



## “Ace In The Hole” ...Hole Card Play

“**Hole Carding**”, or “**Spooking**” as it was also called, is an attempt by players to see or “Pick-Up” the dealers’ Hole Card in Blackjack or any of the various Carnival Games.

Back in my day when Single & Double Deck Blackjack games were much more prevalent, Hole Carding was also described as **1<sup>st</sup> Basing or Front Loading** or **Back Loading** or **Side Loading** or **3<sup>rd</sup> Basing**. ..(Depending upon from which table position or POV you could read or attempt to read the Hole Card.)

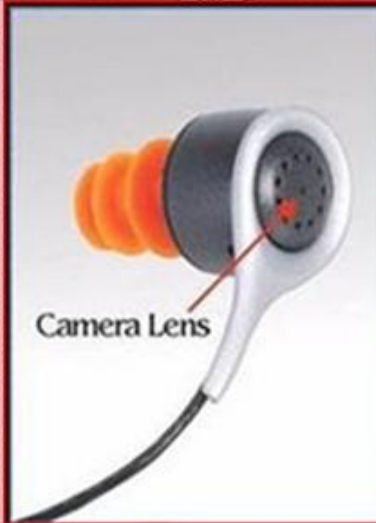
For the most part, Hole Carding depends upon a sloppy dealer, or weak procedure for burying the Hole Card or poor casino policy for negotiating Hole Card placement...or all three.

- Shoe too close to 1<sup>st</sup> base (Dealer Lifts Cards Instead of Sliding Around)
- Shoe too close to bankroll tray (Dealer Lifts Cards Over Edge of Tray)
- Speed Shoes – Shoe (Except for Toe) is on a ½ inch porch
- Bad or Incorrect Hole Card Placement by Dealer

As you know, techniques for Hole Carding a casino game can and do cross the line from Advantage Play to outright cheating. There is also a “**Grey**” area. If you accept the definition of advantage play as...”Using information which is readily available to anyone on the game”, then *Card Counting, Team Card Counting, Back Counting, Shadow Play, Ace Adjustment, Shuffle Tracking, New Card Tracking, Ace Location, Sequence Tracking, Pip Tracking, Dealer Tells, Depth Charging, Natural Warps, Double Peek, 1<sup>st</sup> Basing, Front Loading, Back Loading, Side Loading, 3<sup>rd</sup> Basing and Playing the Turn (“Whew”)* are all legal advantage play techniques.

**Pictured below are some of the illegal methods used to attempt Hole Card Play.**

-2- Hole Card Play



Casey Card Count Computer – Key Fob Counter

One of the Cell Phone Apps above is legal & one is not. The app which does the Card Count is not legal. Cannot use a device to predict the future outcome of a gaming event.



-3- Hole Card Play

Pictured below is an "Old Time" method of Hole Card play. A small mirror is concealed behind the players' hand. The mirror is set at a 45degree angle. The cheater uses various methods to block sight of the mirror...His opposite hand, a drink and/or chips. The hidden mirror gives a view right across the layout, as if your eyes were at table level. At the moment the dealer buries the Hole Card, the cheater raises his left hand slightly to attempt to see its' value.



