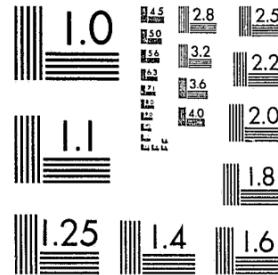


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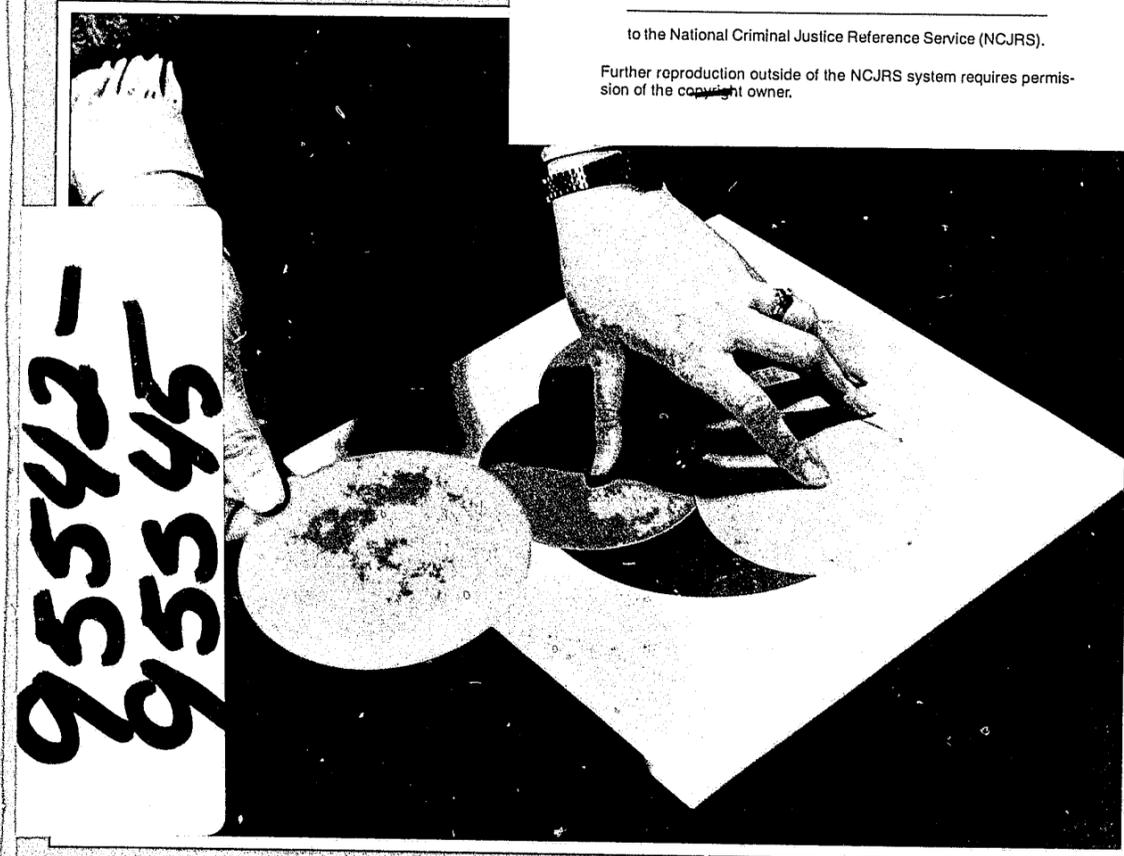
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## Raising the Stakes in Carnival Fraud

# FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

SEPTEMBER 1984, VOLUME 53, NUMBER 9

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ACQUISITIONS

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Federal Bureau of Investigation  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D.C. 20535

