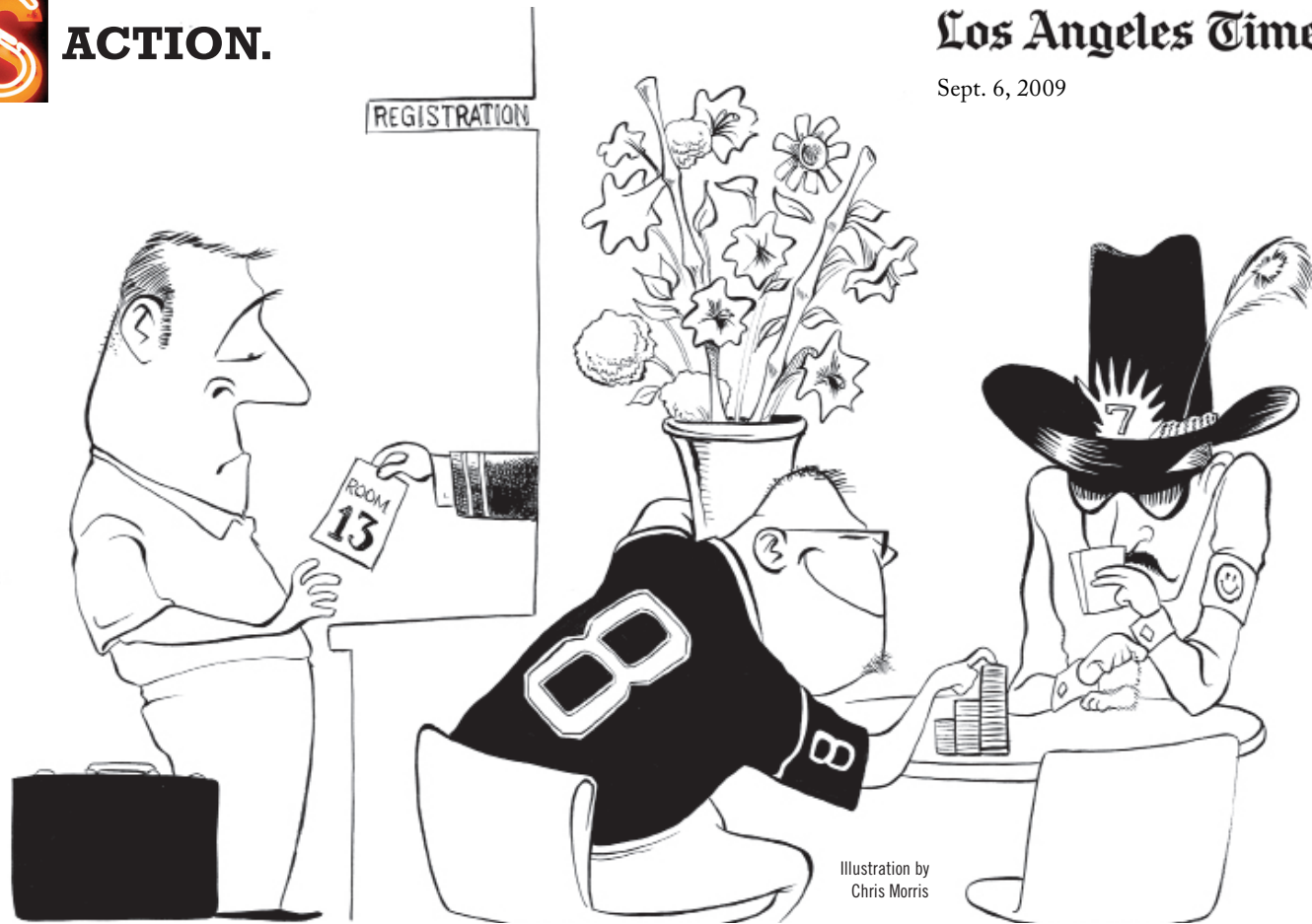


Some gamblers have all the luck



Vegas



Superstitions

If a guest at a hotel asked you not to look at him and avoided all eye contact, it may seem slightly unreasonable to downright rude. But here in Vegas, a certain unnamed superstitious high roller did just that.

While playing his game of choice, the gambler instructed dealers to avoid eye contact with him, for fear it might bring him bad luck.

“He would not allow anyone to look at him. No eye contact, nothing. Just keep your head down and deal,” recalled John Giannos, director of player development at the Golden Nugget.

In Las Vegas this type of request not only goes unquestioned, but it is understood.

Being superstitious is a way of life in Vegas. From lucky troll dolls to lucky room numbers, high rollers and first-time Vegas visitors alike have preconceived ideas as to what is going to bring them gambler’s luck.

No matter how crazy or far out the superstition is, Vegas hotels seem to have a way of making guests feel comfortable about it. Some common superstitions that are accepted in the casinos can vary from the use of numerology to a lucky trinket. Good luck charms spotted at the tables have included rabbits’ feet, a small figurine and even a fruit — professional poker player Johnny Chan carried an orange with him at tournaments and no, it was not his favorite snack.

Different people have different superstitions. While some superstitions can give people something to believe in when they win, it also gives them a reason or excuse to blame it on when they lose.

To be or not to be—superstitious

Being superstitious while gambling can have its advantages and disadvantages. When someone believes in a superstition, it tends to be because they are trying to explain the irrational and make it rational.

