

Insight


Women of
the Year

The brave, the brainy, the
beautiful and the brash

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WIZARD OF ODDS



Beating the house is every mug punter's dream, but a high-profile gambler reckons he's on a winner. One doubter could not resist a look as the blackjack and roulette strategy was put on show in Perth

Story: **BILLY RULE** Picture: **LINCOLN BAKER**

MAD Mick, the King of Geelong, decided a Tuesday morning was a good time to try to change my life. "How many times have I looked after ya before?" he deadpanned down the phone.

"Eh? Eh, mate? How many times?"

I didn't answer.

"Ya there? Ya there, mate?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm here. Keep ya shirt on."

I was actually trying to think of how many times The King had looked after me before. Never.

"Yeah, well listen," he continued. "There's been plenty of times. P-I-e-n-t-y."

I waited.

"Ya there, mate? Ya there?"

"Yeah, yeah, righto, plenty of times. I'm just struggling to remember a few. But anyway, case closed. Let's move on. So what's doing, King?"

Conversing with The King was like a kid doing a dot-to-dot puzzle. It could take time but things eventually took shape.

"I'm actually ringing you with an opportunity," he said. "Ya hear that? An opportunity."

He droned on in staccato gangster slang for the next 10 minutes about the ponies giving his pay cheque a pounding before he finally got round to the point he was trying to make.

"Now listen. A bloke's gonna call ya, OK? Take the call and listen to what this gentleman has to say. He knows another bloke who's got a system at the casino for blackjack and roulette and I'm telling ya it works. I saw him win \$7000 in two hours. Ya listening to me? Ya there, mate? Ya there?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm here."

"Good. Now this bloke with the system is a multi. He flies to Las Vegas every six weeks playing the big casinos and runs rings around them over here at Crown - I think they even barred him once because they thought he was counting cards."

"Now listen, his magic is no good for me because, as you know, I can't help myself, plus you need discipline for these types of things. Gut feeling tells me you haven't got the balls to try it but, I'm telling ya, take the call and see what happens."

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Me, The Iceman and



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Most conversations with The King were straight out of *Aesop's Fables* but the word "system" had my brain neurotransmitters buzzing with possibilities.

There's a medical belief that addicts have a deficiency in the transmitter dopamine and gambling, drinking, taking drugs or living on the edge calms that deficiency.

While my dopamine landscape doesn't exactly look like a desert, there have been a few times over the years where I've certainly needed to fertilise it, much to the detriment of my finances.

Despite my ghastly gambling history, those brain chemicals were already colluding. Could this bloke have the secret? Maybe he could teach me how to count cards or tell me where the roulette ball bounces.

I could swing by Burswood for a slice of the action, and then fly off to Crown to inflict some more pain on the Packer purse. I'd then do an international casino blitz from the Caribbean to Monte Carlo before conquering Vegas.

The possibilities were endless.

But visions of grandeur are what the punt can do to you. When you're a punter you leave logic behind. A tip is as good as a vein of gold and to "let it ride" is to lose it all. A hobby becomes a habit becomes a hell. You borrow to bet again. A flutter becomes a fix. A day at the races turns into addiction and sitting in front of a slot machine brings on self-loathing as your luck runs out and your real life gets left behind.

Remembering past losses was the reality check I needed. I had better things to do than follow a roulette ball around the world.

Well, I'm pretty sure I did. But then Mr Frost, aka The Iceman, dialled my number.

"Bill, a mutual friend, Mad Mick, the King of Geelong, thought you might be interested in an associate of mine," The Iceman said.

"His name is Ron Parsons and he wins money at casinos. He's developed a website where he's launched his new roulette strategy. Ron would like to tell his story. I believe you know your way around the keyboard but, more importantly, I also hear ..." The Iceman paused, and then played his trump card. "Yes, I also hear you don't mind a dalliance on the dark side. That you like the spin of a wheel and the roll of the dice. That sometimes the casino comes calling and you just can't say no."

So cruel. He knew he was dealing with a desperate. Deep down, I was more than interested. I was dying to meet the man with all the answers.

