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GOODFELLAS

NICHOLAS PILEGGI

CASINO

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MOB IN LAS VEGAS

THE TRUE CRIME CLASSIC THAT BECAME SCORSESE'S ACCLAIMED FILM

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About the Book

No one knew more about casinos than Frank ‘Lefty’ Rosenthal, the gambling mastermind who, along with his best friend and partner Anthony ‘the Ant’ Spilotro, virtually ran Las Vegas for the mob. For years it was the perfect arrangement – Lefty provided the smarts, while Tony kept the bosses happy with weekly suitcases filled with millions in skimmed cash. It should have lasted forever, but Lefty’s obsessions with running the town – and Tony’s obsession with Lefty’s beautiful showgirl wife, Geri – eventually led to the betrayals and investigations that exploded into one of the greatest scandals in mob history.

Casino is the shattering inside account of how the mob finally lost its stranglehold on Las Vegas, the neon money-making machine it created.

About the Author

Nicholas Pileggi has been a journalist and writer covering crime, politics and corruption in New York since 1956. In 1986 he wrote ‘Wiseguy’ which he developed into the Academy Award-winning screenplay for ‘Goodfellas’ (1990) with Martin Scorsese. Pileggi followed that success with ‘Casino’ (1995) (also with Scorsese) and has since written and produced several other crime-based films and TV. He was married to fellow author and screenwriter Nora Ephron until her death in 2002.

By the Same Author

Casino
Wiseguy
Blye, Private Eye

Praise for bestselling author Nicholas Pileggi and his unsurpassed mob chronicles

The Stardust . . . The Fremont . . . The Marina . . .
They ran them all.

And they lost. Big time.

CASINO

"EXTRAORDINARY. . . . Pileggi unravels another fascinating true-crime Mob history. . . . Like Henry Hill in *Wiseguys*, Lefty Rosenthal tells Pileggi the story of his career in no-holds-barred fashion, exposing the rampant, multileveled corruption in extensive detail. . . . WITH NONFICTION PAGE-TURNERS LIKE THE KIND PILEGGI WRITES, WHO NEEDS CRIME FICTION?"

–*Booklist*

The families, the wives, the girlfriends, the drugs, the payoffs, the paybacks, the busts, the jail time, and the Feds. It was the life he knew.

WISEGUY

"Exciting, at times amusing, but always chilling. . . . *Wiseguy* is topflight."

–*Detroit Free Press*

"Fast, unrelenting . . . crisp, on-target writing that transforms the old Mafiosi figures into the mythic figures of a novelist like Mario Puzo . . . the only nonfiction book I have ever encountered that I could not put down."

–*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Pileggi tells it all without frills. . . . A chilling tale of human rot, all the more effective for the restrained tone."

–*People*

"Entirely fascinating . . . cynical, violent, avaricious, lawless . . . Hill's testimony has the clear ring of truth."

–*The Washington Post Book World*

"Sleazy recollections slip off Henry Hill's lips fast and furiously . . . the kind of crude authenticity that we haven't had since *The Valachi Papers*."

–*The Sun* (Baltimore)

"Even if you think you've had our fill of Mafia books, Nicholas Pileggi's account of a small-time crook will keep you bug-eyed. . . . A terrific job of reporting."

–*Newsweek*

"One of the best parts of *Wiseguy* is a detailed account of the 1978 heist of $6 million in cash and jewels from a Lufthansa airline vault at New York's Kennedy Airport. . . . A close-up look in Hill's own words of how he romped through life thieving, bribing, and scheming."

–*The Wall Street Journal*

"A fascinating book."

–Mario Puzo

"The nitty-gritty, ranging from the death struggles of condemned gangsters to the scandalous country-club atmosphere at some federal detention centers."

–*The Los Angeles Herald Examiner*

"A true picture of crime . . . *Wiseguy* has the sound and horror of authenticity."

–*Time*

"You have to redefine a life of crime after reading Nicholas Pileggi's *Wiseguy* . . . a definitive, first-person, inside look at the life of a hoodlum who breaks the law as easily as he breathes."

–Benjamin Bradlee

"Pileggi has lifted the rock of organized crime, and the reader is transfixed with horrid fascination at what crawls out. . . ."

–*Detroit Free Press*

"*Wiseguy* hurls you into a world you've never known . . . filled with vivid, authentic, fascinating detail. . . . There's more knowledge about human beings–and sympathy for their weaknesses–in *Wiseguy* than in a dozen novels about the Mafia. Its characters are seared into my mind, and it will be a long time before I forget them. . . . Gripping, compelling."