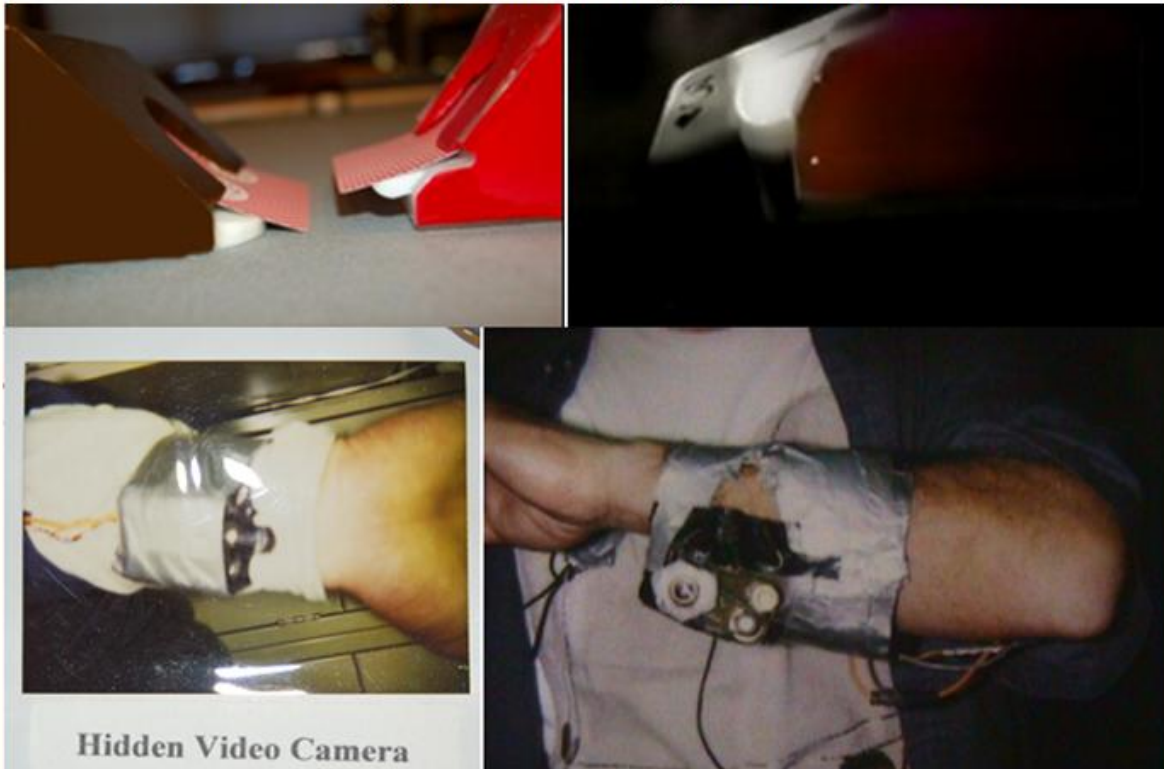
Mirror at a 45degree angle behind the hand. By looking straight down a view of the Hole Card is gained.



**The Hole Card value will not always be as easy to discern as in these photos. The Mirror player may only see a *FLASH* of color...Which indicates a Face Card. A *FLASH* of White could indicate an Ace, 2, 3, 4 or 5. A *FLASH* of Red or Black could indicate a 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10. Keep in mind the Mirror Player may miss entirely and have no information.**

-4- Hole Card Play

There are also more High Tech methods to try and Pick Off the Hole Card.



Hidden Video Camera

Various hidden cameras have been used for hole card play. Notice the obvious weakness in the Speed Shoe pictured above. The playing card exits the shoe over the Toe better than ½ inch off the layout as opposed to touching the layout as in a standard dealing shoe.

The use of any device (mechanical, electronic or physical) is of course illegal. The Grey areas arise when the information is not readily available to everyone on the game...the way card counting or shuffle tracking or ace location is.

**“If I have to slouch down in my chair on 3<sup>rd</sup> base to read a sloppy dealer...only I have access to that information and is it readily available?”** I’ve had countless arguments about whether signally another player is advantage play or cheating. **“What if I sat across the pit kitty corner from the target game and “Spooked”?”** ... (Looked under the dealers’ arm to pick up the hole card or sat in a wheelchair behind the game.) This information is not readily available to those on the game. This argument goes on and on with neither side conceding, but this is not the point of this memo. For the sake of this memo, let’s assume someone can Hole Card the game by some method.



-5- Hole Card Play

At times dealers will lift cards over a bankroll tray if it's too high or in the way...or lift cards to avoid players' bets or playing cards...Most Times Innocent...Sometimes Not.



Notice in the above pictures how the Layout Design forces the shoe out of position. The end picture is the "Whiting Wedge" ...Ted Whiting (MGM Grand) had the corners trimmed down to create a bigger pathway for the cards. "Kudos Ted" ...Double Sharp

("Could this be a Pitch layout on a Multi-Deck Game?" ...Pitch layouts typically have the betting circles closer to the bankroll to allow room for the dealer to Pitch over the wagers and land the cards.) "Could the layout have been improperly installed?" "Could the bankroll tray be forcing the dealer to lift the Hole Card to maneuver around the new raised edge design?" "Could a Side Wager betting circle close the "Alleyway" for the Hole Card even further?"

