from Here

The best place to begin is Part I because it sets up the remaining chapters. From there, just pick the chapters that appeal to you. Scan the table of contents or index and find the topics that interest you. Feel free to frolic — while everyone seeks the same destination, there are no rigid road maps to follow in *Casino Gambling For Dummies*.

And, of course, there are no guarantees that this book will lead you to a monster jackpot. But knowledge really is power in a casino. As long as you've come to learn about the good, the bad, and the glitzy, you've come to the right place. And odds are, even if you don't come out a winner, this book can guide you toward a great casino experience.

Part 1

Casino Gambling Basics: Everything You Need to Know to Start

IN THIS PART ...

Learn how casinos work and how you can work the casinos.

Prepare yourself for what to expect when you visit a casino.

Get the skinny on your chances of success and which games offer the best odds.

Learn how to manage — and stretch — your gambling bankroll.

Chapter 1

Casino Gambling 101: The Inside Scoop

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Entering the world of casino gambling
 - » Tallying up the casino's many offerings
 - » Pinpointing casinos on the gambling map
 - » Testing your gambling aptitude
-

In spite of the popularity of Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer during golf's first golden era, Gary Player was always a fan favorite. The South African's diminutive size made for a less-than-intimidating physical presence in the tee box. But Player's welterweight appearance belied a heavyweight swing.

Believe it or not, casino gambling is a lot like golf. And, no, not because both games are about going for the green. Golf is all about technique, skill, and knowledge. And masters of the game are inspiring to watch. With swings as graceful and elegant as a ballet dancer's leap, they make each challenging stroke look effortless. The pros seem to play as smoothly as those on the PGA tour. But, as in golf, the successful player has gathered important knowledge and studied effective strategies to finesse the outcome in their favor.

In other words, casino pros aren't winners just because they're lucky, any more than Jordan Spieth is a golf god because the angels of the green have smiled upon him.

The greats of the poker tournament circuit may look like they could take the table in their sleep — but they're skilled, savvy, and have studied the game diligently.

It's okay if you're not planning to become the Jordan Spieth of blackjack ... or the Brooks Koepka of Keno ... or the Xander Schauffele of slots (say that ten times fast). Your gambling aspirations should look like your golf ambitions: Play a little better, win more often, and enjoy the experience as much as possible. And you have every reason to believe that you can attain your goal. But success requires knowledge, strategy, and some skill. You've come to the right place. This chapter (and book) can provide the preparation you need to help you find your swing in the casino.

Entering the Casino: What You're Up Against

The first secret to gambling success is to understand the inner workings of the casino world before you're seduced by the flash and dazzle. Casinos are sophisticated and highly successful enterprises — and they don't get that way by giving away money. Your best bet, then, is to be aware of basic casino operations so you can manipulate the experience to your advantage.

Marketing their way to your wallet

They see you coming from miles away. They know exactly who you are, how much money you make, what you like and dislike, and whether you're married, single, or divorced. Who are these omniscient watchers who track your secrets? The IRS? CIA? Al-Qaeda?

None of the above. I'm talking about the marketing gurus at modern casinos. They're constantly studying

reams of data on millions of gamblers to develop profiles of guests who most willingly spend their discretionary income on a couple of hours of distraction.

Nothing is left to chance in a modern casino. Every possible element, from the design of the wallpaper to the thickness of the carpet, is there to draw you in and keep you gambling as long as possible. All the colors, sights, sounds, and sensations serve one purpose: to make you happy — even when you lose.

Accepting the odds: The house rules

The casino's first commandment is "The house shall always win." A couple of games permit sharp players to break even or eke out a small edge occasionally. But casinos are in business to make money, so winning is a losing proposition for most players.

Why? Three good reasons:

- » In many games, the casino doesn't pay out *true odds*. In roulette, for example, the odds of betting on the right number are 37 to 1. That means you can expect to guess right once for every 37 spins of the wheel. But if you win, the payout is only 35 to 1 — or \$35 profit for every \$1 you bet. The difference between 37 and 35 seems small, but that discrepancy actually gives the house one of its biggest edges. (Refer to [Chapter 3](#) for an explanation of *true odds* and [Chapter 9](#) for more info on roulette.)
- » The casino has a *house edge* — a mathematical advantage over the player in any game. Throughout the casino, players must overcome odds that aren't favorable to winning. (Read more about the edge in [Chapter 3](#).)