William H. Webster, Director

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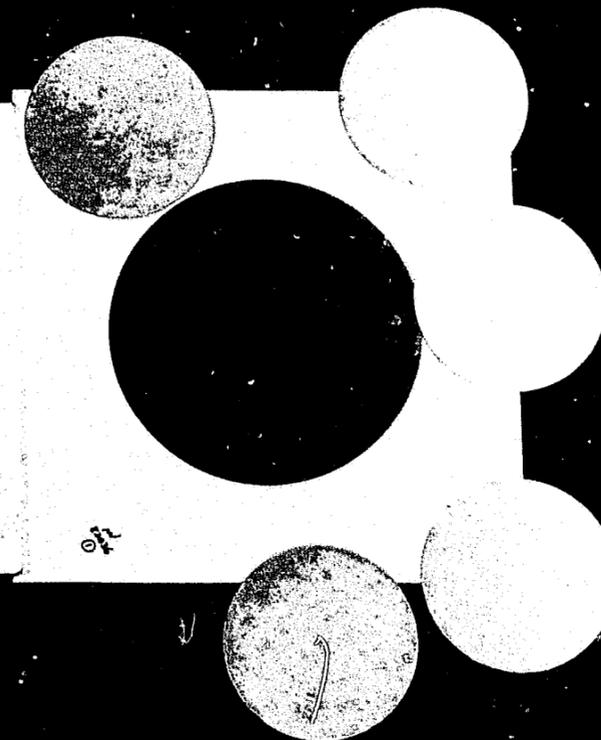


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Crime Problems

**RULES OF GAME**  
1 HOLD PLATES UP 1" & DROP  
2 DO NOT TOUCH OR MOVE  
AFTER DROPPED, OR YOU  
LOSE.  
3 WHEN THE COLOR CIRCLE  
SHOWS, YOU LOSE.  
**GOOD LUCK**  
1 PRIZE PER PLAYER  
**IF YOU DONT UNDERSTAND  
DONT PLAY!**



## Raising the Stakes in Carnival Fraud

Carnival game investigators quickly find the "how" in razzle dazzle schemes.<sup>1</sup> Any one of a hundred variations of a game is played in this scam to get a number that is compared to a conversion chart. The number will give either points toward the winning total, nothing, or a doubling of the possible prize. At this point, of course, the wager also doubles. Each time the doubling number is hit, the wager goes up accordingly from 50 cents, to \$1, to \$2, to \$4, to \$8, to \$16, to \$32, etc. The prospective prize also goes up accordingly, but since the player can never get the

"With both the razzle dazzle and operator-controlled games, arrest and prosecution are often successful when pursued, since the game itself is sufficient evidence to insure conviction."

By  
CAPT. DONALD I. PATTERSON  
Police Department  
Cheyenne, WY



Captain Patterson



B.R. Rookstool  
Chief of Police

total needed to win, it matters little to the carnie what prize is promised.

Games in which the outcome is totally controlled by the operator are also escalated in a similar fashion but without the conversion chart. These include games that have a hidden device that controls the success or failure of every attempt by the player.<sup>2</sup> The player is told that if he can succeed at the game 10 times, a commensurately larger prize will be offered. Frequently, this is a large cash sum. The escalation occurs because each time the player fails on his way to 10 successes, he must double the wager. The usual course of play would be four to six successes, a failure, then success and failure interspersed to keep the player interested and the cost per play rising. The player may be successful 9 times but never 10.

With both the razzle dazzle and operator-controlled games, arrest and prosecution are often successful when pursued, since the game itself is sufficient evidence to insure conviction. The method of deception and wager escalation is a physical part of the gameboards, charts, scoresheets, and devices employed in the games.

These games contain what the carnies call a gaff,<sup>3</sup> which is a method or device that is built into the game to escalate the wager and decide the outcome. In razzles, the gaff is in the conversion charts, gameboards, and the operator's spiel. In operator-controlled games, the gaff could be anything from false bottoms on buckets to weighted bottles. Surfaces that are

tilted at angles at which it is impossible to win,<sup>4</sup> a hidden foot pedal that stops a spinning wheel at a specified spot, or any one of a thousand similar devices or scams are employed in illegal games.

#### Spot the Spot

This game has been on the midway since the 1920's and various methods have been used to control the outcome of the game.<sup>5</sup> During recent carnival seasons, methods that insure the ultimate failure of the player and increase the take for the crooked operator have been used.