It is academic that a Hole Card Player must alter Basic Strategy to accommodate their secret knowledge. **There are several published Hole Card Strategies....**



-6- Hole Card Play

**Hole Card Strategy**

Dealer's Hand	Hit Until:		Double-Down On	Pair Splitting
	Hard Hand	Soft Hand		
Hard 20	20*	20*	Never	Never
Hard 19	19*	19*	Never	9*
Hard 18	18*	18	Never	2,3,7,8,9
Hard 17	17	18	Never	2,3,6,7,8
Hard 12... Thru 16	12	18	5,6,7,8,9 10,11,A2 Thru A9	All Pairs
Hard 11	15	18	Never	Ace
Hard 10	16	18	11	Ace
Hard 9	17	18	10,11	A,8,9
Hard 8	17	18	10,11	A,7,8,9
Hard 7	17	18	10,11	A,2,3,7,8
Hard 6	12	18	9,10,11	A,2,3,6-9
Hard 5	13	18	10,11,A2 Thru A8	A,2,3,6-9
Hard 4	14	18	10,11,A6,A7	A,7,8
A,9	20*	20*	Never	Never
A,8	19*	19*	Never	9
A,7	18*	18	Never	2,3,7,8,9
A,6	17	18	Never	A,2,3,6-8
A,5	13	18	9,10,11, A6,A7	A,2,3,6-9
A,4	13	18	10,11	A,2,6-9
A,3	14	18	10,11	A,7,8
A,2	15	18	10,11	A,7,8
A,A	16	18	11	A,8

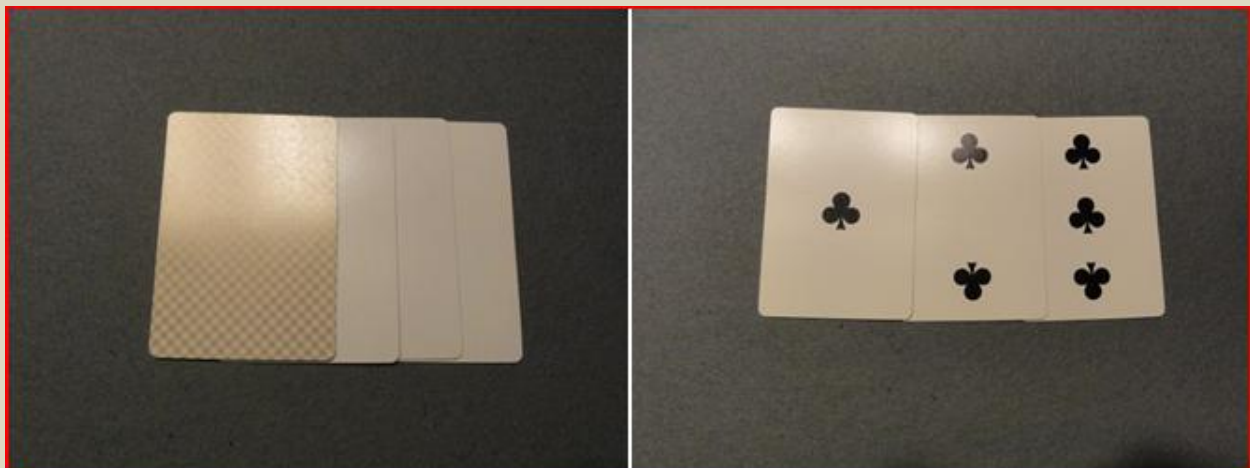
**\*This is the best strategy to play...but would bring too much heat.**

## -7- Hole Card Play

Notice many of the strategies are tagged with an asterisk. These plays would be the mathematically correct strategy if you knew the Hole Card, however they would bring far too much heat. Mathematicians have calculated a player advantage of between 5% & 8% over the house with perfect (100%) Hole Card Knowledge. I don't dispute the math or strategy when considered in a vacuum. But consider the following;

- It is very difficult to ever get 100% hole card knowledge
- Smart Hole Card players may "Play the Suit" ...Meaning they won't use the hole card information if they feel any heat from the floor
- There is the very distinct probability for mis-reading Hole Card information and therefore mis-playing the strategies listed above.
- Because playing cards are dealt quickly and are viewed from a distance, Hole Carders very seldom see the index of the playing card...but rather catch a flash of Color or White going by.