Your goal is to find games where the casino has the lowest edge. Craps is a great example. This fun, exciting game offers great odds — if you stay away from the bad bets. We explore craps in [Chapter 8](#).

To get the lowdown on house edge in other games, check out the individual chapters in Parts II and III.

- » The house charges a *vigorish* (commission) in some games, such as sports betting. (Check out [Chapter 15](#).)

Protecting your money with a plan

For most people, developing a strategy for doling out their gambling bankroll can keep them out of serious trouble. Set a budget and stick to it. Consider contingencies (such as losing your bankroll in the first few minutes of your visit) and know how to respond when your wallet gets whacked.

Your strategy, however, is only as good as your willpower. Nothing jacks up casino profits faster than undisciplined gamblers. If you're an impulsive type, then gambling may leave your bank account looking like it just went 15 rounds with a heavyweight boxing champion. (Refer to [Chapter 4](#), where we discuss important money-management issues.)

Now, it's certainly true that most people can save their money by avoiding casinos altogether. So, for folks who don't want to lose money: Don't gamble! But the conservative and prudent path in life isn't the only choice. (And that would make for a very short book.) Gambling can be a great way to spice up a vacation and break out of a boring routine. Gambling is all about taking a risk — exposing yourself to a chance of loss.



WARNING Don't overdo it. Government studies show that as many as 1 in every 25 adults has a problem with compulsive gambling. Think about that the next time you sit down at a blackjack table. Several people in the pit probably shouldn't be there. Could you be one of them? Gambling addiction is a serious matter. (Refer to Appendix B for some helpful info.)

Identifying the colors of the rainbow

Knowledge is power and is your only ally against the formidable forces that threaten to separate you from your hard-earned cash. One piece of knowledge you definitely need, particularly if you're going to wade into the shark-infested waters of table games, is the varying colors and matching denominations of standard casino chips, the little round tokens you use when you bet.



REMEMBER The casinos make this bit easy for you because the chips also have a denomination printed on them so that you know the red chip, for instance, is worth \$5 and the green chip is worth \$25. The following is a standard list of casino-chip colors, as well as their corresponding values:

- » White: \$1
- » Red: \$5
- » Green: \$25
- » Black: \$100
- » Purple: \$500
- » Burgundy or Yellow: \$1,000

» Brown: \$5,000

Playing the Games: What's Your Poison?

Casino games are as diverse as the people who play them — and that's part of the fun. You may think of craps as a rough-and-tumble game, played by hustlers and wiseguys, but step into a casino, and you're just as likely to spot an angelic-looking nurse rolling dice next to a cursing cowboy from Texas. And because no game has a precise player profile, don't restrict yourself to the few games you think suit you. Give each one a try and see where it takes you.



TIP

Although the majority of casino visitors prefer slot machines, chances are, if you're reading this book, you're willing to try new ways to gamble. After you read this book and know which games have the best odds, take a quick walk around the casino floor to see where you want to start and give several of them a try.

Touring the table games

In a casino, the tables come in all shapes and sizes, from the stadium shape of poker tables, to the half-round crescent of blackjack, and to the long rectangular craps tables. And the table is just about all they have in common.

Unspoken rules seem to govern the table games. Most casino guests have discovered from experience to avoid the taboos: holding your cards with two hands, touching

chips in the betting circle after the cards are dealt, and throwing the dice so wildly that they fly over the rail and end up in somebody's drink. You can discover general casino etiquette in [Chapter 5](#) and more game-specific rules in most chapters. However, before you worry about acting properly, this section includes a brief overview of the main table games that you may encounter in a casino.

Poker: Boosted by Internet and TV tournaments

Poker rooms have been a staple at Nevada casinos since the 1940s. But it took the advent of the Internet to transform poker from a backroom game into something akin to an international sport, complete with major events, television coverage, and superstars. Starting in 2004, the online poker boom created an insatiable American market for poker that has resulted in more than 20 states legalizing live casino poker, card rooms, poker clubs, or online poker.

The Internet was the catalyst, but the underlying appeal of the game is even simpler: Good players can consistently win. In poker, you compete against other players rather than the house. And with honed skills and intimate knowledge of the game, you can have a significant edge over those other, less-prepared gamblers.



TIP

Hiding your emotions is a requisite skill for a successful poker player. They don't call it a *poker face* for nothin'! So, if you can't control your nervous ticks when you bluff, or if your eyes get as big as saucers when you make a full house, either play your