–Robert A. Caro

NICHOLAS PILEGGI

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MOB IN LAS VEGAS

For Nora

Introduction

"Why is my car on fire?"

"I HAD JUST had dinner and gotten in my car," said Frank Rosenthal. "I don't remember whether or not I turned on the ignition, but the next thing I saw were these little flames. They were only about two or three inches high. They were coming out of the defroster vents. I never heard any noise. I just saw the flames reflected against the windshield. I remember, I asked myself, 'Why is my car on fire?' And then the flames started getting bigger.

"There must have been a strong enough jolt to throw me against the steering wheel, because it hurt my ribs, but I don't remember any of that. All I thought was that my car was having some kind of mechanical problem.

"I didn't panic. I knew I had to get out of the car. I had to get away from the flames. Call the garage. I reached for the door handle. I almost torched my arm. There were flames shooting up between the seat and the door. Now I knew I had to get out of the car or I'd never see my kids again. This time I used my right hand to grab the door handle, and I threw my shoulder against the door at the same time. It worked.

"I fell out onto the ground. There were flames all around me. Some of my clothes were on fire. I was burning. I rolled around on the ground until the flames were out.

"Two men helped me to my feet and got me about twenty or thirty feet from the car. They told me to get down, but I didn't want to. I kept saying that I was all right. They insisted I get down, and when I did, it was as though the atom bomb had gone off. I saw my car jump about two feet

into the air, and then flames shot up through the roof about two stories high.

"That's when I realized for the first time it hadn't been an accident. That's when I knew somebody put a bomb in my car."

Before his car was blown up outside Marie Callender's Restaurant on East Sahara Avenue on October 4, 1982, Frank "Lefty" Rosenthal had been one of the most powerful and controversial men in Las Vegas. He was in charge of the largest casino operation in Nevada. He was famous for being the man who had brought sports book-betting to Vegas—an achievement that made him a true visionary in the annals of local history. He was a gambler's gambler, the man who set the odds, a perfectionist who had once astonished the kitchen help in the Stardust Hotel by insisting that every blueberry muffin had to have at least ten blueberries in it.

But Frank Rosenthal had been dodging trouble most of his life. He started as a clerk and bookie for Chicago gamblers and mobsters before he was old enough to vote. In fact, before going to work inside the casinos in 1971, Lefty had held only one legitimate job—as a military policeman in Korea between 1956 and 1958. In 1961, when he appeared at the age of thirty-one before a congressional committee in Washington investigating the influence of organized crime on gambling, he took the Fifth Amendment thirty-seven times. He wouldn't even tell them whether he was left-handed—which fact, by the way, had earned him his nickname. A few years later he pleaded *nolo contendere* to bribing a college basketball player in North Carolina—though he never admitted his guilt. In Florida, he was banned from horse and dog tracks for allegedly bribing the Miami Beach police. And in 1969, along with a dozen of the nation's biggest bookmakers, he was indicted by the Justice Department in an interstate gambling and racketeering

conspiracy case that dragged on for several years—until Lefty's lawyer got the indictment thrown out because John Mitchell, the attorney general at the time, had failed to personally sign the case's wiretap orders, as required by law. Mitchell had been out on a golf course the day the court orders were to have been signed and had instructed an aide to forge his name.

Frank Rosenthal came to Las Vegas in 1968 for the same reason so many other Americans have—to get away from his past. Las Vegas was a city with no memory. It was the place you went for a second chance. It was the American city where people went after the divorce, after the bankruptcy, even after a short stint in the county jail. It was the final destination for those willing to drive halfway across America in search of the nation's only morality car wash.

It was also the city where you could strike it rich—a kind of money-happy Lourdes where pilgrims got to hang up their psychic crutches and start life anew. It was the end of the rainbow—American city as pot of gold—the only place in the country where the average guy had a shot at a miracle. Long odds? Sure, but for many of those who went to live in Las Vegas and for many who went to visit, the longest odds in Las Vegas were better than the odds they had been dealt in their lives back home.

It was a magical place, the neon capital of the world. By the 1970s, the stigma of its mobster history was on the wane, and there seemed almost no limit to its potential for growth. Bugsy Siegel, after all, had died way back in 1947. And he wasn't even killed in Las Vegas. He was shot dead in what is now the 90210 zip code—Beverly Hills.