Study the pictures below. If a Flash of White was seen going in the Hole;

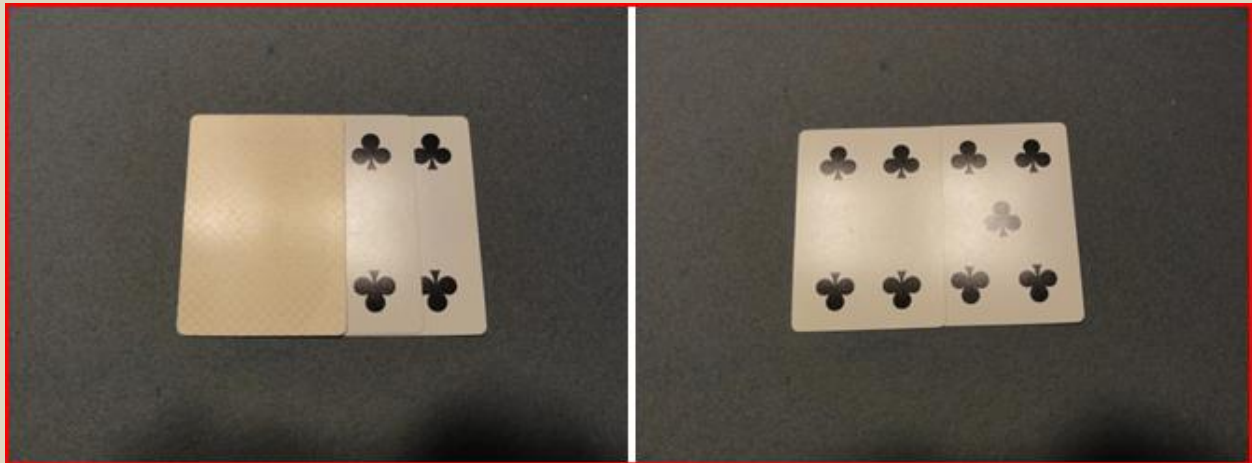


"Could you be certain if it was an Ace or Two or Three?"

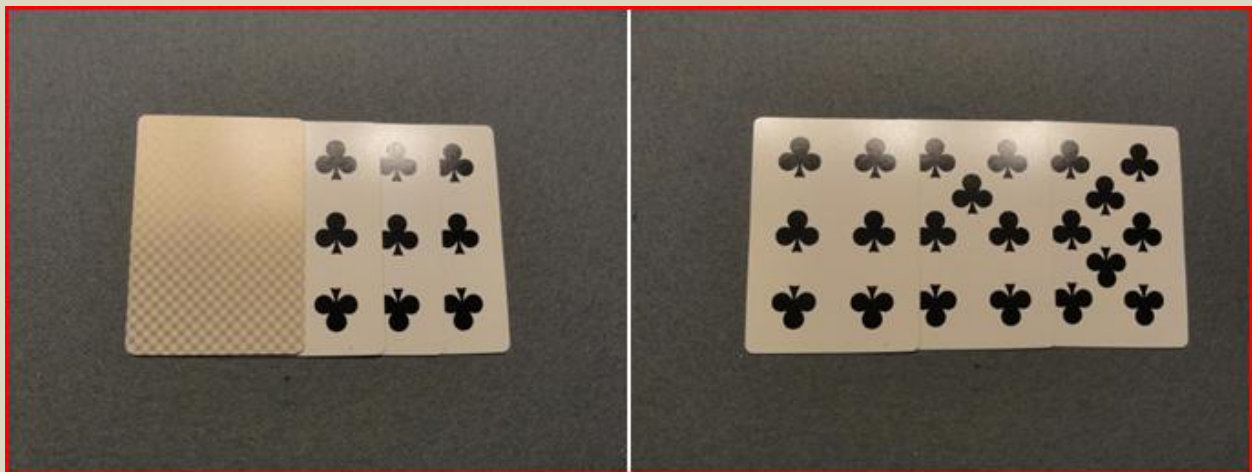


-8- Hole Card Play

Similarly, Study These Photos;



