

# The Challenge of Determining a Player's "Average Bet"

Inexact guesswork can totally skew marketing's reinvestment in table game players

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The problem of determining accurate player worth for table game players remains one of the last great unsolved problems in casino marketing. The three factors that go into this determination are each challenging to determine: average bet, house edge and game pace. Taken together, the errors can compound or offset.

For example, at blackjack, if the house edge is set too high (say 3%) but the game pace is set too low (say 40 rounds per hour), players may actually get a fair estimation of their true worth – if their average bets are being determined accurately.

Assuming everything else is perfect in the system, the human element that is most directly involved is the supervisor who watches a player and enters an "average bet" onto the player's rating card. Most casinos have a vague policy – something like "watch the first 5 wagers," or "wait for them to play 5 minutes then check their wager," or "enter a value, then check back two more times to make sure." At many casinos, there are as many ways average bet is determined as there are floor supervisors. The new proprietary games often come with no guidance about average bet; it's guesswork at best. Following are guidelines for determining a player's average bet for roulette, craps and blackjack.

The simplest example about the chaos of determining a player's average bet is the game of roulette. Players typically spread chips around the board until the signal for no more bets is given. The number of chips wagered can vary significantly between rounds. Many players use a progression system where they may up their wagers after losses. Some are methodical, others are random. Trying to gauge average bet size by watching players spread their wagers, piling chips on each other's chips in a grand cacophony, can only lead to a grand headache. One very



clever supervisor explained her method to me – she watches the muck to see how many stacks of each color are collected. This undervalues the player's wager slightly, after all, in the mess he probably won somewhere. By slightly increasing the observed bet size and taking several such measurements per player, a reasonable average bet can be obtained.

The toughest game to rate is craps. First, the house must understand how it determines game pace. Some casinos count total rolls per hour, others count total pass line decisions per hour. I always recommend using a game pace based on pass line decisions – after all, the pass line is the game's basic wager. A game pace somewhere in the range of 35 to 45 pass line decisions per hour is common. With this game pace, every wager that is made between pass line decisions counts towards the average bet, except for odds bets. Most players will make a pass line wager, so count that. If a player makes a place bet or buy bet, count that. If he wins his place bet and leaves his wager out there, count the new amount too. If he makes a proposition bet, count that. Every time new money hits the baize, it needs to be counted towards the average bet. New money can also be wagers that have been won and pressed. Count the amount pressed. When all these bets are counted up and the shooter sevens-out, that's the total wager for that one "pass line" decision. In summary,

count all new money between pass line decisions and don't count odds bets.

Finally, there's blackjack. It seems easy enough – players usually bet a steady amount. Often times, you know your players and they always play the same way. Joe is a \$20 player – done. The problem is that small errors are big errors. It's not too bad an error if a \$60 player is rated at \$75 (overvaluation of 25%), but a \$10 player who is rated at \$20 is getting overvalued by 100%. The most common mistakes supervisors make are counting double downs and splits as part of the player's average bet. The only money that counts is the initial bet. No other money should be included. For those players who make widely varying bets, they need to have several wagers recorded over the duration of their play, the more the better. Also, blackjack has a wide variety of side bets. Any money wagered on a side bet should be included in the player's average bet.

Some table games departments have a policy to not count large wagers made with "house money." That is, if a player is winning and ups his bet, the increase in bet size is not factored into the player's average bet. The logic is that these large bets are temporary and aren't consistent with the player's long term betting behavior. I believe that players who make large wagers deserve to have those wagers counted into their average bet. A player who has been wagering \$20 all night long and then makes a couple of \$100 bets on "house money" should not be rated at \$100, but he should also not be rated at \$20. Players

should be encouraged to raise their bets, and part of that encouragement is rewarding players in comp value for their higher level of play. Not giving any value for those \$100 wagers is the same thing as punishing the player for winning.

Accurately determining the worth of a player at table games will never be an exact science. However, significant steps can be taken to keep it from being inexact guesswork. Assessing a player's worth relies on knowing his average bet size at each game he plays, every time he plays. Marketing then uses this value, together with game pace and house edge, to gauge the level of reinvestment in this player. A player who is undervalued will defect to a property who offers him more. A player who is overvalued will cause the casino's profit margin to degrade. In table games, the balance between player loyalty and casino profit hangs in the balance, determined by that single value – average bet. ■



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