The game is played by dropping five metal discs onto a gameboard that contains a round painted spot. The object of the game is to cover the spot completely with the discs so that *no* color is visible. When played legitimately, the player pays 50¢ or \$1 per attempt to win a large stuffed animal. The game can be legitimately played if the discs are of a sufficient size to cover the spot. The tiniest fraction of an inch difference in the size of the discs or the spot can change the game from one that can never be won to one that is either difficult or quite simple to win. Usually the investigator will find that the board being used on the carnival midway is just possible to cover.

When the operator wishes to up the ante before defrauding the player, he begins dropping some of the discs for the player while increasing the cost per play. The climax of this deception is when the operator drops all the discs on the spot, completely covering it. He then removes just one disc and offers the player the opportunity to drop the disc for a specified number of attempts at an inflated cost. For example, he might offer three tries for \$20 to cover just the

Three-point drop



MJ  
Rookstool  
①

follow the movement, and the carnie spreads his thumb and index finger, slightly spreading the discs. The increase in spot revealed is extremely slight, but just enough to make the task of covering it nearly impossible.

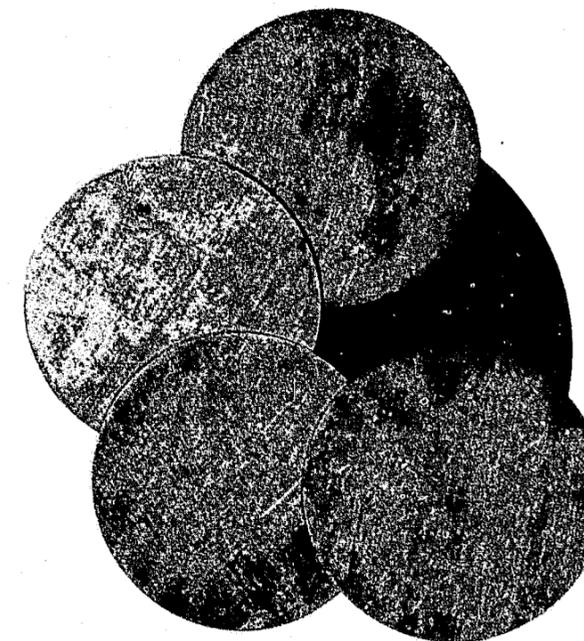
Another method used to cheat the victim is more subtle. When the carnie plays the game, he covers the spot in such a way that the last disc dropped will cover a spot that has only three points. Other discs, when individually removed from the spot, will reveal four- or five-point areas. The carnie drops all the discs, completely covering the spot, but the disc he removes for his victim's attempt is not the three-point disc—it is one which must cover five points.

amount of spot revealed by removing one disc. A couple of tricks make this a much more difficult task than it would appear to be to the unsuspecting victim.

The odds of a player covering the spot on a tight board (one in which the discs will just barely cover the spot) are very slim in any event. The operator makes it look easy because he has had a great deal of practice. Few, if any, players will have a fraction of his skill.

In order to further insure his victim's failure, the skillful carnie may manipulate the discs. He covers the discs that are on the board with his left hand. The disc that is positioned between the thumb and index finger of that hand will be the one offered to the player for his attempts. He need only cover the remaining portion of the spot. However, as the carnie removes the disc, the player's eyes