"With due respect, Iceman," I fired back. "One thing I've learnt from handing over the hard earned is that systems don't work. If you have a



THE SYSTEMS MAN:
Ron Parsons outside Burswood Casino ... he says he turns over more than \$10 million a year

Picture: Lincoln Baker

system that does work, well, you don't tell anyone and keep the profits to yourself. But from my experience those who try and flog systems are just fleecing the fragile."

The Iceman played it cool. "That's fine, Bill," he replied matter of factly. "I told The King I'd ring you and I have. For what it's worth, Ron and I will be in Perth for business tomorrow anyway. If you want to see Ron's system in action we can drop by Burswood and you're more than welcome to join us. Goodbye."

Hmm, had I just farewelled my financial future?

Roulette, or the devil's game as they call it because adding all the numbers up (1 36) comes to 666, has been cracked before. In 1873 an Englishman named Joseph Jagers studied the roulette wheels at a Monte Carlo casino and soon realised one had a significant bias. He returned with a bank and won \$US325,000, a staggering amount in those days.

In Australia, underworld hard man Mick Gatto and his great mate Mario Condello played a system at Crown Casino where they left out seven numbers - the top three (1, 2, 3), the bottom three (34, 35, 36) and zero. They'd then place \$50 on every other number for an outlay of \$1500.

If they won they'd pick up \$1800 for a profit of \$300. If they lost they'd chase it for another

five spins. They were winning regularly and increased their stake from \$50 a number to up to \$400 a number \$2400 profit until they were ahead by \$200,000.

But Gatto reveals in his book *I, Mick Gatto* that they gave it all back when the casino employed a croupier to spin to a section of the wheel away from their numbers.

A former employee of Star City casino in Sydney confirmed to me this does happen. Well-trained croupiers who can spin a ball away from a

my eyebrow. He was your archetypal Aussie cab driver: unshaven, overweight, opinionated and with body odour that would rattle a rhinoceros.

"Yeah, that's right. Is there some type of problem with that?"

"Not for me," the driver shrugged. "No, I love the casino. In fact, I pulled \$25,000 out of the joint a few years ago."

"Sure ya did," I mumbled in the back of my throat as I stared out the passenger window.

"Yeah, I hit one of those

cially not to your wife. Soon after, my new friend, The Liar, dropped me off and wished me luck.

As a member of Crown Casino's Top 200 Premium Club, Ron Parsons turns over a serious amount of money. He says more than \$10 million a year. But sitting at a casino restaurant with his sidekick, The Iceman, he could be mistaken for your average punter dropping in for a quiet Wednesday night meal.

"Evening, boys," I say as we shake hands. "Welcome to Perth."

Ron is slight and well groomed and wears a tailored suit while The Iceman is bespectacled and appears businesslike, making notes in a small diary. Ron was born in Sri Lanka in 1951, migrated to Australia in 1973 and settled in Melbourne. He became a purchasing officer for different car companies until the cards became his passion.

After losing for a while he started to win, but instead of blowing his bank he studied patterns of how the blackjack cards fell and the roulette ball rolled.

In the days when dealers hand-shuffled cards he went on a worldwide winning streak and when he finally dragged himself away from the tables he decided to make some more money by passing on his secrets. At first he held sem-

inars but then in 2003 he took advantage of the internet and set up his website, revealing his blackjack strategies for a price. Late last year he uploaded his roulette system and now more than 16,500 subscribers around the world are recouping past losses thanks to Ron's tutorials.

Over dinner we discuss gambling, systems and Ron's personal punting strategies. He reckons he's won at blackjack for the past five years in more than 5000 sittings. Even though he wins at roulette, he finds it slow, so when he plays for profit his game is blackjack.

"If I'm serious, my minimum bank is about \$500,000," he says. "I generally look forward to winning around \$60,000 an hour and anticipate winning anywhere between \$250,000 and \$400,000 within three hours."

"At that point what I will do is probably keep playing with 20 per cent of the winnings because if I just play continuously I'd sit there 24/7. For example, if I'm winning \$100,000 I'll put \$80,000 away at the end of a shoe when the decks have run out and keep playing with \$20,000. If I lose that \$20,000, I'll walk away and come back later. That's my personal plan."

A few days later I put a number of questions to Burswood about Ron's claims, but a spokesperson says they

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section of the wheel where big money is being laid are paid huge wages to make sure the ball doesn't fall in the wrong spot.