“If you saw Corner Pips, Could you be certain if it was a Four or a Five? “

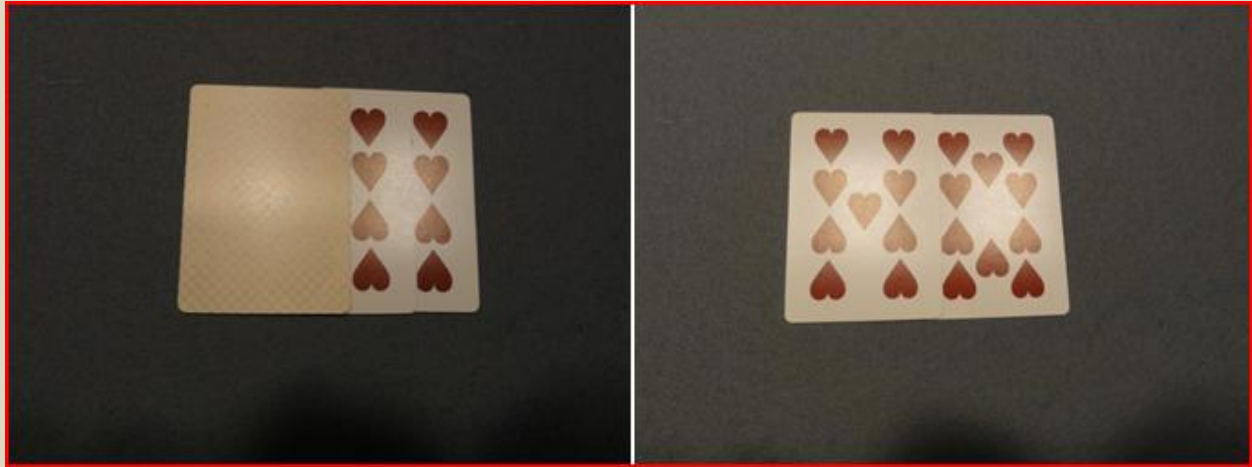


“If you saw Edge Pips, Could you be certain if it was a Six or Seven or Eight?”

**NOTE: Obviously, Face Cards are the easiest to read.**

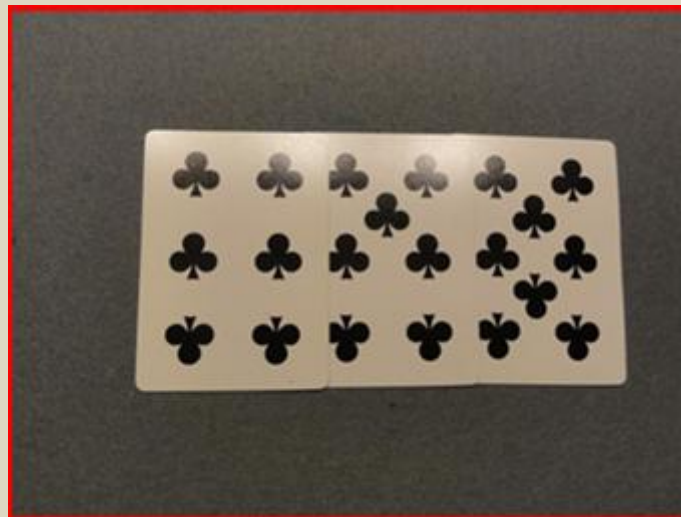


-9- Hole Card Play



“If you saw Full Edge Pips, Could you be certain if it was a Nine or Ten?”

