

Agents learn casino cheaters' tricks

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By

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Jim Edwards, a retired Las Vegas gambling agent, is teaching 12 Ohio Casino Control Commission agents how to cheat so they can catch cheaters at the Hollywood Casino.

Jim Edwards teaches people how to cheat.

He knows how to pinch or cap a bet, mark cards, distract the dealer, slide the dice and turn a \$1

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bill into \$100.

But the retired Las Vegas gambling agent is using his power for good instead of evil. This week, Edwards has brought his 33 years of experience to Columbus to teach 12 Ohio Casino Control Commission agents how to cheat so they can catch cheaters.

"There's no such thing as a perfect move," Edwards said. "But there's a perfect time to make a move."

When the Hollywood Casino opens on Oct. 8 on the West Side, the agents whom Edwards is training will begin around-the-clock surveillance duty. They won't be bouncers or security personnel; the casino will provide those. Instead, the state agents are there to enforce state gambling laws. They will have arrest powers. Most of the newly minted agents have seven to 10 years of law-enforcement experience.

Karen J. Huey, enforcement director for the Casino Control Commission, said 48 agents statewide (12 for each of the four casinos) are being taught how to play card games, craps and roulette — and how to cheat. Arrests were made at the Toledo and Cleveland casinos within a few weeks of their openings, so officials will be on alert in Columbus. A Detroit man was found guilty this week of cheating at the Hollywood Casino in Toledo. He was the first of several defendants there to be charged, according to *The Blade* newspaper of Toledo.

Edwards, 62, spent three years as a pit dealer in a casino before going to work for the Nevada State Gaming Control Board. In three decades on the job, he learned the tricks of the trade from gambling cheaters — after sending them to jail.

Although the idea of beating the casino has been dramatized in movies such as *21*, in which college professor Kevin Spacey organizes his math students in an elaborate cheating scheme, it's usually not that sophisticated nor complex, Edwards said.

Marking cards is a common trick. Cards can be slightly bent or folded, "painted" by daubing on a tiny bit of color, or "sanded" by scratching lightly with an abrasive such as a belt buckle.

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In table games such as blackjack, cheaters can discreetly add a chip if they have a good hand — a technique called “pressing” — or take one away to cut their loss if they have a bad hand, known as “pinching.” Both are illegal.

Edwards demonstrated one technique with a seemingly innocent move — deftly slipping his cards under a stack of chips. Almost impossible to detect is the fact that he used the cards to slap a chip from the bottom of the stack into his empty left hand.

At the craps table, Edwards showed agents how players rub the dice to slightly round the corners, making them less likely to tumble and easier to slide to improve the odds. He taught them how to catch teams of cheaters working the tables; the job of one of the cheat-ers is to distract the dealer.

There is even an electronic device being used to trick bill readers in slot machines to read a \$1 bill as a \$100.

For all the training aimed at catching cheaters, Edwards said cheating actually is rare. Some experts estimate that casinos lose 6 percent of revenue to cheating, but Edwards said there's no way to know. “The money is stolen before they count it,” he said.

The ace in the hole for casino enforcement is cameras. At least two will be trained on every game table in Hollywood Casino.

“The camera never blinks,” Edwards said. “The way we catch people is simple: Stop. Rewind. Play.”

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