

# The last executives standing

BY REBECCA ZISCH

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Television viewers are about to be allowed entry behind the green door of casino operations, through the uncompromising and edited-for-best-ratings eyes of reality programming.

The Discovery Channel's "American Casino," debuting June 4, is a 13-episode series examining day-to-day business at Station Casino's suburban Green Valley Ranch. Only 10 days later, Fox will unveil the newest Mark Burnett venture "The Casino," an unscripted and behind-the-scenes look at downtown up-and-comer the Golden Nugget.

I admit that I haven't been privy to previews of either series. However, it is clear that June is busting out all over, fulfilling our country's ever-growing fascination with Las Vegas casinos and gambling. The increasing ratings of the World Series of Poker and the World Poker Tour, the renewal of Bravo's "Celebrity Poker Showdown" and even various attempts to televise blackjack are testaments to TV viewers' interest in gambling — no matter the actual entertainment value.

If people are willing to spend their free time watching silent contenders battle over chips and cards, these two new casino reality series should at least be able to attract and keep viewers with instigated drama between entrepreneurs, staff and guests — otherwise known as the kings, queens and jacks of the employee card game. While it doesn't matter whether that game is poker, crazy 8s, hearts or war, the producers of these shows are hoping that all face cards come up wild.

The rulers of each respective kingdom should prove interesting in their own ways. "American Casino"'s Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta III, Station Casinos' principal shareholders and all-around big-wigs, should have a family-business and brothers-in-arms vibe about them. With Green Valley Ranch growing into the go-to location for east-siders with disposable income, there are probably more than a few investors hoping that "American Casino" does for the Fertittas what "The Real World" did for the Maloofs.

On the other hand, Tim Poster and Tom Breitling are going for a young, cool and entrepreneurial vibe. When the stars of "The Casino" made an offer MGM Mirage couldn't refuse and assumed ownership of the Golden Nugget in January, they vowed to reawaken Las Vegas' glory days with hipster entertainment, a new poker room and other swinging touches. Only time will tell whether enlisting producer Burnett of "Survivor" fame proves to be the Machiavellian alliance needed to ensure their success.

For those of us watching, it will be interesting to see which type of show delivers the most insightful casino unveiling. Will it be the serious docudrama, businessmen-in-their-natural-habitats tendencies of the Discovery Channel? Or the combination of Burnett's surviving pirates with Fox's deceptive "Joe Millionaire/The Swan" output? Both have their pros and cons. But in the end, we may all be wishing that the two groups of producers had gotten together and created a game show out of it. Perhaps the last casino executives standing would win permits to build a hotel-casino at Red Rock. **CL**