By the 1970s, Las Vegas was poised for such unprecedented growth that the city was much too big to be dominated, or even influenced, by a bunch of men with funny accents and pinky rings. Public corporations like Sheraton, Hilton, and MGM, along with Wall Street

investment bankers and Michael Milken's Drexel Burnham Lambert, were becoming increasingly interested; tentative investments had already begun to turn what was essentially an inhospitable, crop-defying, windblown, alkaline-salted town on the eastern end of the Mojave Desert into the fastest-growing city in the United States. From 1970 to 1980, Las Vegas would double the number of its visitors, to 11,041,524, and the amount of cash left behind by those visitors would increase 273.6 percent, to $4.7 billion. The heart of all this growth was, of course, the casino business —and by 1993 visitors had dropped $15.1 billion in town.

A casino is a mathematics palace set up to separate players from their money. Every bet made in a casino has been calibrated within a fraction of its life to maximize profit while still giving players the illusion that they have a chance.

Casinos mean cash. From the nickel slots to the $500 progressive superslots, cash is the blood that enlivens everything and everyone in a casino. The buildings are nothing but a cacophony of money. From the noisy geysers of a winner's silver change rumbling into the purposely hollow metal trays to the bells and buzzers and lights announcing minute-by-minute wins, cash dominates the room. Normal business techniques of fiduciary responsibility and cash accountability crumble under the mountains of paper money and silver coins that pour into casinos every day.

There is probably no type of business in the world where as much paper money is handled on a daily basis by more people under more security than in a casino. Dealers have to clap their hands under the Eye before leaving the table to make sure they're not carrying any chips away with them. The small aprons they wear are to cover their pockets—and keep them from filling them. Every $100 bill changed for chips at the table must be called out by the

dealer so the pit boss can watch it being slid into the narrow drop box slit with a metal paddle.

No matter how busy a craps or roulette table might be, the chips must be evenly stacked by color to facilitate the almost continuous counting by supervisors, and blackjack dealers have to learn to cup the hole card against side readers to make sure players in cahoots aren’t swapping paints (face cards) to beat the house. An experienced stickman at a craps table is trained never to take his eyes off the dice, especially when the noisy drunk at the end of the table spills his drink on the felt, drops his chips on the floor, and takes a swing at his wife. It is at precisely these distracting Kodak moments when the shavers, or baloney dice, are slipped into the game. Trying to beat the casino—through a miraculous win or, alternatively, through the more reliable methods of being a crook—is what brings everyone to town. In Las Vegas, beating the casino by hook or crook has been raised to an art form.

But, of course, the greatest amount of casino theft has nothing to do with cheating players or crooked dealers. Most of the major theft in a casino doesn’t even happen on the casino floor. The largest amount of larceny takes place behind closed doors in the casino’s sanctum sanctorum, the casino’s most sensitive and security-conscious area, the place where all of the cash churning its way through the hundreds of games and slot machines ultimately heads, the casino’s sacred count rooms.

Usually a windowless, double-locked, bare-bones workroom with straight-back secretarial chairs, clear plastic tables, and reinforced-steel shelves and floors to bear the tons of coins and stacks of cash that must be counted daily, the count room is the place where the hundreds of double-locked metal boxes under every table game are emptied, their contents of $10, $20, and $100 bills sorted into inch-thick $10,000 bricks and, on busy days, stacked against the walls chest high.

There are no strangers stealing this money in the count room. This money is taken in spite of the fact that cameras are often in use, that guards check everyone walking in and out, that only a very limited number of people can even enter (state law bars even casino owners), and that every dollar counted out of every single drop box on every shift must be signed and initialed by at least two or three independent clerks and supervisors.

Count room workers go about their tasks with the deadened glaze of people who must steel themselves against the dazzling daily experience of being immersed in the sight, smell, and touch of money. Tons of it. Stacks of it. Bundles of cash and boxes of coins so heavy that hydraulic lifts must be used to move the tonnage of loot around in the count room.

There is such a daily fortune of stacked paper bills pouring into the count room that rather than being counted, the cash is assembled into various denominations and weighed. A million dollars in $100 bills weighs 20½ pounds; a million in $20s, 102 pounds; and a million in $5 bills, 408 pounds.

The coins are poured into specially made Toledo electronic coin-weighing scales manufactured by the Reliance Electric Company—model 8130 being the scale of preference when Lefty ran the Stardust—that sort and count the coins. A million dollars in quarter slot machine winnings weighs twenty-one tons.