Ask Yourself

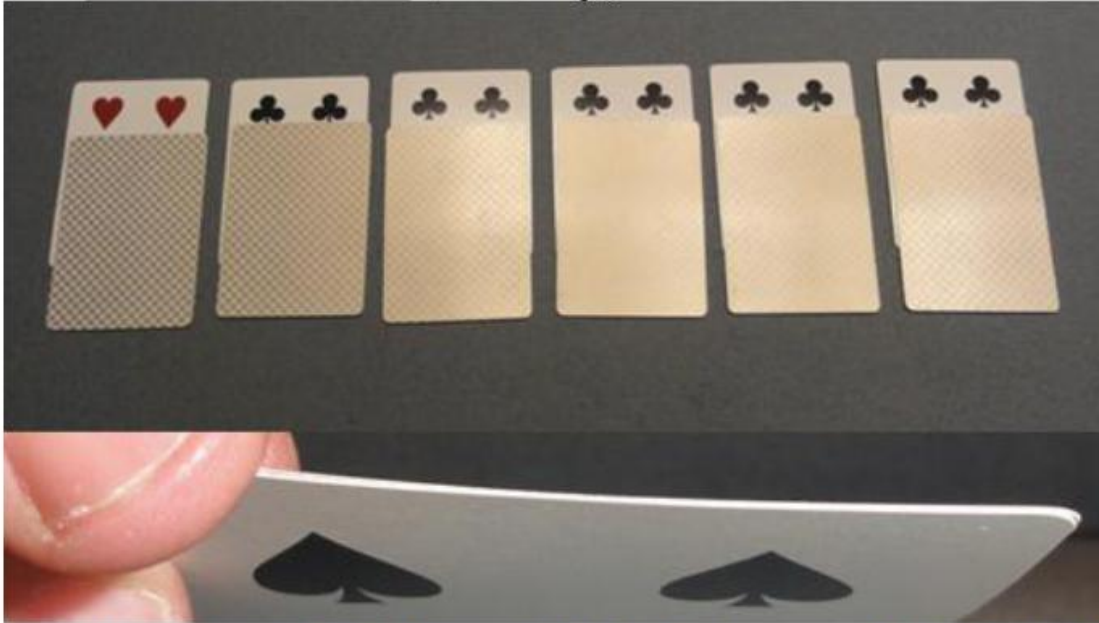


- “Could a 6 be Mis-Read as an upside down 7?”
- “Could an upside down 7 be Mis-Read as an 8?”
- “Could an upside down 7 be Mis-Read as a 6?”

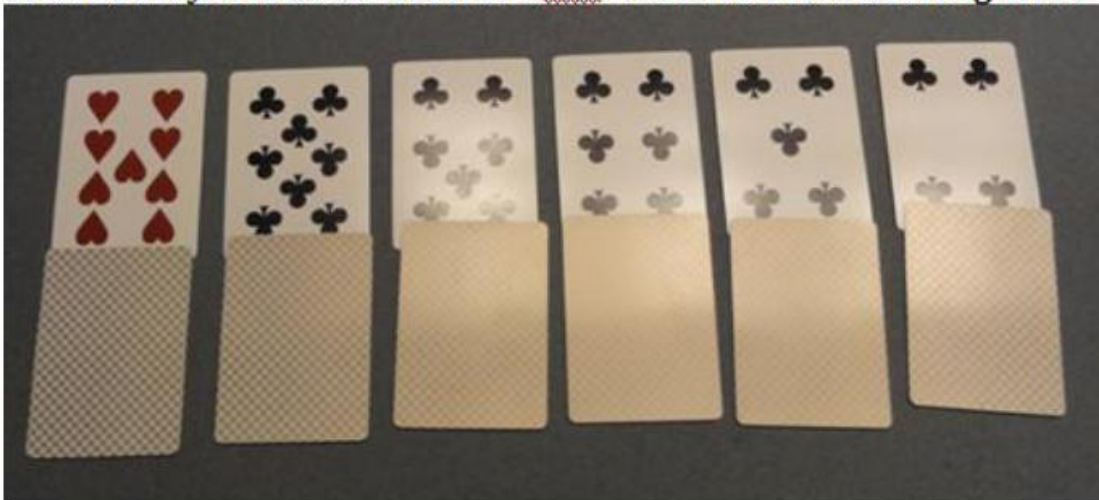
-10- Hole Card Play

**FRONT LOADING:**

**Study These Pictures:**



**"Couldn't any of the Cards Above be Mis-Read when viewed Straight On?"**



**Front Loading (In My Opinion) Offers the Greatest Number of Opportunities for Mis-Reading the Greatest Number of Playing Cards**

-11- Hole Card Play

Study the photos below;



**In the picture on the Left the Hole Carder Stood with 13 VS 10...  
The Hole Card was a 4...Correct Read and Correct Hole Card Strategy**

**In the picture on the Right the Hole Carder Stood 13 & 13 VS 10...?  
The Hole Card was a 9..."Is it possible that the Front Loader simply Mis-  
Read the Flash and thought the Hole Card was a 4 or 5 or 6?"**



And not a 7,8 or 9





-12- Hole Card Play

Study This Example: 1<sup>st</sup> Base Stood 14 VS 10...With a 7 in the Hole



“Did his partner signal him to Stand because he Mis-Read the Upside Down 7 as a 6?”

