

OBVERSE OR REVERSE - HOW DO WE TELL?

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Before route tokens and silver strikes, when casino gaming token collecting was in its infancy, a basic communication problem was discovered. Everyone, it seemed, had a different idea as to which was the prominent, important, identifying, front or obverse side of these new tokens. This was creating a real problem when it came to written identification and token descriptions. About 10 years ago, collectors determined a need to establish a criteria for casino gaming tokens. A system was needed that could be put to the test in every instance, such as with coins, trade tokens, medals, orders, and decorations. One that we could all understand and apply.

Being new collectors with a new hobby, we had a tendency to think of the feature side or the one with the most outstanding design as the obverse. Many of us had never collected anything before, much less coins, tokens, or medals. Most of us did not even know about regulations, much less requirements. To establish guidelines we had to formulate a workable criteria. To do this, we had to understand the other common numismatic and exnumia collectibles, the development of gaming tokens, the federal guidelines, and the various state regulations. We found coins, tokens, medals and decorations to have some type of federal restrictions, and while none of their criteria was completely applicable, some portion of each applied.

Coin of the Realm: Look at the change in your pocket. In every instance you will discover a bust on the obverse and a design on the reverse. The unmistakable heads and tails, however, this is not the qualifying factor. The design may change over the years, but one thing remains constant. U. S. Coinage and modern coinage from other countries always has an issue date. This date identifies the obverse, the other side is the reverse.

Trade and other tokens: With trade, good for's, transportation, novelty, and gaming free play tokens the obverse is the identifying side. The one that names who or what event the token is designed. Examples: (1) An amusement park may be named on the obverse, with free roller coaster ride on the reverse. (2) Valley Park Days on the obverse, and good for one free game on the reverse. (3) Name of casino will be on the obverse, with free pull on jackpot machine or some other wording on the reverse.

Medals, orders and decorations: Many times these only have one side, easy to tell the obverse here. However, frequently, one will find lettering or designs on both sides. The obverse will tell what the medal, order or decoration commemorates, may it be an award or event. The reverse may tell why awarded, who awarded, or who received the medal or decoration.

Like the above, gaming tokens are regulated by the U. S. Department of Treasury, Division of Mints. Unlike the other collectibles, gaming tokens are also regulated by various gaming jurisdictions. These regulations may be the same as the federal guidelines or may have additional requirements. Nevada and Colorado, for instance, require the name of the user and the dollar equivalent be on both sides, while New Jersey requires the wording "Not Legal Tender" on at least one side.

The Department of Treasury requires four items on at least one side of each gaming token. The four required elements are: (1) Name of gaming establishment; (2) Location, city and state; (3) Denomination or value; and (4) Mint mark. Remember some jurisdictions require the name and value on both sides. There are two additional elements collectors believe are important. These are the date and logo or design. They are included when evaluating a token to determine the obverse. The side with

the most information, usually four to six points, becomes the obverse.

We look at the token field for the initial point count, adding rim wording only after the fact. In other words a token that has the name, location, dollar value, mint mark, and logo within the center on one side, would count five points without any rim wording. The other side could also have five points. A design in the field and as many as four identifying items in the rim (name, location, value, and mint mark or date.) In this case the obverse would be the side with the information in the center and the reverse would be the side with the rim information.

Simplicity seems to be the newest trend. There are several new issues that have three of the four required elements on each side. In these cases the side with the mint mark becomes the obverse, and the rim wording has to count. If both sides are equal and contain a mint mark, a date if included becomes the next obverse qualifying factor. There are at least two new issues where both sides are identical, makes no difference on these. One new casino has a token where the only difference is a design on one side and a logo on the other. In this case the logo side becomes the obverse.

The new Silver Strike premium tokens may present some problems to those who don't understand the above qualifying points. A series on the Seven Wonders of the World, Stagecoaches of the Old West, or Steam Locomotives may be used by several casinos in the same or various gaming jurisdictions. The side with the series is not the qualifying side or the obverse, even though the artwork and design might be outstanding, eye-catching, and attractive. The other side will always have the identifying information and qualify as the obverse.

Several years ago, when casino gaming token series became popular the tokens were put to the above test. In all but one instance the common side qualified as the obverse. At that time collectors agreed the common side would always be considered the obverse, and the design on the reverse would be used for individual identification. The newest series to be released is the Laughlin, NV. Riverside Resort 30th anniversary car series. This rule applies, and in this instance the common side also becomes the obverse. These tokens will be identified as 1996, Riverside Resort, 1955 Ford (etc), NCM-C. As with Silver Strikes, a collector may wish to display a series with the reverse features in prominence, and include one example of the common obverse.

What good is a rule without an exception? Well, we have one when it comes to Nevada Gaming Tokens. Route tokens always have a user side and a route company side. In every instance the user side has the name and location of the licensee, and this is always considered the obverse. The route company side is always the reverse.

Gaming tokens have always confused the collector. Some issues cause the most knowledgeable advanced collectors to have problems distinguishing between the obverse and reverse. The early issues had some tokens with an actual reverse established as an obverse before the above criteria was established, and we have accepted these as exceptions. In some of our publications, we have shown the wrong side as the obverse without realizing it, and yes, often collectors disagree, but we always come to a workable solution when it comes to identifying the obverse from the reverse. If a particular token confuses you, put it to the above test then confirm your conclusion with other collectors. Remember, we all get confused from time to time when it comes to a casino gaming token's obverse.