The dream for many of those who find themselves owning casinos, or even working in them, is to figure out exactly how to separate the count room from its loot. Over the years, the methods employed have run from owners getting their hands on drop box keys to employees grabbing fists full of cash before the boxes are even counted. There are complicated methods of misdirected fill slips and maladjusted scales that weigh only one-third of the loot coming through the count room doors. The systems for

skimming casinos are as varied as the genius of the men doing the skimming.

In 1974, only six years after arriving in Las Vegas, Frank Rosenthal had managed to get from Las Vegas exactly what he'd hoped—a new life. He was running four Las Vegas casinos. He had married a gorgeous former showgirl named Geri McGee, and they lived with their two children in a $1 million house facing the fourteenth tee on the Las Vegas Country Club golf course. He had a swimming pool and a housekeeper. His bedroom closet had over two hundred pairs of custom-made silk, cotton, and linen slacks—most of them in pastel shades—which he had specially fitted by tailors flown in from Beverly Hills and Chicago. He was the man to see at the Stardust, and his reputation as an innovative and successful casino manager was soon to be recognized throughout Nevada. He saw himself as part of an elite group of casino impresarios, union pension fund officials, investment bankers, and Nevada politicians who were about to transform Las Vegas from its cowboy and gangster roots into the family-oriented $30-billion-a-year adult theme park it would eventually become.

It should have been perfect.

But ten years later, Frank Rosenthal was under investigation as the mob's casino man in town and the suspected mastermind behind a multimillion-dollar skimming operation. He had been denied a gambling license and was hosting an inadvertently hilarious ninety-minute talk show—which he had modestly named *The Frank Rosenthal Show*. He was suspected of working in cahoots with his boyhood friend Anthony "Tony the Ant" Spilotro, who the FBI said was the Chicago mob's main muscle in town, a hit man suspected of at least a dozen homicides. At the time of Lefty's explosion, Spilotro was under indictment along with eight members of his gang for running an extortion, loan-sharking, and burglary ring out

of a jewelry shop he owned just off the Strip. He was also the prime suspect in Lefty's attempted murder, and he was a man with a motive: he was having a love affair with Lefty Rosenthal's wife. Well, maybe not a love affair—very little that happened in Las Vegas had to do with love—but an affair nonetheless, one that had been documented by the FBI agents who were assigned to follow Spilotro and that had eventually become public knowledge.

How it could have come to this in just a few years was a question that would haunt not just Lefty but the mob bosses who had put him in to run the casinos in the first place. Instead of calm, Lefty gave them chaos. Instead of a quiet path into the new Las Vegas, Lefty and his pal Spilotro had created so much turmoil and caused such law enforcement scrutiny that rather than retiring with their tidy nest eggs of skimmed millions as planned, the septuagenarian mob bosses of Chicago, Kansas City, and Milwaukee were facing the rest of their lives in prison.

It should not have ended this way. It should have been so sweet. Everything was in place. It was better than an even-money bet. It was a wager you couldn't lose. And yet, eight years later, the whole thing blew up in the parking lot on East Sahara Avenue.

PART ONE

Betting the Pass Line

1

“My pals thought I was the messiah.”

LEFTY ROSENTHAL DID not believe in luck. He believed in the odds. In the numbers. In probability. In the math. In the fractions of data he had accumulated copying team statistics onto index cards. He believed that games were fixed and that referees and zebras could be bought. He knew some basketball players who practiced the art of missing basketball rim shots for hours every day, and he knew players who bet the middles between the odds spread and got a return of 10 percent on their money. He believed that some athletes played lazy and some of them played hurt. He believed in winning and losing streaks; he believed in point spreads and no-limit bets and card mechanics so good they could deal out cards without breaking the cellophane on the deck. In other words, where gambling was concerned, Lefty believed in everything but luck. Luck was the potential enemy. Luck was the temptress, the seductive whisperer taking you away from the data. Lefty learned early that if he was ever to master the skill and become a professional player, he had to take even the remotest possibility of chance out of the process.

Frank “Lefty” Rosenthal was born on June 12, 1929, just a few months before the stock market crash. He was raised on Chicago’s West Side, an old-world, syndicate neighborhood, where bookie shops, crooked cops, corrupt aldermen, and closed mouths were a way of life.

