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Blackjack Card Counting Explained

Our Friends · Friday, January 10th, 2020

Blackjack is one of the most loved gambling games across the world.

With it being the American twist on the age old game of Twenty-One, the game is best known for appearing American casinos and has been captured in films and TV shows over the years. Played with a deck of cards, you do not need much else to play a simple game of blackjack, although it is certainly played best against a suave dealer – be they online or real life. It's also best to learn [how to play blackjack](#) in order to enjoy the game win, eventually.

Blackjack is a game so popular that it has its own culture and own traditions within it. One of the more controversial parts of blackjack is card counting, as card sharks into this particular card game have the ability to play the odds game better than others thanks to a fairly infamous method.

Counting cards dances on the fine line between being a betting strategy and outright cheating, depending who you speak to. One thing for sure though, is that the method is not going anywhere. Many players study the fine art that is card counting like a curriculum, practising the skill involved the do quick maths and remember the formula that the method of counting cards requires.

While it might not be as fun as attacking a game of blackjack with a sense of innocence and unpredictably, serious blackjack players swear by the method and there is no doubt that, if performed correctly, it can greatly increase one's chances of winning at the semi-circular table that the game is traditionally played on.

The basics behind card counting

Card counting is all about odds, probability and remembering what cards have been played and what cards must left in the pack.

The essence of the most simple card counting strategies is based on the simple notion that high cards like picture cards, aces and 10s, are of more benefit to the player than they are to the dealer. As the game is played against a dealer, rather than against other players, this is something that becomes very important in winning a game of blackjack through card counting.

Also, the low cards such as 3s, 4s, 6s, and in particular the 5s, are very beneficial to the dealer while hurting the player's odds of winning simultaneously. More high cards being dealt helps the player because you are more likely to hit the desired Blackjack result – created by a value of 10 and an Ace of Spades. Or more so, higher values increase the chances of getting to 21 by whatever

means.

Also, higher values increase the chances of a potential splitting of hands, something which the dealer cannot do. Furthermore, having more 10s means that there is less 10s in the pack for the dealer, whose chances of getting a pontoon or blackjack are hurt massively as a result.

The system works not by physically remember the exact value of all cards played, but by assigning a value to each card that in turns helps the player predict the likelihood of winning or losing the hand.

Are there different systems of card counting?

Within card counting there are several different systems.

Similar to the amount of betting methods and strategies you find at the roulette wheel, the game of blackjack has a few schools of thought, techniques and approaches to counting cards. The most basic card counting system assigns a value of positive, negative or zero to each card seen. Then, when a card is dealt, the value of that card within the player's system is adjusted to fit their own card counting approach.

Low cards increase the card count as they lower the chances of winning, whereas higher values do the opposite. The Hi-Lo system is a system of card counting that is particularly well known.

Using the Hi-Lo system, a player subtracts one for each dealt 10, Jack, Queen, King or Ace, and adds one of the lower values – that is, any value 2-6. Values 7-9 are assigned a value of zero and therefore do not affect the count, due to the fact that their totals can influence the outcome in a more unpredictable way.

So, as you can see, despite the formulaic nature of card counting, there is still an essence of predictability, not to mentioned memorising, that makes it more of a method than guaranteed winning technique.

Is counting cards easy to do?

Counting cards is something of an art form within card games like blackjacks.

It certainly is not an easy skill and despite it's fame, few people at your average casino are able to successfully carry out the method with ease. However, it is a skill that you can practise and it is this that makes certain players and card counters more effective than others.

Online, you will even find programmes to practise the skill with and it is this practise that is important. It is a misconception that a card counter needs an inhumane mathematical mind. However, it certainly does require a great understanding, a good amount of reading and ideally, a high level of concentration once the game gets going.

Is counting cards cheating?

Technically, using the card counting methods or strategies is not cheating. Currently in the United Kingdom and the United States, counting cards is not illegal and therefore, cannot be considered to be cheating.

Yet, this does not mean that all casinos accept the method at their blackjack tables. Card counters have been scrutinised for years and have been made examples of quite publicly when caught. Both eagle eyed dealers and video surveillance are used to catch out card counters or at least, expected card counters who may be asked to leave the casino as a result.

Acts like large buy ins, dramatic bet variations, table hopping and large lifetime wins are traits used to identify card counters. Some card counters have become infamous, with names like Jess Marcum and The Four Horsemen, going down in gambling folklore for their mastery of the craft.

Image:  **Esteban Lopez**

This entry was posted on Friday, January 10th, 2020 at 9:04 am and is filed under [Lifestyle](#), [Sponsored](#)

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