Five-point drop



MJ  
Rookstool  
①

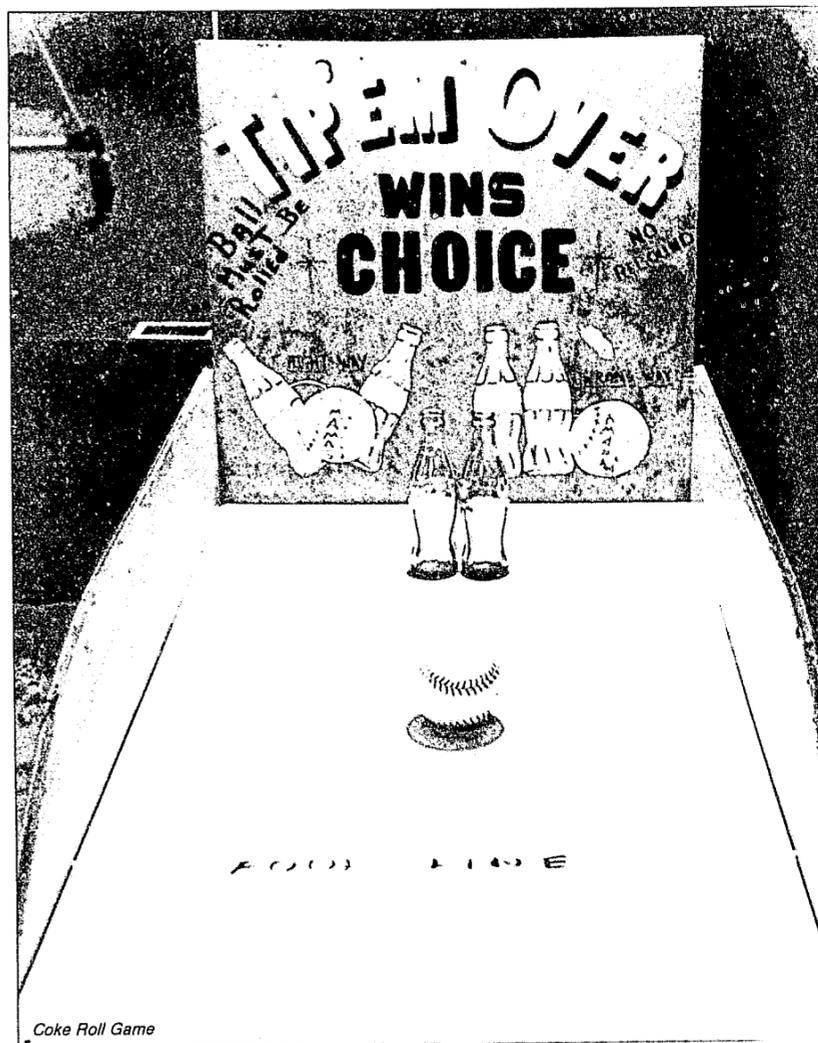
Again, the player is offered a number of attempts at an inflated fee. The five-point drop, of course, is considerably more difficult than the three-point drop because of the need to line the disc up over so many more points for the drop. The odds of the player successfully covering the spot are extremely slim. If the player should win, the operator will produce an alibi to cheat his victim out of his success. He may place the point of a pin in an area between two discs. When the discs are moved away, the pinpoint is in the colored area. The carnie may lay his head on the playing surface and from this position he will "see" some of the spot revealed. Of course, the carnie may simply bump the board or move the discs to cause a speck of the spot to be revealed.

Making up the rules as he goes, the carnie can explain success into failure—the disc was not held high enough when dropped, or the victim's hand was on the board, nullifying the drop. The net result is always the same—large amounts of money lost, no winners, and a difficult case to prosecute because it is the victim's word against the word of the operator.

**Coke Roll Game**

The coke roll game is very popular at carnivals and looks like a sure win to the unsuspecting victim. The carnie places two small soda bottles at one end of the board with the object being to hit the bottles, knocking them both over with one roll.

The "regulation" softball is actually a styrofoam ball with a thin leather cover. When played legitimately, the odds of success are approximately 35 to 1 against the player, with variances based on ball weight, surface slickness, and ability of the player to hit the area between the two bottles.