The next day I made up my mind.

"Where to, mate?" asked the cabbie.

"Burswood, thanks."

"Ahhh, Burswood, eh?" came the reply. "Having a go at the tables, are ya? Going to the casino, are we?"

I glanced across and raised

linked jackpots playing a machine about 3am. Bells and whistles went off like the building was on fire. Told the missus I won 20 grand and kept the other five up my sleeve for the punt."

I smiled at him with a newfound respect. He was telling the truth because when you punt you lie. You don't tell anyone when you win and if you have to fess up that you've beaten the bookies you never reveal the full amount - espe-

a wheel deal

Julia the darling of political year, but as for rest...

FOR a non-election year in a first-term government, 2009 was a surprisingly interesting one in Australian politics.

The Government has been remarkably stable, but that doesn't remove the fact that Julia Gillard's popularity and standing in the eyes of much of the public has grown such that one day it could cause tensions between the Prime Minister and his deputy.

The Opposition has been a rabble. Three leaders in just over two years and a damaged deputy who has managed to keep her job hardly inspires confidence for conservatives at the next election. The events that led to the demise of Brendan Nelson and Malcolm Turnbull – climate change disagreements and the Oz Car debacle – have given journalists plenty to write about.

Below are the 10 awards the *Sunday Mail* is dishing out to our political leaders.

Some are in jest but others tell the tale of who performed well and who failed in the year that was.

1 THE Yes Minister Award to the politician whose answers confuse rather than elucidate. Kevin Rudd likes to either talk down to people or over their heads. Either way he rarely makes sense unless he is delivering the lines his press secretary Lachlan Harris has worked up with him for Rove or FM radio. But record popularity ratings tell us the public haven't tired of the Rudd jargon two years into his prime ministership.

2 THE Mark Latham Award for party loyalty. Who else but Wilson Tuckey? His loyalty to Malcolm Turnbull was unmatched. When others were busy anonymously backgrounding journalists against Turnbull, Wilson was always prepared to put his name to the attacks.

3 THE Mensa Award for breaking down complex economic equations. How lucky Australia has been to have Wayne Swan with his wealth of economic knowledge to steer us through the global financial crisis. Who could forget the excruciating full minute journalists had to stand by as Swan fumbled to try and find the forecasted inflation rate. That was late last year and in fairness he has spent this year on the improve.

4 THE Time Traveller's Wife Award for service when others are abroad. Julia Gillard has performed better in the media than Kevin Rudd and been more entertaining in parliament. With more time in one year clocked up as acting prime minister, because Rudd is overseas so much, than any previous deputy, in many ways Gillard has had greater portfolio responsibilities this year than her boss.

5 THE Captain Snooze Award for staying on message to the point of complete boredom goes to Julie Bishop, who never seems to really respond to the question she is asked so much as the question she wanted to be asked. But who can argue

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with her staying power? She has survived as deputy under three leaders, two of whom are now has-beens.

6 THE Billy McMahon Award for service to public life. Harry Jenkins first entered parliament in 1986 when his dad, also Harry, resigned from the seat he had held since 1969.

Harry Jnr never made it to the front bench in 23 years in parliament, but he did head an important parliamentary study tour to Belize in early 2007. With a pedigree like that what does he do now? Run Question Time, of course. He became Speaker of the House of Representatives last year and spent this year repelling Liberal criticisms over his lack of impartiality.

7 THE Pinocchio Award, for the most "honest" politician, is awarded to Nicola Roxon, who promised ahead of the last election not to means test private health rebates. She stood by the claim not long before the May Budget that reneged on the promise even though we now know she would have been well aware at the time that it was a promise that was soon to go into the "non-core" category. That's a double extension of the nose on the one issue.

