

Crown Casino's Maple Room allegedly robbed by high-roller

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CROWN casino's exclusive Maple Room was allegedly robbed by a down-on-his-luck high-roller who brazenly swiped \$125,000 of gambling chips and bolted home with them.

Gunawan Akay, a 38-year-old casino regular, faced Melbourne Magistrates' Court yesterday charged with stealing 25 \$5000 chips last Friday.



Gunawan Akay leaves Melbourne Magistrates' Court with his lawyer.
Picture: Nicole Garmston

None of the allegedly stolen chips have been recovered. Some may have been dropped as Mr Akay bolted towards the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre on his way home to Caroline Springs. A dealer immediately noticed the brazen theft and tried to alert security but he managed to evade staff and allegedly left with the haul.

Sources say Mr Akay, a gold-class member at the casino, had lost thousands of dollars in the exclusive Maple Room just before the alleged theft.

The casino quickly identified him through CCTV and his casino membership and he was charged on Tuesday after agreeing to meet a detective from the Melbourne Criminal Investigation Unit.

His lawyer, George Balot, told the court Mr Akay wanted to resolve the case as soon as possible.

“(This case) involves the brazen theft of \$125,000 from the casino last Friday ... today the informant showed me portions of the CCTV. It is of very high quality,” Mr Balot said.

“There is no point dragging him through the system. It's obviously going to resolve. (The CCTV) is the central piece of evidence.”

The allegedly brazen theft caps off a horror year for Crown's business. In October, 18 staff — some of whom were involved in luring big spenders to the Melbourne casino — were detained in China.

The arrests were blamed for a drop in high-value VIP clients. In June, Crown boss James Packer was reportedly involved in an ugly altercation with a Crown security guard who did not recognise him.

Mr Packer was also involved in a high-profile but now soured romance with pop diva Mariah Carey. Their relationship ended in the middle of the year.

Mr Akay will reappear for a committal mention in March.