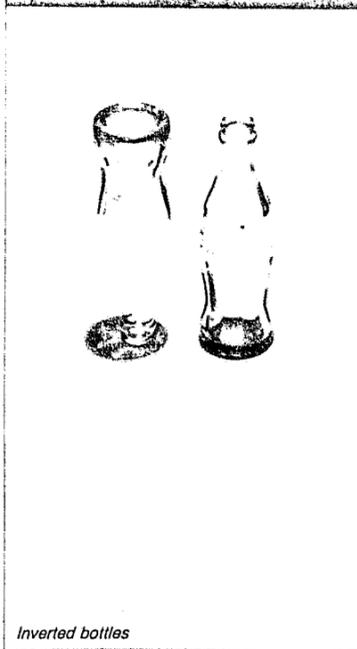
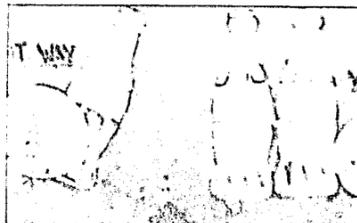


*Coke Roll Game*

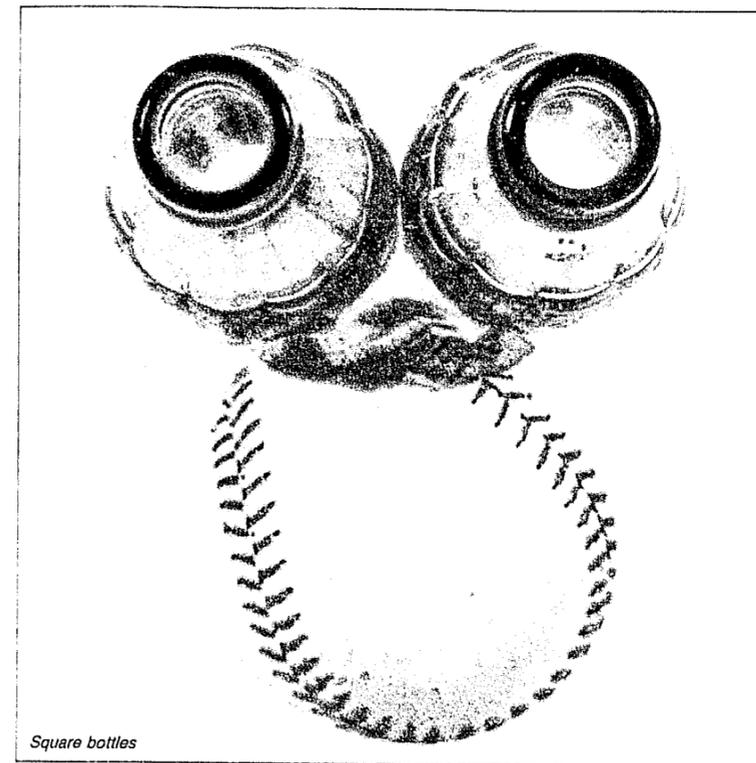
Any contact of the ultralight ball with one bottle expends so much of the ball's energy that there is not enough left to knock down the second bottle. The only way the player can win is to hit both bottles at precisely the same time, and even then, they may not fall.

If the bottles are offset, one slightly closer to the player than the other, the task becomes impossible. The offset bottles now make the exact middle of the two target bottles more difficult, or perhaps even impossible, to hit.

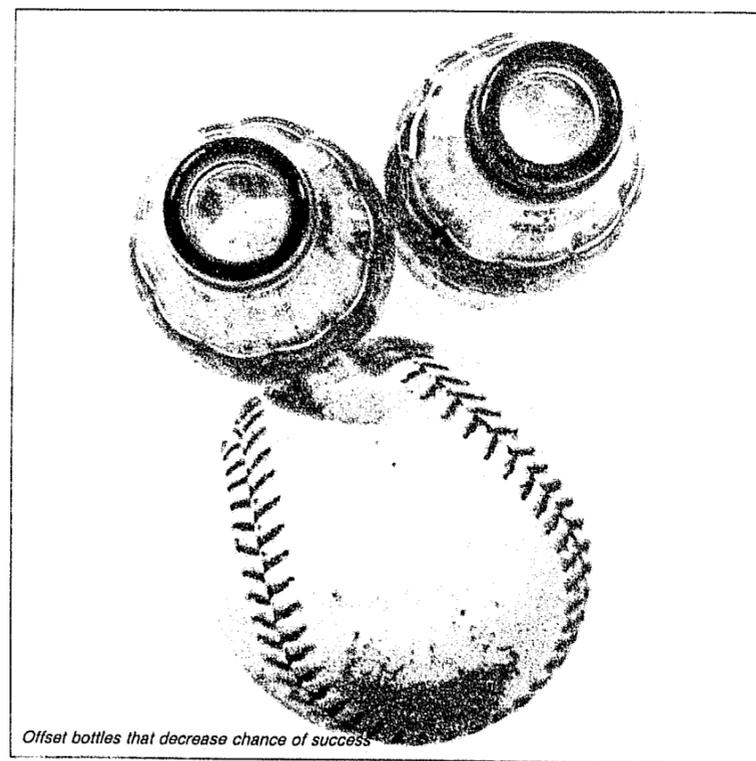
*Styrofoam ball with thin leather cover*