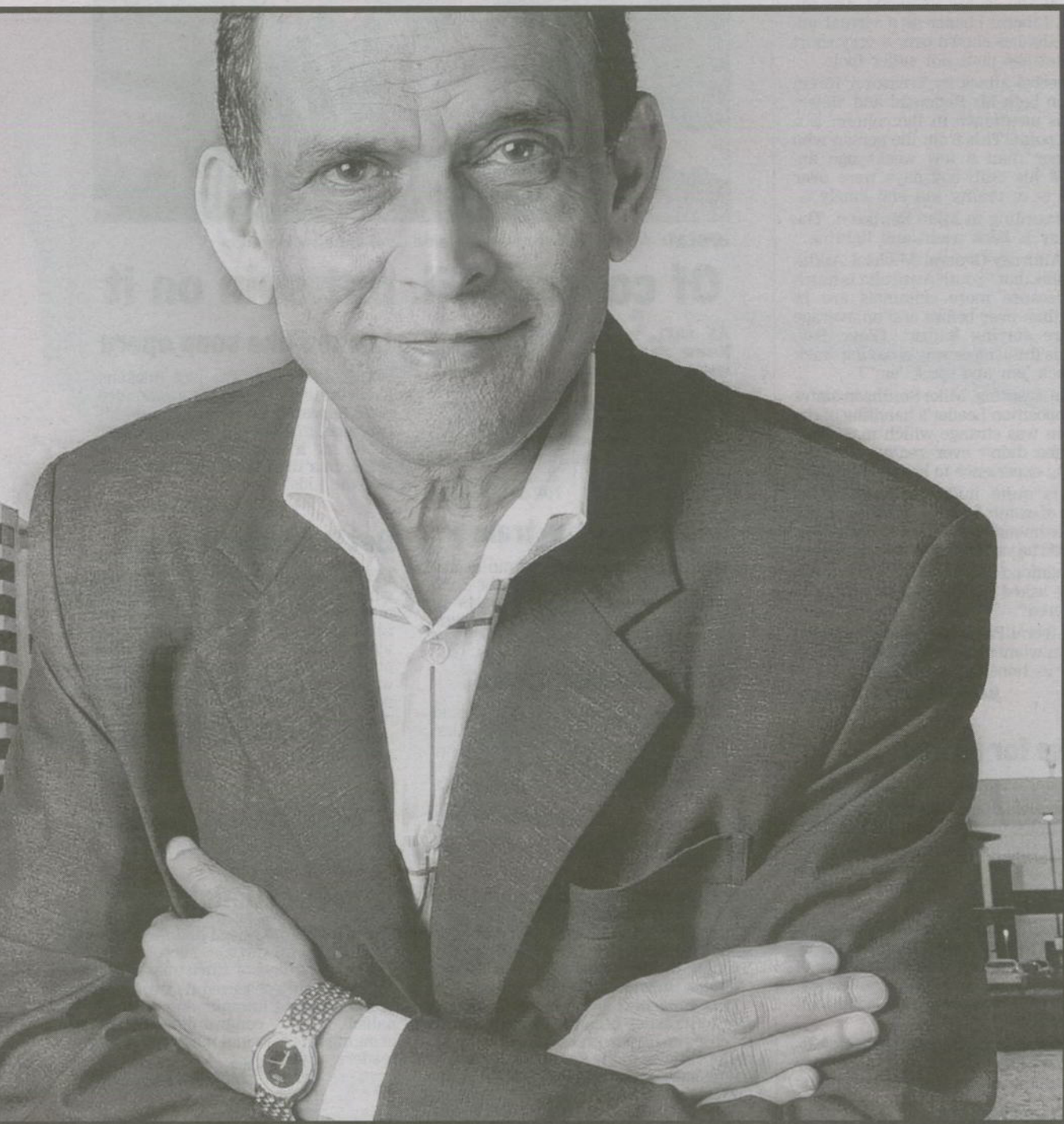
8 THE Da Vinci Code Award for conspiracy theories. This award must go to Liberal Senate Leader Nick Minchin, who used *Four Corners* to declare climate change science a left-wing conspiracy. But Malcolm Turnbull came a close second for declaring Minchin was part of a right-wing conspiracy to remove him as leader. In truth, if Turnbull hadn't put his own head on the leadership chopping block Minchin wouldn't have won against him.

9 THE Alan Cadman Award for anonymity in public life. Named after the 30-year veteran of the seat of Mitchell, who was forced into retirement at the last election when he was challenged for his seat by Alex Hawke, this prize goes to Kerry O'Brien. Not the high profile host of the *7:30 Report* on the ABC, but his namesake – the Labor Senator you could walk past and not realise you just did.

