

## My Golden Rules for Choosing a BJ Variation

### Game or Side Bet for Your Casino

*By Joe Centrone 9/17/2021*



I've been designing and marketing table games for nearly 20 years. If there is one thing I've learned it's that many casino execs are not very good at deciding which new games they should put in their casino. Over the course of these years I've developed the ability to look at a new game and determine in a few minutes if it has little to no chance of success with about 100% accuracy. However, while picking the games that will definitely not succeed is easy, picking the games that will succeed is much more difficult. This is because the success of a new game will also depend on a host of other factors. Factors such as the type of market the game is placed in, the placement spot on the casino floor and the length of time a casino leaves the game in to find its market. All could have a major impact on the success or failure of a game. I will outline the criteria I use in developing games, and any casino exec could use to have the best chance of success when choosing a new Blackjack variation game or side bet. While these rules are specific to BJ variation games because that is my area of expertise, much of this could also be applied to other new game types as well.

### RULES FOR CHOOSING BJ VARIATION GAMES

- 1. The 30 second rule.** If you can't explain the basics of the game to a player in 30 seconds or less and have the player understand it, the game is not likely to succeed. For example, in 2 Face BJ, the dealer shows the hole card whenever his or her up card is a Face or an Ace. The game is dealt with the numerical 10's removed (ie Spanish decks). Other rules are similar to standard BJ. Dealer hits S17, DAS, BJ pays 6 to 5. Simple to understand and explain.
- 2. The Entertainment value rule:** The game must add an additional element of entertainment over and above the standard game. For example my Double Attack BJ game allows a player many more opportunities to increase their initial bet, thus adding more excitement to the game. 2 Face BJ adds the bizarre circumstance of players actually rooting for the dealer to get a face card up so they can see the hole card. Free Bet adds the excitement of the house letting players double and split without risking any more money if they lose, but getting paid more if they win.
- 3. The Perfect Player vs the Average Player Rule:** When deciding on whether to put in a game by looking to see if the house edge is high enough, do not just look at the HE for the perfect player (as long as the house has an edge against the perfect player). Look at the HE against the average player. To do this you need to estimate how many more errors a player will probably make in the new BJ game vs the standard game. In Spanish 21, Double Attack, and 2 Face, since the ten's have been removed in all these games, most players make more errors because they play the game more like a traditional BJ game. That's why all 3 of these games have proven to hold more than a standard BJ game, even though the HE against the perfect player is about the same or even less. In addition, Double Attack adds the additional

element of not making the additional Attack wager correctly. In 2 Face BJ additional errors are made when seeing both cards because players aren't used to making some of these decisions. Think 9 vs 12 or 11 vs A6 (Hit or double?) This is one area where, if the data is available, hold % can tell you a lot about the HE against the average player. When compared to other BJ games nearby over 6 months or more, the higher hold games will usually mean a higher house edge against the average player. This assumes similar table minimums and hands per hour.

**4. The Don't Take Pushes Rule:** Some BJ variations try to compensate for whatever edge their game gives to the player by taking some pushes. Players HATE losing pushes. In fact one of the most successful BJ variation games, BJ Switch, originally took pushes on certain totals. The game did not take off until that was changed to the Push 22 rule.

**If you look at the most successful BJ variation games you'll see that they all meet all of the above rules.**

### **RULES FOR CHOOSING BJ SIDE BETS**

**1. The High Payoff Rule:** Offer at least one very high payoff. This doesn't necessarily mean a progressive jackpot. But if a \$5 can return \$1,000 or more, than that's plenty.

**2. The Hit Frequency and House Edge Rule:** The hit frequency shouldn't be prohibitively low and the house edge shouldn't be prohibitively high. The hit frequency should be high enough to make players feel like they are winning often enough to keep coming back for more. The house edge shouldn't be so high that players feel like they have no chance of coming out ahead. While many casino execs may get greedy and favor installing high house percentage side bets over moderate house percentage ones, they may be sacrificing long term gains for short term profits. Bets that make players feel like the casino is just sucking up their money won't gain a long term following.

**3. The Side Bet Optional Rule:** Don't make the side bet mandatory to play the main game. While I have seen some BJ side bets that do this, these games have never become widespread or very popular.

**4. The Game Speed Rule:** Avoid side bets that slow up the main BJ game too much. This basically means that side bets should be easy and fast for the dealer to take and pay.

**5. The Low Lease Fee Rule:** Many casinos now buy site licenses for one side bet for an unlimited number of games either casino wide or even covering all casinos under the corporate umbrella. They believe they are saving a lot on lease fees by doing this. As the saying goes "Penny wise, dollar foolish". By doing this you are basically saying that all side bets are alike and players don't really have any preferences in side bets.

So if you only offer one side bet any player that doesn't like that particular side bet just won't play it. Or worse, they may also go to a casino that offers a side bet they do like. The amount of money they are saving on lease fees is minuscule compared to the amount of profit multiple different popular side bets can generate. A casino that offers only one side bet is like a restaurant that has only thing on the menu. This rule applies even more so to multi casino site licenses, where the demographics between the different corporate casinos will effect the popularity of the side bet they are offering.

But first I want to give you an example of the kind of game you should NOT put in a casino. The game is called Quick Pay BJ and here are the the rules:  
After bets have been made and initial cards dealt, any blackjacks shall be resolved, as follows:

Both player and dealer have blackjack — Both bets push.

Player only has blackjack — the Bet pays 6 to 5 and the Surrender or Play is a push.

Dealer only has blackjack — the Bet loses and the Surrender or Play is a push.

Otherwise, if the player has a total of 18 to 20, then he can accept a "Quick Pay," as follows, or play the hand normally:

Total of 20 (including soft 20) — Bet pays 1 to 1 and the Surrender or Play is a push.

Total of 19 (including soft 19) — Bet pays 1 to 2 and the Surrender or Play is a push.

Total of 18 (including soft 18) — Both bets push.