

## C H E A T S

**AS RECENTLY AS LAST NOVEMBER,** Connecticut State Police arrested a man identified as Sholem Weisner for allegedly marking cards at the Mohegan Sun Casino while playing hold'em in its poker room. Upon searching his hotel room, they found \$55,000 in cash, which means Weisner was doing quite well marking the cards, or he was just in the habit of carrying a more than ample bankroll in case something other than getting caught and busted went wrong.

This was the first major case of card-marking that I've heard about in awhile. But what does that mean? Is card-marking on the decline or are the operations employing it getting better and more sophisticated and therefore less likely to be detected?

First, let's take a look at the Connecticut case. Apparently, Weisner was already well-known to both the Mohegan Sun and the neighboring casino, Foxwoods, security and surveillance staffs.

Evidently, he'd been 86'd (barred) from both of them – as recently as September 2006 from the Mohegan Sun, but this time he was using a friend's Players Club and Social Security card to gain entry to the casino and hotel and stay there several days running. Upon further reading, I learned that Weisner is apparently a scofflaw who owes thousands in unpaid parking tickets and credit card debts.

After analyzing all that, I came to the conclusion that Weisner was not a real professional and if that 55 grand was profit, the guy had been very lucky to get away with what he was doing for the amount of time it would take to accumulate such a hefty sum. Although I don't know for sure which type of card-marking method he supposedly employed, I believe it was subtle card-bending and marking the backs of cards with his fingernails.

But regardless of Weisner's case, let's examine what the reality of marking cards is in today's modern poker rooms.

### LEVELS OF SKILL

First, let's dismiss the rinky-dink marking scams usually carried out by amateur and desperate cheaters. Attempts such



PHOTO: TEY HWEE WAI

## IS CARD-MARKING A THREAT IN TODAY'S POKER ROOMS?

by Richard Marcus

as nail-marking (which should be caught quickly in spite of whatever success Weisner may have had with it), bending, corner crimping, punching “blisters” with hidden pin-like devices, sanding cards with sandpaper glued to fingertips and applying Vaseline – which actually does happen – more often than not earn their perpetrators very small profits before they find themselves in handcuffs.

The next group of what I will call intermediate card-markers, those using a better method known as “playing the paint,” can be a significant threat to brick-and-mortar poker games where the players, dealers and floor supervisors are not very observant and attentive. But beware: Sometimes the two latter groups may be in on the scam with one or more of the players. However, for the sake of this argument, I am assuming no help to the cheaters is coming from

the inside.

Playing the paint is applying a substance called daub to the surfaces of the backs of the cards. It is a pastelike substance made from various formulas and often has the feel of women's lip rouge or eye shadow, and those using it can certainly make their mark (pardon the pun) at the poker table.

The best of these card-markers use what is known as juice dust. The main advantage of the dust is that, unlike regular daub solutions, it will not dull the finish of the cards and will work on both the paper and plastic cards used in poker rooms and casinos. Those who use juice dust also go through the pain of learning how to read their marks on the cards. The marks are harder to see without special glasses, but by training themselves how to read them, these cheaters can do away with special glasses or contact lenses that would facilitate

the reading while increasing the probability of drawing suspicion.

But as we near the end of the decade, discarding those glasses and contact lenses is becoming less necessary for professional card-markers, for reasons not only related to advanced technology but also the proliferation of players at the tables wearing sunglasses to hide their eyes for the sake of preventing opponents from picking up on their facial tells.

With advances in optometry, especially contact lenses, cheaters can slip these contacts into their eyes for long periods of time, despite often smoky conditions in cardrooms. The problem with these special lenses is that they need to be tinted red in order for the person wearing them to spot the usually green marks on the red printed part of a card design (the same problem exists for blue-backed cards). However, this dreaded “red-eyeball effect” for the cheaters has been lessened over the past few years with improvements to monocular contact lenses that are often used by the colorblind to distinguish certain colors and as such have been adopted by cheaters looking to be less obvious.

Now, for the cheaters with light eyes wearing these lenses, the unnatural darkness of their eyes looks less artificial, and for those who have brown eyes, the lenses covering them are not noticeable. Some cheaters will even wear tinted glasses over their contact lenses for additional cover.

### SPOTTING THEM

These types of sophisticated card-marking operations, when carried out by professionals with all the right marking and optical equipment, will get the job done. But what can you do to spot them in your game? First, you can try to observe players you’re suspicious of and see if you can pick up on where they carry the daub and how they transfer it to their fingers.

Daub can be concealed in many places. I’ve seen it on eyeglass rims, beer bottle labels, clothing buttons, watches and rings, even on currency and chips. In fact, one notorious card-marker was caught with daub in a small concave hole in the bottom of a chip that he’d carved out, keeping the chip inconspic-

## THE BEST CARD-DAUBERS USE WHAT IS KNOWN AS ‘JUICE DUST’

uously in the middle of one of his chip-stacks. I’ve seen it as well on a sponge in a woman’s handbag. Often daub is concealed in small tin containers with safety pins soldered onto their surfaces. Look closely and you might see.

Your next chance to sight the markers is when they load the daub onto their fingers. But this is very difficult when it comes to modern daubs, which are more of a powder than a paste, and a single load of it can mark an entire deck. Professionals will never be clumsy in making this transport and will then proceed to mark the cards with a soft touch. Those not as skilled, however, might give themselves away when applying the daub to the cards. Perhaps you will catch them making a swiping or brushing motion with their fingers instead of a smooth touch, or even a repeated swiping of the card as if they feel they had not sufficiently applied the daub on the first attempt.

The final way of catching card-markers is to watch the eyes of people you suspect, or their faces if they’re wearing shaded glasses through which you can’t see their eyes. Remember that although professional markers rarely stare at the top of the deck or their opponents’ hole cards, they must at an opportune moment look at these cards to read the marks. It will usually be a passing glance, but maybe you will notice the same passing glance on numerous occasions, and if it becomes constant, you might then have some evidence of a card-marker.

Also be aware that professional card-markers, just like other types of professional poker-cheating teams, normally work in twos and threes, so the person you suspect of card-marking may not be the actual reader but instead the marker, or just a player who is receiving strategy signals from the marker or the reader across the table.

With multi-member cheating groups, the person who reads the marks will change accordingly with situations at the table. For example, a person sitting next to you can see marks on your hole cards much easier (in most cases) than someone directly across the length of the table. Also, try not to be too obvious when looking at a suspected person’s eyes. If that person is right next to you, it will be difficult to look into his eyes without him noticing you. So you need to be discreet in your detection attempts.

The last – and most dangerous – form of card-marking is when the cards are already marked before they hit the table. Although this is rare outside of home games, it has happened, and in that case the marking methods and equipment used at the table to see the marks will always be state of the art – deceptive and futuristic.

The heretofore top-of-the-line luminous and ultra-luminous daubs designed to be read by the human eye with the use of filtered lenses have now given way to a new generation of luminous technology. Video luminous daub uses marks that cannot be seen by any human being, even if they are looking through a luminous filter. These marks can only be read by using custom-designed electronics and filters and displayed on a TV monitor in another room to a cohort. Then the card values may be signaled or transmitted to the player who needs to know. But don’t worry too much about this one, as it can only happen with cards marked long before you see them. But if they ever get into your game and you don’t see them, that blindness will cost you a bundle. ♠

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