Notice how wildly bad strategy can give up a Hole Card Team

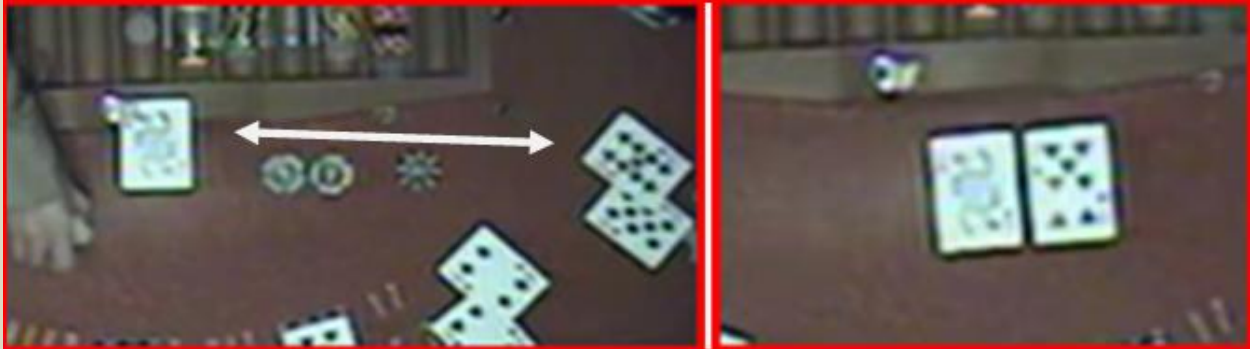


This player Surrendered 12 & 13 VS 8 – Hole Card 3  
The Hole Card Strategy Chart says if the Dealers’ Total is 11, then Hit until you reach Hard 15 or Soft 18...  
It’s more likely the Hole Carder Mis-Read the 3 as an Ace.

In either case, the play is ridiculous and a major Red Flag...There is no strategy which dictates Surrendering 12 or 13 against any Up Card.  
Even if Surrender were correct mathematically, **“There’s Too Much Heat”**

-13- Hole Card Play

In this example, 1<sup>st</sup> Base Surrendered 17 VS 10 – Hole Card 7 – Dealer has 17



“Why would you Surrender a Push?” It is very likely the Hole Carder Mis-Read The Upside Down 7 as an 8 and signaled his partner incorrect information.

**Obviously the Hole Carders Are Often Correct...Study these photos:**



Player Surrendered 17 VS 8 (Very Odd) Dealer Had a Face Card in the Hole



Player Insured 7 & 15 Dealer Had BJ

Stood 14 VS 10 – Hole Card 5



-14- Hole Card Play

Let's try and put the Hole Carding question in perspective.

- **Hole Carding play poses a significant threat to a Casino's Bankroll & Game Integrity...Even if it's not 5% to 8%**
- **Hole Carding play has the significant potential for Mis-Reading, so;**
- **Hole Card Strategy charts can at times be misleading for surveillance review if you don't allow for the distinct possibility of outright "Missing" & "Mis-Reads"**
- **Marked Card knowledge of the Hole Card can be different than Flashed Hole Carding knowledge**
- **Playing Cards marked in advance of play can of course be marked to distinguish absolute value by rank**
- **Playing Cards marked during play, (Bending, Nicking or Daubing) usually indicate group values in a range...High / Low.**
- **In a Real World setting, Hole Card playing strategies most resembles group values in a range...High / Medium / Low because of the frequency of Mis-Reads.**

Surveillance and floor personnel must recognize the non-strategy "Tells" as well as the drastic deviations from Basic Strategy. A customer positioned either too high or too low on a game. (Standing or Slouching) A player who seems to be rocking back & forth in their chair.

Non-Strategy "Tells" aside, it will be the drastic deviations from basic strategy (Surrender & Insurance & Inconsistent Hitting & Standing VS the Same UP-Cards) which should cause concern and prompt a review.

Respectfully Submitted,

**George D. Joseph**

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**GJ/ccj**