

Don Schlesinger, Grand Square Head Proofreader

The next time you bow to your partner, you may be do-si-do-ing with one of the world's foremost authorities on the game of casino blackjack. Like a superhero with another identity, Don Schlesinger isn't just your friendly, neighborhood square dancer; he's a gaming mathematician, author, lecturer, and player whose work is considered one of the most sophisticated theoretical and practical studies of the game.

Author of the book *Blackjack Attack: Playing the Pros' Way*, his highly acclaimed work has spanned almost three decades. "I had always been interested in the mathematics of gaming, and in the theories of probability that applied to the various games. So, it was natural that I would come around to actually playing blackjack in a casino." After playing in Las Vegas for the first time in 1975, Don taught himself how to count in 1976. "And I've been at it, as a hobby, ever since. Blackjack is a game in which the player can gain an advantage over the house, so I like the idea of being able to turn the tables on the casinos and beat them, so to speak, at their own game!"

Don holds two graduate degrees in French and an undergraduate degree in mathematics. He taught high school-level mathematics and French in New York City for 16 years, and was an adjunct lecturer of French at the City College of New York (CCNY). In 1984 he changed fields, moving to the Wall Street firm Morgan Stanley. He started as a proprietary trader and options strategist, eventually rising to an executive director in the Worldwide Equity Derivatives department. "Hectic. Long hours. Extremely exciting at times," is how Don characterizes those days. "I was working with numbers all day long, and, being mathematically inclined, that really suited me."

As if accomplishments in gaming, finance, and mathematics aren't enough, Don and Cathy, his wife of 35 years, both speak fluent French. Intrigued by language, Don enjoys copy editing and proofreading, and is proud to be head proofreader of the *Grand Square* editorial team. "It's an extraordinarily competent and devoted group of people, with whom I've had the pleasure of working since 2010," he says.

But we're not done yet; this Renaissance man has other passions up his sleeve. Don has been involved in the sport of track and field, in one or more capacities, for more than 50 years. "From 1963-67, I was a sprinter for the CCNY track team," he says. "I set numerous school records, some of which still stand today, and was inducted into the CCNY Athletic Hall of Fame in 1979."

Don has coached, on and off, for more than 35 years. He coached his daughter, Jodi, in sprinting and jumping. She became a multiple New York state and national champion in the triple jump, and was a 10-time All-America. Don is currently coaching the horizontal jumpers at a high school in Rockland County. In 1990, he became meet director of an annual town track and field meet, which is still thriving. Jodi is now married with a two-year-old son. The Schlesingers also have a son, Jason.

And, finally, we come to Don's most familiar passion: square dancing. "When Jodi was in Brownies, a local caller, John Callahan, organized a father-daughter square dance," he says. "Nearly 20 years passed, and in 2006, Cathy saw an ad for a class to be given by ... the same caller! I was hesitant at first, but we stayed with it, and I'm certainly glad that we did." The Schlesingers are members of RocklandRockytops.

The main attraction of square dancing, says Don, is "the precision of the figures. As a mathematician, the virtually infinite combinations of calls and how they are executed was fascinating to me. I must also say that, as a community, square dancers are among the friendliest people I have ever known."

Robin Friedman, Kittatinny Rangers