The McCOMB-ical Card Trick

a comedy card classic

Notes from Billy McComb on the background of this trick: "This trick was first marketed in 1960 after it enjoyed great success at the Boston convention that year. It was given to Jay and Frances Marshall as a "thank you" for their great hospitality over a period of six months when I stayed at their home and did various lecture tours arranged by Frances. (Subsequently, it passed through various hands and seemingly its roots were forgotten.) Sometime around 1970 Ken Brooke inquired if I wanted to market the effect in the U.K. I decided against this, since I was doing the effect in my act there at that time. Around 1975 Ken decided to market the effect as the "Potty Prediction." He changed the selection from the first deck and had the prediction card in a changing envelope (such as that used by Eric Williams in his "Blind Date" effect.) Later Supreme Magic put out a version with (only) seven or eight cards in each deck which they called "Jumbo Jest." The idea was to cut down on the number of jumbo cards used, as many performers found the handling of two full decks to be awkward. (Hence in Britain the origin of the effect is often confused.)

EFFECT: Magician explains that he is about to make a prediction. He holds up a fan of assorted cards and, after some musings, selects a card. This is shown to the audience but not to the spectator who has volunteered to help. The spectator sits on the card. Another packet with a different color back is shown to the audience with the comment that the spectator is going to have a completely free choice of the cards as they are passed from hand to hand. This brings a laugh as the magician demonstrates the action, since the cards are seen to be all the same. This laugh is covered to the spectator (who doesn't see the faces of the cards) by saying, "They don't think it's posible for anyone to do this." As the cards are passed from I hand, the spectator is invited to say "stop" at any time he pleases. He eventually does so and the "stopped-at" card is placed carefully face down on his hand and covered with his other hand. The magician quickly reiterates what has occurred and invites the spectator to call out the name of the card he chose (to stop at.) To the magician's chagrin, it turns out to be an entirely different card than the prediction card. magician asks how this can be, since all the cards were alike. The magician's selected card is revealed and it matches the card chosen by the spectator.

SECRET: The card chosen by the magician from the fan of assorted cards is actually TWO cards. The one shown (say the three of hearts) has another card (say the king of clubs) roughed to its back. A pencil dot can be placed on the back of the roughed card in the corner, so the magician can easily spot it from the rear of the fan. The card is replaced on top of the fan while the magician demonstrates where he wants to place it out of sight (on the spectator's chair). The card thumbed off and placed on the chair is the back card of the roughed pair. Thus the three of hearts is changed to the king of clubs, and this is the card the spectator is sitting on.

Now the second packet of cards is introduced and the selection is made as the cards are passed from hand to hand. Each card appears to be a three of hearts but is really a three of hearts

with a king of clubs roughed to its back. When the spectator says "stop," that card is replaced on the top of the deck while the magician demonstrates how the person is to hold the card between his palms. When the card is thumbed off the top of the deck, it is actually the king of clubs which is placed between his palms. The working part of the trick is ended, allowing the magician to concentrate on the presentation to bring the trick to a successful and surprising finish.

PRESENTATION: Here are some performance hints.

Some performers ignore the reason for putting the card back on top of the deck to do the change. Without a reason, the audience wonders why he has placed the card back on top of the deck instead of just giving it to the spectator or placing it down. This is covered when the magician demonstrates where he is going to put the card or how the volunteer should hold the card in his palms.

When the spectator calls out the name of the card he is holding and it proves to be the "wrong" one, the magician's reaction should not be a long, wordy explanation of his apparent surprise. He should stop dead and say nothing. This is the normal reaction of anyone who is completely taken aback by an unexpected outcome. Any attempt at another reaction, especially a verbal one, will spoil the huge laugh which comes at that point. If you are using a microphone, be sure to put it rit in front of the spectator so that his words ring out clearly to tne audience. If he speaks quietly and the audience doesn't hear him, you miss a big reaction. When the laugh has died down, ask him to repeat his words. It underscores the magician's apparent failure and subsequent discomfort when the spectator repeats his words clearly into the microphone.

Ask any competent actor and he will tell you that the correct reation to an astounding happening which is communicated to him verbally is to stop in his tracks. That is the meaning of "dumb-founded," and that is what you are supposed to be.

Apparently coming to your senses, you take the card from the spectator and, holding it up in one hand, you pick up the card he is sitting on and hold it up in the other hand so that the cards can be seen and compared. This puts you in the classic "applause pose" for the reaction which is bound to come.

After the applause dies down, don't forget to thank your assistant and escort him or her off the platform or back to his seat. This is what a caring gentleman or lady would do, and that is the effect you should create.

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