10 THE Hunter S Thompson Award for service to journalism. We couldn't round out the awards without giving this star attraction some billing. Whether he was abusing journalists directly, complaining above their heads to editors (or management if no one else would listen), or simply putting his foot in his mouth on a weekly basis, Malcolm Turnbull's time as Liberal leader gave us all something to write about.

He will be missed (but not if he has his way with constant blogging damaging the party he once led).

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have no comment. After dinner, we wander out to the main gaming floor and there's a bustling crowd. Punters mill around table games playing – or watching – blackjack, baccarat and pontoon. The roulette wheels are surrounded by hopefuls. Row after row of gaming machines hold shell-backed suckers mesmerised as they sit open-mouth eyeing off their screen.

While Ron won't reveal all his secrets, he's prepared to let me watch and explain some tactics.

He's been put on the spot before. *Today Tonight* wanted to do a story on him so he turned up to find a roulette wheel in the studio and the instructions: "OK, show us how you win." He played and he won.

He refused to let them film his strategy but a senior station executive was later seen at Crown Casino using Ron's system for a healthy profit. Others who are onboard include footballers, judges, lawyers and even a few WAGs.

The Iceman looks agitated. He's used to the luxurious surroundings of casino high-roller rooms but, because we've only got 40 minutes or so, tonight I've asked Ron to play on the main gaming floor where the knockabout punters ply their trade.

First off, he looks for the right spot to play. Each table has a list of the past 14 numbers that

have been spun and like a hawk Ron scans the room searching for a table to start. Soon he finds one and whips out a lazy \$1000.

"What happens in roulette, and I can publicly say this, is there are four patterns spun on a roulette tree a run of reds, a run of blacks, red black or black red and a two one run black black red or red red black." Ron says. "Once you work out the patterns it's as simple as identify, bet or alternate."

I watch as he puts \$100 or so on black and then a few chips on different numbers in the

40 minutes we're \$400 in front and it's time for Ron and The Iceman to head back to Melbourne.

Even though we won I'm not convinced, so two days later I head back to Burswood and sit on a table for two hours documenting the winning numbers.

Ron now has a calculator set up on his website where you can see how you would have gone playing his system. My numbers are entered and the result shows a \$1400 profit.

Wow. But Ron emphasises that his strategies aren't a

The call of the casino coaxing me for a comeback is getting louder and I need some advice from someone who's seen it all.

Racing expert Ken Callander has been in the game for almost 50 years. In his book *Good Luck and Good Punting*, he reveals the huge amounts he bet for Kerry Packer and Laurie Connell and their strategies.

He's also been a professional punter, a bookmaker and frequented the two-up schools and illegal casinos around Sydney when they were part of the landscape in the 1960s and 1970s.

So I call him and put it to him straight: "Can a punter win, Ken? Do systems work?"

"The biggest asset any punter can have in any form of gambling is discipline," Ken says. "Bookies bet to punters knowing the punter is going to keep coming back and that's how they'll get them in the long run. But if a punter's got discipline and knocks off when he's winning or losing well, he's got a lot more hope of beating the bookie than a panic punter. And I'm sure it's the same in the casinos."

I hang up and, deep down, I know my casino comeback is over before it's begun. Much like Mad Mick and most wide-eyed wannabes, I know that not having the discipline would eventually be my downfall.

So the casino won't be getting my money. This time.

/// If a punter's got discipline and knocks off when he's winning or losing well, he's got a lot more hope of beating the bookie than a panic punter ///

middle. The ball spins and the croupier calls "last bets". Red 18 – we lose. Ron bets again, this time a similar amount on red and three or four chips on numbers. Red 30 we win and we also collect some money from the middle as we had 30 covered as well. Next spin we go red and win again.

It's a slow process. There's a lengthy break between each spin and I can see why Ron chooses blackjack when he plays for serious money. After

quick fix. In fact, an annual subscription costs \$1500 and to win you really need to have a starting bank of at least \$3000. To be successful you also need to allow several hours at the table, employ strict money management and know when to walk away or have a break.

The anti-gambling lobby are also firm believers that no matter what your "system" the casino will always win. Despite that, I can feel the itch, the urge to outlay some cold hard cash.