



Photo courtesy of Caesar's Tahoe

F RANCHISED BLACKJACK SCHOOLS

Wherever casino gambling is legal, the potential in teaching 21, the most popular of table games, is well worth considering. Here is one venture you may wish to explore.

BY MURPHY JAMES

According to Jerry Patterson, a professional blackjack player and best-selling author, you can make a good living by playing blackjack and teaching others to do so by operating one of his franchised blackjack schools. The schools are Jerry Patterson Blackjack Clinics, and franchisees include a plumbing and heating contractor, a radio station owner, several teachers, a former jet aircraft navigator, a university professor, and a former law enforcement official.

Patterson and his franchisees have trained about 4,000 persons to date in blackjack, the most popular of casino table games. Casino gambling is being considered in Florida, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, as well as other states. Casinos are open, of course, in Nevada and Atlantic City, but blackjack is also legally played in North Dakota, Oregon, and Alberta, Canada. The future of blackjack, sometimes called 21—the only game in which a player has an edge over the casino under certain conditions—appears bright.

A computer scientist with a master's degree in business administration, Patterson placed his first bet at the age of 12. "Picked the St. Louis Cardinals to win the 1946 World Series," Jerry says. "They won, and I've been interested in gambling ever since."

He and two partners formed Systems and Computer Technology Corporation and located it in suburban Philadelphia. By 1978 the firm was very successful. But Atlantic City—less than an hour from Patterson's home—had legalized gam-

bling. The first casino, Resorts International, was about to open. Hundreds of blackjack tables were on the way. And Jerry had been a blackjack player for more than 20 years. He had played and won—in casinos in Nevada, Europe and the Caribbean. He had also just published a book, *Blackjack: A Winner's Handbook*, which a Philadelphia *Inquirer* review called "a concise, intelligent, no-nonsense approach."

Patterson had to make a choice: computers or casinos. Casinos won out and he turned to blackjack, once winning ten thousand dollars in a single weekend at Atlantic City. Sales of his book picked up as the full impact of the gambling mania hit the East Coast. His second book, *Blackjack's Winning Formula*, also received excellent reviews (sales of the two are now approaching 100,000 copies).

Jerry Patterson's formula is a mathematically proven system based upon correct play and identification of advantageous betting situations. He is quick to credit those who originated the ideas he uses. Early in his career, for example, he worked with mathematician Wilbert Cantey. Cantey joined Roger Baldwin in an attempt to eliminate the casino advantage over the blackjack player of about 20 percent. They considered every possible combination of hands, determined the optimal play for each hand, and concluded that a player using their system on basic strategy would play about even with the casino.

Edward O. Thorp, then an MIT mathematician, took their research one step further. He discovered that

if one used basic strategy, tracked the ratio of high cards to low cards played from the deck, and bet more at certain times, the edge could be tipped in favor of the player. Thorp showed that an excess of low cards is a more favorable situation to the casino and he recommended a low bet. An excess of high cards favors the player. At those times, a higher bet should be made. Thorp tested his system successfully and introduced a new term into casino lore, "card counter," i.e., one who counts groups of high vs. low cards and makes betting decisions accordingly.

The casinos were not unaware of all of this. They changed rules to make the game more advantageous to them when Thorp's book, *Beat the Dealer*, appeared in 1964. But when business fell off at the tables, they went back to the old rules.

There is nothing illegal about card counting, of course. It is simply intelligent use of information available to anyone. Casinos used to bar known card counters with regularity, but a recent decision in the New Jersey courts outlaws the practice in that state. Nevada casinos may still bar counters, but the practice is dying out.

While the casino ban on counters was hot news, photographers and talk-show hosts queried Patterson regularly: Won't the casino people recognize you and bar you? So Jerry came up with the Masked Man gimmick and carried it over into his ads. Query: Who is this Masked Man? And the advertisements' response: Jerry Patterson, professional blackjack player from