



Staff photo by Soddt Stetzer

Joe Centrone, president of Nu Games, deals a hand of Double Attack Blackjack at the Trump Taj Mahal on Friday.

Taj bets dealer's variation of blackjack will be winner

By J. STAAS HAUGHT

Staff Writer, (609) 272-7253

ATLANTIC CITY — The crowd may have been gathering Friday afternoon because the table was still holding a \$5 minimum bet. It may have been because a reporter and photographer were clogging the aisle. But it is more likely that Trump Taj Mahal's newest table game is attracting a steady stream of players all on its own.

So the smile on Joe Centrone's face as he slipped

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Blackjack

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behind the table to deal a few hands was more than understandable. As the creator of Double Attack Blackjack, he sees that the game has the potential to become a huge success.

"It's already doing very well," said Vincent Mascio, vice president of table games operations for Trump Hotels and Casino Resorts. "People just took to it so quickly."

The game, a variant of blackjack, adds a few twists to the simple game of 21.

After placing an initial bet, players are dealt in and then shown the dealer's first card, at which point they can place an

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would be winning and the game wouldn't be here," Centrone said.

The game maintains the pace of standard blackjack and new players are quick to learn.

"One minute, that's all it takes," Mascio said, holding up one finger to further his point.

Sixty seconds may have been a conservative estimate. One new player read over the simple rules and within seconds was placing multiple bets. Forty-five minutes later, he was still at the table.

Centrone is adding a first-of-its-kind LCD display screen to the table. A looping 90-second spot will introduce players to the basics of the game.

"When I show people that, they say 'why didn't we think of that?'" he said.

The Taj is introducing a sec-

ondational bet.

Double downs are allowed on both bets and players can surrender half their bet at any point in the game.

But it's the option to bet the dealer is going to bust that gives Double Attack its lure, Centrone said.

"I thought, 'How can I give people an opportunity to have more fun with the game, to see some more excitement,'" the long-time dealer and supervisor said.

His answer was a system of increasing-odds bets that the dealer will break 21 on the third card.

Players who throw a \$1 chip in the "Bust it" circle are repaid \$3 if the card that puts the dealer over the limit is a face card. If that pivotal card is a six, the lucky player is rewarded on a

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and table soon, and Trump's other properties have agreed to make room for the game on their floors.

Centrone said at least one other casino is committed to the game and others are taking a serious look, but he remains modest about accepting congratulations.

"The support I've got here from everybody and the employees is what's making this a success," he said.

That's part of the strategy, Mascio said.

"When Mark Brown (Trump CEO) came here in 2000, he said he wanted to get the employees involved in creating new games," he said. "So I went to Joe and asked him to put some of his ideas together."

The result is a smooth business strategy that gives Trump

15-to-1 scale.

And starting Monday, if the dealer draws three eights of the same suit, the payout is 200-to-1.

"They love that edge," Mascio said. "People do like a challenge, a bit of excitement."

But that edge could have had a chilling effect on the game's success.

Centrone, a self-confessed numbers fan, calculated the odds and realized the game was stacked to the players' advantage. "Since all casino games have to give the house the best odds, he made two simple adjustments: make blackjack an even money payout and take all of the tens out of the standard eight-card shoe."

"That gives the house the odds. Without it, everybody

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properties free access to the game and gives Centrone the exposure he needs to showcase the game's value to other casinos.

The burgeoning success has prompted Centrone to start his own business, called Nu Games.

Tapping into his love of numbers — "I've always had a high aptitude for mathematics," — he is already hard at work on a new game.

"This one will be better and more exciting than Double Attack," Centrone said. "But, I'm not ready to reveal the details yet."

Spoken like a true businessman.

To e-mail J. Staas Haught at The Press:

JHaught@pressofac.com