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THE TITANIC THOMPSON CHAPTER SERVES AS A CAUTIONARY TALE OF HOW A GAMBLER CAN END UP **BROKE, BROKEN AND ILL OF HEALTH.**

One thing that Rubin emphasizes is that you should always come off as a major-league loser—one way is to discreetly sweep chips from the table and place them in your pocket. “The casino will typically comp you 10 percent of a big loss,” says Rubin. “If you lose, or appear to lose, \$10,000 in a short period of time, most casinos will give you at least \$1,000 worth of comps right up front, no matter what else happens during the course of your stay. Win or lose, always ask for as much as you can possibly get in terms of comps. If they say no, ask what you need to do to get what you want.”

Blackjack Attack: Playing the Pros' Way by Don Schlesinger (RGE Publishing, 2004, \$39.99). The subtitle is not hyperbole. Schlesinger had been a feature columnist for a digest-sized publication called *Blackjack Forum* (which was practically a trade magazine for card counters) and a winning player for the last 25 years. The *Forum* is gone, but Schlesinger's columns, and a whole lot more, live on in this book. Absolutely not for those who are unversed in counting, *Blackjack Attack* serves as an advanced course. (Neophytes should turn to *Blackbelt in Blackjack* by Arnold Snyder [Cardoza, 2004] or *Professional Blackjack* by Stanford Wong [Pi Yee Press, 1994]). In Schlesinger's book, subjects discussed in great detail include the mathematically perfect time to walk away from a table, risks of ruin (i.e. going broke) under specific conditions, and a streamlined list of exceptions to the rules of standard card counting.

The book is loaded with mathematical charts and tables, a chapter on team play, and the results of countless computer simulations that augment and challenge long-standing card-counting theories. “I have a whole chapter on score,” says Schlesinger, “which is a way of comparing the attractiveness of games with a dollar-and-cents value. It helps you to determine the most advantageous game”—based on such elements as betting limits, the degree to which you can vary your bet, and the number of decks in the shoe. “My preference is a six-deck Las Vegas Strip game with the most favorable rules—dealer stands on 17s, player can double-down after splits, can re-split aces and can later surrender. Those rules make it so that the basic strategy player [who isn't counting but is making the optimal decision in each situation] can bring the house advantage down to only .26 percent. For a card counter, who can achieve a relatively large [betting] spread, that sort of game can offer some of the best profit potential out there.”

Betting Thoroughbreds: A Professional's Guide for the Horseplayer by Steven Davidowitz (Plume, 1997, \$18). Considering that the erudite Davidowitz gambles on a sport in which the pari-mutuel system pits him against other players (rather than against the house), you have to wonder why he'd write a book that tells his competitors what he does. “By opening research and consolidating your ideas, you find better examples and reinforce a lot of principles of what you do,” says Davidowitz, who coined the oft-used phrase *track bias* (which refers to the ways in which track conditions influence how certain horses run). “There is also the feedback you get from others—notations, letters, criticism—and what it does to help you move

forward. When you feel you understand an aspect of the game in a way that no one else does, you have a responsibility to write about it.”

And write he does. The book is broken up into 28 concise, well-organized chapters, in which Davidowitz uses personal experience to convey his strategies for becoming a winning horseplayer. “Without being a jerk about this, my book covers the game as it really is and provides tools that you can use in order to become a stronger horseplayer,” says Davidowitz. “But you've got to do some research and try it out. I emphasize that the individual has to evaluate himself, in terms of his specific skills, to go after a winning approach.

“Let's say you are a highly visual person, then go to the paddock and look at the horses and jockeys. If you are a problem solver, get into the trainer patterns and past performances, so you can see how the inlay of a race will work out. Even though the [house take] is severe in racing, you are betting against everyone else, not against the house. Since everyone else can be wrong, you can sometimes get 25-to-1 on horses that should be 3-to-1, because the horse has won only one race—but it was on this track, with this jockey, with this trainer. When the public is wrong, you can get great value.”

Fast Company by Jon Bradshaw (Trafalgar Square Books, 2003, \$14.95). Visit the home of top sports bettor Billy Baxter, and a first edition of this book rests on a small shelf behind his desk. Poker legend Puggy Pearson has got a copy as well. These guys may not be huge readers—unless it's the facial tics of opponents across a poker table—but they know the real thing when they see it. And this is that. First published in 1975, the book chronicles the late Bradshaw's immersion into the world of gambling back when it was still pretty much of a closed society. He eats steak with Minnesota Fats, sweats Johnny Moss at the Dunes poker room in Vegas, makes a painful visit to Titanic Thompson while the notoriously cheating con man lingers at death's door. But the book never gets sentimental or puffy, and the Thompson chapter serves as a pretty good cautionary tale about how a money-chasing, never-say-die professional gambler can easily end up: broke, broken, ill of health and compulsively trying to hustle low-stakes action.

On the more upbeat side, *Fast Company* captures top players in their flashiest, winningest moments. And, through the course of it, Bradshaw actually shows how these guys get the money. One of the more telling moments comes when Pearson is on the golf course and getting clobbered—until he raises the stakes high enough to take his superior opponent out of his comfort zone and fleeces the guy. Bradshaw was an excellent journalist who briefly focused his talents on gamblers, and we're all the better for it.

A more contemporary, less literary book of this type—it's all Q&As with the likes of poker player Chip Reese, card counter Tommy Highland and backgammon hustler Mike Svabodny—is *Gambling Wizards: Conversations With the World's Greatest Gamblers* by Richard Munchkin (Huntington Press, 2002). ♦

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