



Inside Ed's Head

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For Everything, There is a Season (Cyclical Stacks Help Defy Reason)

In my very first column, in April 2012, I wrote of how to memorize a deck. I also talked at length about combining the Si Stebbins stack with an idea of Simon Aronson to avoid alternating red and black cards in the stack.

Later on, in August of 2013, I wrote up Darwin Ortiz's "Do as I Did"—a trick my friend Hal has used to great effect for years. I mentioned it needed some sort of stacked deck but didn't go into details. All I said you would need is a "stacked deck that allows you look at a card and know the value of the next card in the stack."

I did assume everyone reading my column would know Si Stebbins—I was probably right—but did you know Si Stebbins (William Coffrin) didn't use the Si Stebbins stack? Apparently, he thought his system was too good to give away.

In this issue, I'll describe what Stebbins didn't want you to know and give you a great mindreading effect. And, if you don't know the "Charlier Shuffle," you will by the end of this column.

What is a cyclical stack?

A cyclical stack uses simple rules to allow you to look at any card in the deck and be able to calculate the identity of the next cards. There are typically two rules: one to calculate the value of the next card and one to calculate its suit. These rules usually mean that there are four banks of thirteen cards with all of the values from Ace to King covered. These banks will be identical—as far as value goes.

How do you figure out the suit?

The most common rule for finding the next suit is called "**CHaSeD**." Using the consonants in that word, we get **C**lubs, **H**earts, **S**pades and **D**iamonds. This means that if you are looking at a club, the next card will be a heart.

In reality, there are six possible ways you can arrange the four suits in a cyclical order. (Remember, as far as a cycle goes, CHSD is the same as HSDC.) I've only heard of two others being used, **SHoCkeD**, and the order used in the game of Bridge, **CDHS**. **SHCD** has a possible edge in memorizing the order, in that just looking at the top of the design can bring its numerical position into focus. A spade comes to a single point at the top. A heart has two curves, a club has three "petals," and a diamond has four

corners. The numerical value of these suits is used in some card tricks or stacking systems.

The Original Si Stebbins

Si Stebbins' original rule to find the value of the next card was to add *four* to it. This meant each bank of thirteen cards would look like this:

A 5 9 K 4 8 Q 3 7 J 2 6 10

Using CHaSeD, we get

**AC 5H 9S KD 4C 8H QS 3D 7C JH 2S 6D 10C
AH 5S 9D KC 4H 8S QD 3C 7H JS 2D 6C 10H
AS 5D 9C KH 4S 8D QC 3H 7S JD 2C 6H 10S
AD 5C 9H KS 4D 8C QH 3S 7D JC 2H 6S 10D**

You should note several facts about this stack or any similar stack.

- Every fourth card is the same suit.
- Any four consecutive cards have one of each suit.
- If you look at the bottom card of the deck, two of the three top cards will be the opposite color and the third will be the same color, opposite suit.
- Every thirteenth card has the same value.
- The suits of any particular value run in the same order as the rule you are using for suits. Note in the table above that all the columns are in CHSD order.
- These last two facts should point out that with some mathematical skill you are able to know the position of any card in the deck. I actually practiced this after reading about how to do it in *Expert at the Card Table* but gave up on it as too cumbersome.

Stebbins recognized a more important fact specific to his system; in any set of *three consecutive* cards, you will have one that is *high*, one that is *low* and one that is ambiguous when noted among the other two. This can create an amazing effect. In addition, in any set of four cards, the value of the fourth card is one lower than the first and the suit *before* the first card. This means if someone takes the top three cards and you see the bottom card is the Five of Clubs, you should immediately know that one of the three cards is the Nine of Hearts (plus four, next suit) and another is the Four of Diamonds (minus one, previous suit). It should take only a few seconds more to figure out that the third card is the King of Spades. (The suit will always be the same color and opposite suit as the one on the bottom.)

Mr. Stebbins Goes Fishing

Effect

The spectator cuts the deck and removes the top three cards. He thinks of *any one of the three*. The magician divines the card.

Setup

You'll need a deck set up in the original Si Stebbins setup.

Method

Either ring in the setup deck or uncase the deck and false shuffle it during your introductory patter. An easy shuffle to use here is the "Charlier Shuffle." Briefly: hold the deck in left-hand dealing position and spread a small group of cards into your right hand. Now, use your left fingers to push off a small group from the *bottom* of the deck and drop these *on top of* the cards in your right hand. Spread off another batch of cards *from the top* of the deck and take these *underneath* the cards in the right hand. Once again, spread cards from the bottom of the deck and drop these on top. Continue alternating this pattern until you run out of cards. It doesn't matter where in the pattern you run out just make sure you use this pattern:

- Cards spread off the top of the deck go *under* those in right hand.
- Cards spread off the bottom of the deck go *on top of* those in right hand.

This shuffle looks very messy and haphazard, which is a good thing. It *cuts the cards*, so it's not exactly a false shuffle but this is immaterial in the context of this trick.

Give the deck to the spectator and direct him to give the deck a single cut. Make sure he can do this properly. Be prepared to do another trick if he drops the deck on the floor. If you're using this on stage, have a second deck ready.

After this is completed, turn your back and ask him to cut the cards. Give him the opportunity to cut again, if he so desires. Ask him to remove the three top cards and give the deck back to you. Finally, ask him to look at the three cards and concentrate on *one* of them,

As he is doing this, glance at the bottom card of the deck. This will give you all you need to know to "go fishing." Unless you are looking at a jack, your spectator will have an ace or a picture card in his hand.

In this case, say, "You're sending me a high card, are you not?" If he immediately answers, "Yes," that means he's thinking of an Ace or a picture card. You can now continue to concentrate—calculating the values of his three cards, and calling out the value of the ace or picture card.

If, after being told he's thinking of a high card, he waffles a bit, he's thinking of the value in the middle of the three. Figure out which it is and reveal it.

If he immediately denies thinking of a high card, reveal the lowest card of the three.

If you see a jack at the bottom of the deck, your spectator is looking at a two, a six and a ten. Announce, "You are thinking of a low card." If he says yes immediately, it's the two. If he waffles, it's the six. If you get an immediate "no," it's the ten.

What if I'm wrong? Let's say you announce that the card is the Ten of Hearts and your spectator says, "Wrong." You have a very simple out. Just say, "I was getting a very blurry image but I was almost certain it was a Ten of Hearts. I think you considered the Ten but then switched. Is there a Ten of Hearts in your hand? He will confirm this. Then say, "OK, how about concentrating on both of the other cards. After a suitable time, reveal them.

Important note: *Do not* talk about possible high/low values of the cards in your introductory patter. If you say that the high cards run from eight to ace, and the spectator is thinking of the Nine of Hearts, he'll answer "yes" immediately when you say he's thinking of a high card. This might lead you to the erroneous conclusion that he's thinking of the King of Spades.

If the spectator asks, "Is an ace high or low?" you can always say, "I consider the Ace of (whatever suit he's holding) to be a high card."

We'll have some more about cyclical stacks next month.

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