“My dad was a produce wholesaler,” Rosenthal said. “An administrative type. Good with numbers. Smart. Successful. My mother was a housewife. I grew up reading the racing form. I used to tear it apart. I knew everything there was to know about the form. I used to read it in class. I was a tall, skinny, shy kid. I was six foot one when I was a teenager and I was kind of withdrawn. I was sort of a loner, and horse racing was my challenge.

“My dad owned some horses, so I was at the track with him all the time. I lived at the track. I was a groom. A hot walker. I hung around the backstretch. I mucked out. I’d get there at four thirty in the morning. I became a part of the barn. I started hanging out there when I was thirteen and fourteen, and I was an owner’s son. Everybody left me alone.

“I got some resistance at home when I started getting into sports betting. My mother knew I was gambling and she didn’t like it, but I was very strong headed. I wouldn’t listen to anyone. I loved going over the charts, the past performances, jockeys, post positions. I used to copy all that material onto my own eight-by-ten-inch file cards in my room late into the night.

“I cut school one day to go to the track. I went with two pals. Smart guys. We stayed for eight races and I punched out seven winners. My pals thought I was the messiah. My dad turned away when he spotted me there. He wouldn’t talk to me. He was pissed that I had cut school. I didn’t say anything to him when I got home. It wasn’t discussed. I didn’t say anything about winning, either. The next day I cut school again and went back to the track and lost it all.

“But I really learned gambling in the bleachers of Wrigley Field and Comiskey Park. There were about two hundred guys up there every game and they bet on everything. Every pitch. Every swing. Everything had a price. There were guys shouting numbers at you. It was great. It was an open-air casino. Constant action.

“If you were talented, and you had some ego, and you knew your game, you’d be tempted to take them on. You’ve got money in your pocket and you feel like you can take on the world. There was a guy named Stacy; he was in his fifties and he had a pocket full of cash. He’d fade anybody. ‘Hey kid, they gonna score this inning or not?’ Instead of passing, your pride gets in there and you make a bet and you pay the price. Stacy always got you to make a price.

“Say Chicago is winning six to two in the eighth and you want to bet they score again, or that they’ll lose in the ninth. Or that they’d hit into a double play to end the inning. Or hit a home run to win the game. Or a double or a triple or a flyout. Whatever. Stacy would take the action and he’d lay the odds. He’d make a homer twenty-five to one. Bam! Just like that. A fly ball was twenty to one. An ‘out’ was eight to five. If you wanted the action, you made the bet and he gave you his odds.

“I didn’t know it at first, but every one of those bets Stacy faded had odds backing them up. A strikeout at the end of a game was, say—I don’t remember the real odds now, but say it was a hundred and sixty-six to one, not thirty to one, which was what Stacy was laying.

“A home run on a game’s first pitch could be three thousand to one, not seventy-five to one. And so forth. If you were betting Stacy, you had to know those odds, or you’d be picked clean.

“After I caught on, I’d just sit and listen to him make his odds and I’d write them all down and keep a record. After a while, I started making proposition bets out there on my own. Over the years, Stacy made a little fortune in the bleachers. He cleaned up. He was terrific at getting everybody all around him to start betting. He was a great showman.

“Back then, you didn’t have sports channels and magazines and newspapers and radio shows that specialized in betting sports. If you were in the Mid-west

you couldn't easily find out what was happening to the East and West Coast teams behind the scenes. You'd get the final score and that was about that.

"But if you're betting seriously, you've got to know a lot more than that. So I started reading everything. My father got me a shortwave radio, and I remember spending hours listening to the play-by-play of out-of-town teams I was thinking of betting. I began subscribing to different papers from all around the country. I'd go to this newsstand where they had all the out-of-town papers. That's where I met Hymie the Ace. He was a legendary professional. I don't call people legends unless they are. Hymie the Ace was a legend. He would be there at the same newsstand buying dozens of papers, just like me. He'd get into his car and start reading. I'd be there, too, except I didn't have a car. I had a bike. After a while we got to know each other. He knew what I was doing.

"Hymie was about ten or twelve years older than I was. I made it a habit to always say hello to him and to the other pros, and I was lucky that they'd all talk to me. I was still a kid, but they saw that I was serious and I had an aptitude, and they were willing to help me. They were very kind. They allowed me into their circle. I felt great.

"But I'm also getting chesty. I'm doing pretty well. I'm feeling good. There was a Northwestern-Michigan basketball game that was coming up. I had people at both schools feeding me information and I felt really strong. I liked Northwestern.