“It’s a way of turning random events into something that’s more comprehensible,” says Director of Gaming Research at UNLV, David Schwartz, Ph.D. “I think randomness scares a lot of people and superstitions are a way of giving random events some structure. And giving people control over random events.”

But not all gamblers feel the need to explain the way they are playing with superstition. Professional poker player Annie Duke prefers to use math and skill instead of a good luck charm.

“I usually encourage [players’] superstitions because it encourages really bad thinking,” she says. Duke explains that instead of focusing on the skill and the numbers involved in the game, superstitious people blame their superstition.

However, some gamblers would disagree with Duke and swear by their superstitions. Just ask Giannos, who grew up around gambling and will tell you he’s as superstitious as they come. The former baseball player is still toting around a red envelope he received as a gift 20 years ago. He won’t get rid of it. He walks in and out of the same entrance at the Golden Nugget every day. When Giannos gambles, he notices people have a certain way of setting the dice. His way is not to set them at all.

“Just as soon as they push me the dice I pick ’em up and I shoot ’em. I don’t set them because... (laughs) I want to sneak up on the dice, I guess.”

And Giannos isn’t alone in such behaviors. For example, sometimes a gambler will have a run of wins or a few good hands in a row.

“When gamblers who believe there are hot and cold streaks see that happening, they rush over to a table to get involved in that and they will bet and bet and bet and bet to get involved in that,” says Gary Thompson, director of corporate communications for Harrah’s Entertainment.

They want some of that good luck to rub off on their playing. But Duke, who has a

degree in cognitive science and a master’s degree in math and probability, sees this behavior as an opportunity to use skill over luck.

“It’s a huge advantage to play someone who has a superstition because it usually means they’re more emotional, they don’t think as clearly. They’re going to blame things on bad luck where they should be blaming it on bad play,” says Duke.

And while math might be the more logical choice, Giannos insists that superstitious players think that their superstition is logical.

“Everything that they do is logical. If they’re standing on one leg with their finger in their ear, it’s logical for them to do it because they just rolled a winning seven. No matter how absurd it is, it’s just logical to them.”

Very superstitious, very Vegas

Because superstition is such a big part of gaming and gaming is such a big part of Vegas, hotels and casinos would be remiss if they didn’t make certain accommodations for people’s sometimes unusual superstitions.

Ly Ping Wu, vice president of The Mansion at MGM Grand keeps a lucky frog figurine on property for one high roller so anytime he comes to town his lucky charm will be waiting. She also notes that for her Asian gamblers, there are lots of flowers and greenery like tangerine and kumquat trees that all symbolize good wishes. The color red is also used throughout the property as a symbol of prosperity.

Vice President of Casino Operations at MGM Grand Debi Nutton, notes the use of color around her property as well. She also offers high rolling guests a commemorative gaming chip or “lucky money” during the Chinese New Year. With the Chinese New Year falling very close to the Super Bowl, it’s MGM Grand’s busiest and luckiest time of year.

But handing out good luck charms, changing colors or adding a few Ficus trees isn’t enough for the extremely superstitious. While most properties around Vegas do not have a thirteenth floor, the MGM Grand’s older tower still does. However, properties like Encore Las Vegas have gone so far as to omit all of the floors numbered in the forties because the number four is bad luck to some cultures. In Chinese, the number four sounds much like the word “death.”

In addition to accommodating room number requests, casinos will sometimes even accommodate a dealer switch. While this usually isn’t done for just anyone who asks, casinos have been known to make a switch should a high-roller or

long-time gambler request it. Dealers will even accommodate your bad hygiene, if it means that much to you.

“I know people that wear the same jacket for the last 30 years because they were lucky once in 1984. They haven’t been lucky since but they’re still going to wear that jacket,” says Giannos.

Perhaps there’s something to that—the word on the street is Members Only jackets are making a comeback.

Superstition is an undeniable part of gambling and gambling, an undeniable part of Sin City. It has become a fun part of Vegas culture. It has also developed into a legitimate consideration when structuring and decorating hotels and casinos. So feel free to take out your lucky figurine and wear the same jacket two nights in a row at the poker tables. The guys in Vegas won’t bat an eye.

Pressing your luck in Vegas as easy as carrying a rabbit’s foot

Las Vegas is all about luck and some gamblers like to rely on a little something extra to give them that edge. Some bring along a lucky trinket to the tables and some engage in superstitious behavior every time they set foot in a casino. Here are some of the common lucky symbols and objects and even a few of the unlucky things to keep an eye out for the next time you’re in town:

- Rabbit’s foot
- Wearing the same article of clothing while gambling (a lucky hat, jacket, etc.)
- Wearing red underwear
- A figurine the gambler considers lucky

- The color red is considered the color of prosperity and good fortune.
- The number eight in Asian culture is lucky because the word for eight in Chinese is similar to the word for prosperity. (Four is an unlucky number because the word for four in Chinese is pronounced much like the word for death.)
- In Asian cultures, flowers are considered good luck
- In Asian cultures, water is a sign of prosperity and plentiful luck.
- Some gamblers hold their cards or throw their dice a certain way.
- Don’t tap someone on the shoulder when they are playing — that’s considered bad luck.
- Don’t sit cross legged when gambling, you will cross out your luck.
- Don’t drop a card on the floor during a game.

— Written by Nikki Neu