

The Ultimate Blackjack System

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Introduction to Blackjack

A Brief History

It is generally believed that playing cards was invented in China in about 900 AD. Chinese people began to shuffle paper money into various combinations and in China today the term for playing cards means paper tickets.

The 52 card deck as we know it was originally called the French Pack. The origin of Blackjack is somewhat unclear. Some people believe that Blackjack originated in French casinos in the early 1700s where it was known as "vingt-et-un" ("20 and 1").

The game became known as Blackjack because if a player held a Jack of Spades and an Ace of Spades as the 1st two cards, the player was paid out extra. So with a Jack being a vital card and Spades being black, the game was called Blackjack.

This game has been played in the United States since the 1800's. Gambling was legal out West from the 1850's to 1910, at which time Nevada made it a felony to operate a gambling game. In 1931, Nevada re-legalized casino gambling where BlackJack became

one of the primary games of chance offered to gamblers. In 1978, New Jersey became the second state to legalize gambling and since then casinos have sprouted up in about 20 other states. Blackjack remains one of the most popular card games in the world. Let's see why.

Is Blackjack a "Winnable" Game?

When blackjack first became a casino staple, it was assumed that it was rather like baccarat, where the house, by virtue of the rules determining play, had a statistical edge. All players and students of the game assumed that this advantage existed based on two simple facts. One, the player had to act first. Two, all busts (hands totaling over twenty-one) were losers no matter what the dealer later drew. These two rules seem to give the house an incontrovertible edge.

Conventional began to change in 1956 when a paper by Baldwin, Cantey, Maisel, and McDermont was published in the Journal of the American Statistical Association. This paper and a blackjack strategy manual published by Baldwin et al. the following year both attracted very little interest among non mathematicians, but it would prove to be the first step toward determining that blackjack is a "winnable" game.

Edward O. Thorp, a scientist at MIT, did understand the implications of the work of Baldwin and his colleagues and began to examine two elements of the game that were previously unexamined. One, the composition of a deck of cards changes with every card

dealt. Two, some deck compositions favor the player and other favor the house. In 1962, Thorp published his now famous book, *Beat the Dealer*, which contained a simple yet profound message. Unlike dice, roulette wheels, and slot machines, decks of cards have "memory."

Blackjack, unlike Roulette for example, is a winnable game because of this "memory." Let's look at an example. You are sitting at the Roulette table and the dealer throws the ball and it comes to rest on the number 9. Now, when he throws the ball again for the next round, what are the odds the ball lands on 9 again? Assuming the wheel is not rigged or the dealer is not trained to "fix" the outcome, the odds of the ball landing on 9 again are exactly the same! Let's take it a step further. Assume that the ball does indeed land on 9 again - twice more. Now the ball has landed on the 9 three times in a row! What are the odds this happens a fourth time? Exactly the same! There is no statistical reason that the ball should "avoid" landing on 9 again.

Blackjack is different. Let's look at a similar situation in blackjack. You are at the table with two other players. The dealer deals a 9 to each of the players at the table. Now the odds of dealing another 9 have been significantly reduced. In a

six deck game the odds have been reduced from 3:49 to 7:104. This fact alone makes blackjack a winnable game. We will learn later how to take advantage of this.

How to Play Blackjack

Setup

Blackjack is played at a table with a single dealer and from one to seven players. The layout gives a few basic rules, such as the payoff for blackjack; for insurance; and whether the dealer hits on soft seventeen.



There will usually be a small sign to one side of the dealer that gives the table stakes and any special rules, such as whether surrender is allowed. You must ask to discover the other unposted rules and regulations. You will need to know, for example, whether doubling down after splitting is allowed, whether a player may double down on any two cards, whether pairs may be split a second time, and whether aces may be resplit. Such rules determine whether the basic game is favorable or unfavorable.

Rules

The game itself is simple. You, the player, attempt to accumulate cards with a numerical total closer to (but not more than) twenty-one than those accumulated by the dealer. If you do so, you win. If the dealers' total is closer to twenty-one than yours, you lose. Winning hands are paid off at even odds. If you and the dealer both arrive at the same total, the hand is a "push," and nobody wins. All bets must be made before any cards are dealt, and no bet may be changed once the first card has been dealt.

Each player is initially dealt two cards; they may be face-down or face-up, depending on the rules of the casino. The dealer gets two cards, one face-up and one face-down. The value of the cards is given by their face value except that the ace (A) counts as either 1 or 11 and the 10, jack (J), queen (Q), and king (K) all count as 10.

The combination of an A and any 10 on the first two cards is a blackjack and is an automatic winner (unless both dealer and player have it, in which case it's a push). A player blackjack is paid at 3 to 2. When the house has a blackjack the player

merely loses his bet and not one and a half times that bet. Any combination of cards that exceeds 21 is a bust and a loser. The player always goes first, so if the player's total exceeds 21 the hand is lost -- even if the dealer also busts later. If the dealer busts, all remaining players are winners. The dealer has no options; play is fixed by the rules.

After the first two cards are dealt, the player must decide whether or not to take additional cards based on two pieces of information: the cards held and the dealer's upcard. This is where the game begins to get interesting. A wide variety of options offer themselves, and unless the player understands the principles of the game there are numerous ways to go wrong. Let's review the options first; correct play will be discussed later.

Player Options

Standing

The player elects to "stand" with the current total and not to draw any additional cards. If you are in a game where the cards are dealt face-down, you slip your cards under your chips. The

dealer will understand the message. If you are in a face-up game, wave your hand back and forth in a wiping motion just above your cards, which is the signal for standing. All casinos insist on some form of hand signal; verbal statements are not accepted. Casinos can get rather noisy, and it is easy for a dealer to mishear a player. Also, the cameras hidden in the casino's ceilings can be used to resolve disputes only if hand signals are used, since they do not have an audio component.

Hitting

The player elects to draw an additional card or cards. If you are in a face-down game, draw your cards toward you with a quick scratching motion against the felt once or twice. In a face-up game, make a similar motion with your fingertips or , preferably, point to your cards with your index finger.

Splitting

If your first two cards are of the same value, you may split them and play each as a separate hand. To indicate a desire to split your cards, place an additional wager equivalent to the original one to the side of it. If you are playing in a facedown

game, you must expose your cards. After splitting a pair, various other options become available. You can re-split if a third like-valued card appears. Or you can double down on the split hands should an appropriate card be drawn. For example, if you have split 8's and catch a 3 on the first 8, you may now double down on this total of 11. Both re-splitting and doubling and doubling down after a split are to the player's advantage.

Doubling Down

The player may double the size of the original bet and elect to draw only one additional card. The typical doubling situation is where you have a hand that stands a chance of becoming a very good hand with one additional card; for example, your first two cards total 10 or 11. To indicate a double down bet, slide a second wager to the side of the original bet. This wager may be as much as but no more than your original bet. If you are playing in a face-down game, you must expose your cards. Virtually all casinos permit doubling on 11 and 10; most on 11, 10, and 9, and many will allow it on any two cards. The latter rule is the most advantageous to the player.

Insurance

When the dealer shows an A, players are given the option of taking insurance against the dealers' having blackjack. Calling this "insurance" is a bit misleading. Actually, it is nothing other than a side bet that is paid at 2 to 1. If you wish to take insurance (which is only recommended in very specific circumstances recognizable by an expert card counter only), place a bet equal to half your original bet in the semicircle running just in front of the your betting spot. If the dealer has blackjack, you will lose your original bet but win the insurance wager and break even on the hand. If the dealer does not have blackjack, you will lose the insurance bet and the hand will be played out normally.

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