"Now I don't mean I *liked* Northwestern. That I was a fan. That I had their pennant in my room. I mean I liked them as a bet. That's all teams were to me. Bets. I'd been waiting for this game. I'd been watching it. So I bet Northwestern to beat Michigan State. It was a sellout crowd. I walked in and I saw Hymie the Ace. Hymie knows more about basketball than any man alive. We say hello. It's ten minutes to tip-off.

“I told him I played Northwestern and asked what he was doing. I was so certain about my information that I had made what I used to call a triple play—I’d bet two thousand dollars. It was as far as I could go with my bankroll. A single play for me at the time was like two hundred, a double play was five hundred, and a triple was two thousand. I’m just a kid. It’s my limit. We’re talking about a time when my whole bankroll was eight thousand.

“‘What?’ Hymie says, surprised. ‘Why are you playing Northwestern? Don’t you know about Johnny Green?’

“‘Who?’ I asked him.

“‘Johnny Green. What’s wrong with you?’

“Now Johnny Green was a black player who had been ineligible for the whole season. It turned out he had suddenly become eligible a couple of days before the game. I’d missed it.

“‘Green’s going to take every rebound in the game,’ Ace said, and my heart sank.

“I ran to the phones, but there were just two booths and there were twenty-five people waiting at each booth. I’m looking to lay off some of my bets. Get rid of them. Balance some of the action. I’m still standing in line waiting for the phone when I hear the announcer and I know I’m dead. I can’t get off.

“I go back and sit down. I watch Green. Just like Ace said, he controlled both backboards. At halftime I had seen enough. Michigan annihilated Northwestern. Ace had done his homework and I hadn’t.

“Ace not only knew that Green was eligible, he knew what kind of a player he was, knew that he was a great rebounder, knew that that was the element that could beat Northwestern. Green went on to be an All-American and top pro player.

“I learned a hell of a lesson. I found out I wasn’t as smart as I thought I was. I had depended upon people for too much. I had given them the power to make up my mind for

me. I realized that if I wanted to spend my life gambling, pitting myself against the best bookmakers, there was no such thing as listening to people. If I was going to make a living doing this, I was going to have to figure it out for myself and do it all myself.

"So I started out with college basketball and football. In college games I subscribed to all the school newspapers and went through the sports pages every day. I'd call the reporters at the different schools and make up all kinds of stories to find out extra bits of information that didn't get into the papers.

"At first, I didn't tell them why I wanted the information, but pretty soon they caught on, and I picked up some sharp kids out there and I brought them along. When I won, I threw them a few bucks, and after a while I had a whole network of people who kept me informed about college games.

"As I got older I'd go to games with a tape recorder. I had spotters working for me. I'd tell some guys to just watch specific things. I'd have them watching two or three players only. I didn't care what else was happening; they had to watch who I told them to watch. I'd take their notes. Then I'd fly to the next town where the team played and I'd watch them again. I'd match lineups. The final score's never the main thing to look at if you want to make money instead of losing it. I knew if a player had hurt his ankle and was playing slower. I knew when a quarterback was sick. I knew if his girlfriend got knocked up or left him for somebody else. I knew if he was smoking dope, snorting coke. I knew about injuries that didn't get in the papers. About injuries that players kept from their coaches.

"Now, with this kind of information, it wasn't hard for me to see when the bookmakers had made an error in their odds. I didn't blame them. They were covering lots of sports and lots of games. I was concentrating on a few. I knew everything there was to know about a certain limited

number of games, and I learned a very important thing—I learned that you can't bet on every game. Sometimes you can only bet one or two games out of forty or fifty. Sometimes, I learned, there wasn't a good bet on the whole weekend. If that was true, I wouldn't bet or take a serious position.

"I used to hang around a cigar store on Kinzie. George and Sam ran the place. Out front they had cigars and stuff. But in the back there was a Western Union wire, telephones, and a tote board. In those days, they had the most up-to-date information. During the baseball season, the latest list of starting pitchers would come over the wire just before game time.

"George and Sam were really big bookmakers. They had come to Chicago from Tarrytown, New York. And they had an okay from the powers that be to operate the book. It was wide open. They even had the okay from the local police captain to run poker games, which were very illegal.

