

A guide to poker scams – how not to get stung

April 11 2018, by Graham Kendall



Credit: Andrew Neel from Pexels

Winning in a casino is difficult enough when you have the house edge to contend with, but there are people who want to make it even harder. There are legitimate ways that other players can make life difficult for you, even if some of their tactics are not in the spirit of the game and they are within the law. One example is trying to get a player to throw

away their poker hand, even though they hold the better hand, all the betting is complete and the player only has to show their cards.

Some of the ways that people try and separate you from your money is not so ethical, and may even be illegal. In his book [How to Cheat at Everything](#), Simon Lovell outlines many scams that both amateur and professional cheats will use to try and part you from your money. Some are simple, some are sophisticated and some you could imagine being successfully used against you.

It is not just gamblers that are being cheated, [but also casinos](#). Last year, Phil Ivey, a leading [poker](#) player, lost a court case. He had won almost £8m in 2012 from a Mayfair casino. But they never paid as they accused him of manipulating the deck, even though he never touched it. This was indeed the case but he persuaded the dealer to rotate the most valuable [cards](#) by saying he was superstitious. This technique – called edge sorting – enabled him to see small differences in the pattern on the reverse of playing cards so that he could identify certain cards.

In another [scam](#), a player used infrared glasses to detect marked cards. Online poker is also [not from immune from scams](#).

So if you dabble in a bit of poker, what can you do to avoid being stung? There are some scams which make you think you have the upper [hand](#), for example, even though nothing could be further from the truth. I'll walk you through one example – if you see how one works, you'll be less likely to fall for similarly attractive traps.

Five card draw

If you understand the rules of poker, see if you can work out this [scam](#) before you read how it works. If you are unsure of poker hand rankings, a summary is available [here](#).

The game is five card draw poker. In this variant, each player is dealt five cards. In the normal game, the cards are dealt face down and after the deal there is a round of betting. The players can then swap as many of their cards as they choose. The cards that are returned by the players are put into a discard pile and play no further part until that hand is over and the pack is shuffled.

Following the exchange of cards, another round of betting takes place before those players still in the hand show their cards and the player with the best hand takes the pot.

The set-up

But in this scam, the conman offers to spread the deck face up and lets you choose your own poker hand. He will then do the same. He bets that you cannot beat him.

In the heat of the moment, or the lure of some easy money, you might succumb to temptation. It's easy, right? You just pick out a royal flush (that is a run of cards from 10 to Ace, of the same suit). This is the best poker hand possible, so surely you cannot be beaten? You don't even take up the offer to swap any cards, as you cannot improve your hand.

Now read the bet again. It dictates that you cannot *beat* him. All he needs to do is also choose a royal flush and the two hands are drawn (the suits have no rank in poker, so a royal flush in diamonds is the same as a royal flush in spades). He has won the bet, and you must hand over the money.

The sting

The conman offers you double or quits. The bet is exactly the same, the only difference is that he gets to choose first. What can be wrong with

that? The best outcome is a draw and you win as your hand has not been beaten.

You agree to the bet. At least you will get your [money](#) back.

He chooses four tens and a three. Not a bad hand (four of a kind), but you can beat it – just choose a royal flush like before. Ah, but you cannot do that as you need 10, J, Q, K, A and all the tens are gone. The best hand you can get is a nine high straight flush – 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 – of the same suit. But that beats four of a kind, so you are winning at the moment.

Next comes the draw. Your opponent discards three of his tens and the three. He chooses four more cards to make a straight flush.

Realisation suddenly hits. The best you can do is the hand you have (9 high straight flush). You cannot make a royal flush, as your opponent has one of the tens and the other three have been discarded.

Like most scams, the bet you were offered seems too good to be true. The conman relies on the fact that you feel as if you have the advantage and when you realise that this is not the case, it is too late.

If you are offered a bet like that above (and there are many) and you can't work out what is going on, the best advice is just to walk away. If the best sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

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