*Inverted bottles*



*Square bottles*



*Offset bottles that decrease chance of success*

The carnie escalates the bet by appearing to make the game easier and offering tries for an inflated cost per attempt. First, he moves the bottles closer to the player. This may be up to half the distance closer, but slightly offset. After the player finds that he is unsuccessful at the closer target, the operator will invert one of the bottles and again offer attempts at an even higher price.

In truth, neither the distance nor the inversion of the bottle has any real effect on the outcome of the game. The odds of success never change to any large extent. In fact, the task may have become harder with the changes.

Again, should the player have the good fortune to beat the odds, the rules of alibi come into play. Your hand went over the foul line, you did not hit the bottles in the middle (side shots are a foul), or the bottles hit the side before falling.

#### Enforcement

A few simple steps can be employed by law enforcement agencies to help control carnival fraud on the midway.

Law enforcement officials should learn about the games and carnival fraud techniques. There are trained law enforcement personnel around the country who know how the games work and what tricks carnies employ. They should be contacted in order to obtain the information needed for enforcement.

There should be a list of rules and applicable laws in your area. If none exist, suggest a carnival ordinance or law.<sup>6</sup> Make sure the carnival operators know the rules in your jurisdiction when they sign a contract to operate. If they know the rules and your intent to enforce them, the odds of fraud on the midway decrease.

As a requirement of their contract or through an ordinance, require the carnival to post a complete set of rules of play on every game front, the owner's name and address, and the exact cost of play with no variance (all signs should be of permanent material, neatly lettered, and large enough to be prominent). Foul lines should be prohibited. Instead, the carnie should use a longer board, a wider trailer, or customer retaining ropes. Foul lines are a built-in alibi designed to defraud the successful player of his prize. Have officers from your department warn the operators that violations will not be tolerated and will result in arrest and seizure, not warnings and game closures. Conduct undercover

operations to determine if there is compliance. If violations occur, follow through with arrest.

Document, followup, and prosecute citizen complaints. Out of thousands of persons questioned at carnival seminars, hundreds admit to having been cheated at carnival games, but only a tiny fraction of these ever reported the offense. If 10 complaints are received, it should be presumed that there are many more being defrauded in the games, and action should be taken. **FBI**

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Phillip Harker and Gary Bald, "The 'Game' of Razzle Dazzle" *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, May 1981, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> John Scame, *Scame's New Complete Guide to Gambling* (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 556-624.

<sup>3</sup> Walter B. Gibson, *Carnival Gaffs* (Las Vegas: Gambler's Book Club, 1976), p.7.

<sup>4</sup> FBI Laboratory, "The Basket Game," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, June 1981, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Supra* note 3, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 6, Article IV, *Code of Ordinance of the City of Cheyenne*, (Ord. No. 2700, Sec. 1, 6-13-83).

## Reminder To Return UCR Survey Questionnaire

A questionnaire on the UCR program was recently sent to the heads of all law enforcement agencies serving populations in excess of 10,000 and to all other agency heads who returned the coupon included in the May issue, indicating their interest in participating in the survey. We urge those included in the survey to ensure that their views are counted by responding promptly to the questionnaire.

**END**