"They had a bar and they'd serve drinks and food for free. The wire was always banging away. It was like a stock market ticker. The Western Union machines were hard for a bookie to get. They were meant to be sold to newspapers, but if you filed certain papers with the company and knew how to go about it, you might be able to get one. At that time I was so dumb I tried to get one for my house, and I was turned down.

"George and Sam were independent operators, but they still had to pay protection. All the card rooms and bookie rooms paid off in those days. Bookmakers took care of the cops and they took care of the outfit. And sometimes the outfit took care of the cops. In the end, everybody could wind up taking care of everybody, just as long as everybody made money.

"When I was nineteen," Rosenthal continued, "I got a job as a clerk at Bill Kaplan's sports service, Angel-Kaplan. It was great. We would be on the phones all day giving out

our line to bookmakers and players. Everyone from all over the country was hooked into each other. We had special phone lines set up by retired telephone company workers. We all knew each other's voices and code names, but after a while, you get to know everybody's real name.

"I'm just a kid and still in Chicago, but now I'm hooked into the biggest office in the United States at the time—Gil Beckley's in Newport, Kentucky. Gil had the whole town of Newport locked up. The coppers. The politicians. The whole fucking town.

"Gil was Newport's main industry. He had thirty clerks working. He ran the biggest layoff operation in the country. It was where every bookmaking office in the country called to lay off bets if the action on one side was getting too heavy.

"For instance, if you're a bookmaker in Dallas, you are naturally going to get more Dallas bets than you want, because you won't have enough people betting on the other side to offset any win. So a Dallas bookmaker would call Gil Beckley's layoff operation, and Beckley's clerks would pick up enough of the Dallas bookmaker's bets to balance his book. Since Beckley is national, he can offset the Dallas bets against their opponents that week, and everything becomes even again.

"Wherever he went, Gil was the boss. In the winter he'd be in Miami. He'd invite twenty or thirty guys out to dinner. 'Let's go to Joe's Stone Crab!' 'Let's go here!' 'Let's go there!' He always had an entourage with him, and he always picked up the check.

"Naturally, I got to meet Gil Beckley only by phone. For a couple of years we're talking and he recognized that I was an up-and-coming kid. A whatever-you-want-to-call-it kid. A handicapper and a player. And my little reputation was building. But the more I talked to Beckley, the more I realized the most unbelievable thing. If you asked Gil

Beckley how many men were on a baseball team, he’d have to ask someone. Literally.

“He could not tell you. That wasn’t one of his things. I’m being honest. Mickey Mantle? Who? Beckley just didn’t know. He didn’t have a fucking clue. But then, he didn’t have to know. He was a bookmaker and layoff man. He didn’t bet. He just ran the biggest accounting office in the country. I was stunned.

“But I found out pretty soon it didn’t matter. All a layoffman’s gotta do is make sure he keeps the bets balanced and take his ten percent. You don’t have to be an expert on teams or even know about the games. I was amazed, but it turned out to be true of lots of layoff men and bookies. Some of the biggest guys didn’t bet. In Chicago we had Benny the Book. Benny was the biggest bookmaker in town. Benny made millions and millions as a bookmaker, and just like Gil Beckley, Benny couldn’t tell you who Joe DiMaggio played for. I’m serious.

“I was betting and getting good information at the time my friend Sidney was Benny’s top clerk, and he asked me, as a favor, if I would call his office if I learned something about a game, something that might affect the outcome, like that there was a fix or one of the players was injured.

“So, one day I came up with an injury that hadn’t been reported, and I called my friend Sidney, but he wasn’t there. Instead, I got Benny. The big boss himself. So I told Benny about the player. I remember the player. Bobby Avila. Second base for the Cleveland Indians. I said, ‘Avila’s out.’

“I wanted to alert him so he could adjust his line and not get smashed by all the pros, who, I can assure you, would have already gotten the same information I had.

“Benny takes the information like he knows what I’m talking about, but when I finish he asks me, ‘Don’t they have another second baseman?’ I think, ‘Another Bobby Avila? Is he serious?’ I couldn’t believe it.

“That night I met Sidney and I asked him if he was working for a crazy person. He said Benny didn’t follow the games, just the price. Benny was the biggest bookie in Chicago, not because he knew about the players and sports but because he paid on Monday. No matter what he owed you after the weekend, Benny paid on Monday. His clerk would be down there with an envelope and brand-new bills. And if you owed him, he’d always give you more time. So, whether he knew Bobby Avila or not, he had a tremendous clientele and laughed all the way to the bank.”