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Gambling - The Scientific Approach vs. The Luck Approach Copyright © 2005 Matthew Rotterman

There are those who feel that mathematics is the only way to go when gambling and that playing the best odds will help you to win the most money. There are others who are in disagreement with this and believe that all you need to do is to be lucky when gambling. Both approaches have been shown to work and both have been shown to fail at different times. So who is right?

By the scientific approach I am referring to statisticians who determine the best odds of winning a game, percentages of wins, algorithms, etc. This method has a great deal of merit in regards to gambling. The most agreed upon statistics state you have the best odds of winning in a casino when playing blackjack, video poker, and craps. The house advantage in these games is lower than in any of the other games. Now blackjack and video poker require a certain amount of skill and knowledge that will help improve your odds. If you learn these skills, such as when to hit in blackjack, when to double down, when to split, and how to count cards your odds will improve statistically. In video poker you need to learn the odds of making the best hand given the cards that you are dealt to statistically improve your odds of winning. In craps the best way to improve your odds of winning is to understand which bets have the best payout and which ones are purely sucker bets.

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Personally, I am a firm believer in the scientific approach to gambling. The casinos will NEVER offer a game in which they do not have an advantage; after all they are there to take your money in the end. The games I mentioned still have a house advantage, just less of an advantage. Learning the skills of how to improve your odds in these games and sticking to them should help you to win more money.

The luck factor has worked many times and this is how most people approach gambling. Luck states that you will simply either win or you won't. People who gamble solely on luck make outrageous bets and often bet the long shots. As I said, sometimes this will work.

Statistics tell us though, that in the long run this will not work and that we will eventually end up losing. The interesting thing is that large numbers of hands, or pulls of a lever determine these statistics. Most people do not play enough to have these statistics impact them. Most people gamble recreationally over a short period of time and may hit that big jackpot or have a good run of cards. Since these recreational gamblers will not bet as many hands or pull as many levers, they have a chance to walk with some money on pure luck alone. I mentioned earlier that I am a firm believer in the scientific approach and paying attention to the odds. I also believe that luck is a factor that comes into play when gambling. I think that the very best approach is to try to combine both of these methods in order to get the best possible results. Knowing how to play a game, such as video poker and the odds of getting winning hands will let you know when to "go for it" if you have a lucky feeling. If I am playing blackjack and know that there have been very few face cards in the last five hands and I feel lucky, perhaps I will up my bet in hopes of a win.

Regardless of which method you use, always learn how to play a game before actually playing it. This will help you make good

decisions when you are actually at the tables or the machines. For example, if you want to play blackjack but have never played before, be sure to learn the rules of the game and what it takes to win before you ever walk into the casino. You will be glad that you spent the time researching this information. With a little luck and a lot of skill you could go into the casino and do very well for yourself. Of course you may also lose all of your gambling money, even if you know every statistic there is to know. Knowing the odds and the skills of the games simply improve your odds of winning, they do not guarantee that you will win. In the long run of gambling, the casino always wins. Providing entertainment and a fun atmosphere, all while taking your money, is the reason the casinos are in business.

Matthew Rotterman is a writer for the GamblingWisdom.com website.