

# UCI Hires Top Mathematician

## He 'Beat the Dealer' at Las Vegas

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Staff Education Writer

The college professor who rocked the foundations of Nevada's gambling industry with his unbeatable system for winning at blackjack will teach mathematics at the University of California, Irvine next fall.

He is Dr. Edward O. Thorp, author of the best-selling book, "Beat the Dealer," and one of the few men ever barred from tempting the odds at Nevada gaming tables.

His appointment as an associate professor of mathematics at UCI was routinely announced earlier this week by Chancellor Daniel G. Aldrich Jr.

Thorp's reputation as an authority on the mathematical theory of probability has withstood some severe tests in gambling casinos from Reno to Las Vegas.

The 32-year-old professor, a hero to every weekend gambler who ever squeezed the pasteboards at a Nevada blackjack table, is currently on the faculty of New Mexico State University.

Reached at his office on the Las Cruces, N.M., campus, Thorp said he hasn't played blackjack, or "21" in Nevada for almost two years. The public attention resulting from his winning ways and the publication of his book has made it virtually impossible for him to enter a casino without being recognized, he said.

"The casino operators either ask me to leave, or harass me so badly it's impossible to get a square game," he explained.

In his book, Thorp discusses various clandestine methods used by Nevada blackjack dealers to make the odds fall their way.

The expose incurred the wrath of gambling interests, and that, said Thorp, is another reason for his current lack of interest in returning to the Silver State.

"Frankly," he said, "I don't want to get my head caved in."

"Some people scoff when I tell them that. Have you read the 'Green Felt Jungle'? Well, I've met some of the mobsters mentioned in that book.

"My answer to those who scoff is — brother, I'm not taking any chances."

When you consider that Thorp's sure fire system enabled him "to transmit in excess of \$25,000 from the dealer's side of the table to my side" in about 15 brief visits to Nevada over a two-year period, it's easy to understand why his welcome wore thin rather rapidly. He says he and a partner once won \$17,000 in two hours.

### SURE THING

Thorp believes he is betting on another sure thing in coming to UCI.

"I'm very impressed with UCI and I'm particularly impressed with the mathematics department being organized by Dr. (Bernard) Gelbaum," he said. "I think UCI will become one of the great universities in the country."

Thorp himself is a graduate of UCLA and holds a master's degree and a doctorate also earned at the Westwood campus.

He developed his blackjack system with the aid of a computer while teaching at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1959-61.

While still at MIT, he was challenged to submit his theories to the ultimate practical test. With the help of



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Card Expert Thorp

some gambler acquaintances who offered advice and financial backing, he traveled to Reno during an Easter vacation and put his theories to work.

### PAYOFF

They paid off handsomely and Thorp soon found more and more casino doors closed to him as word of his successes moved quickly through gambling circles.

Later in his brief, but glory-packed fling at the gaming tables Thorp wore disguises in order to confuse casino operators, pit bosses and dealers who had been alerted to his description and gambling habits. The disguises were only mildly successful, he said, because pit bosses became suspicious the moment he began winning large amounts of money.

"I've had a number of people tell me they've used my system successfully," Thorp said. "I advise them not to

win too much at any one casino because it makes them conspicuous and more susceptible to the one thing no system can beat — cheating."

Thorp's book enjoyed a lengthy tenure on the nation's best seller lists following its publication in 1962.

### PAPERBACK

He refused to say how much money he has made from the book, but did say more than 85,000 copies in the hardback edition have been sold to date. He is currently revising it for reprinting in paperback form and has sold an option on movie rights.

Thorp credits widespread use of his system with pushing panic-stricken Nevada casino operators into adopting more stringent blackjack rules on April Fool's Day 1964.

But the rule changes apparently cut "the take" from blackjack, one of the most popular and lucrative methods of separating Nevada visitors from their money, and the old rules have gradually been revived, according to Thorp.

"The dealers began complaining because blackjack became unpopular under the tougher rules," he added. "Tourists weren't playing and the dealers weren't getting any tips."

"I guess it finally became a question of the cure being worse than the disease."

### SUBTLETIES

In his book, Thorp predicted the inevitability of rule changes once his system came into widespread use, and even explained how to modify the system to cope with the changes.

By using his system, Thorp maintains, almost any blackjack player can gain a con-

sistent advantage over the house. He cautions, however, that his system, as any other gambling system, requires working capital and a cool head. It also requires a sharp memory.

And an amateur gambling with money he can ill-afford to lose is not a cool-headed gambler in the professor's view.

He also warns that a blackjack player should have at least a nodding acquaintance with the practical problems involved in gambling against professionals.

He favors a simple maxim credited to a casino operator, who, when asked if customers in Nevada ever walked away winners, replied: "When a lamb goes to the slaughter, the lamb might kill the butcher. But we always bet on the butcher."

### GAME THEORY

Thorp points out that mathematicians interested in the theory of probability have studied gambling games for centuries in an effort to discover ways of beating the house.

But, he adds, it was the advent of the high-speed computer which made his system possible. The computer he used, Thorp explained, took three hours to make calculations "it would have taken roughly 10,000 man-years to do... with the aid of a desk calculator."

He ends his book with a prediction that casinos ultimately will have to "fight science with science" in order to keep up with the development of scientifically based winning systems.

Meanwhile, satisfied that the dealer can be beaten, Thorp has moved on to other forms of mathematical studies.