

# POT LIMIT OMAHA 8 REVEALED

Expert Advice For Beating  
Pot Limit Omaha 8 Poker Games



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## About This Book

This book is intended for poker players already familiar with no-limit hold'em (NLHE) and/or pot-limit Omaha (PLO), who are looking for a different poker game that is easier to beat and has lower variance than these more popular forms of poker.

The number of serious poker players has expanded rapidly since the poker boom began in 2003. With the passing of the UIGEA in 2006, the number of recreational players has leveled off. Added to this have been numerous online training sites which have made the serious players even better. This has created a player pool that has many more sharks relative to the number of fish than there used to be, and has made it much more difficult to find soft games in the most popular forms of poker like NLHE and PLO.

But other games like pot-limit Omaha hi/lo (PLO8) that are not as popular still offer plenty of fish and very few sharks. Few people understand how to play PLO8 skillfully because so few resources are available to learn to play. This book will enable you to crush PLO8 games. If you are already a winning PLO8 player, you will learn new skills that will increase your win rate.

The primary focus of this game will be 6-max cash games. That's because 6-max cash is where most of the money can be made playing PLO8. The concepts discussed in this book are all applicable to full ring cash as well; and there will also be a chapter on tournament play.

PLO8 is a game that is played mostly on the internet, and has been increasing in popularity in recent years. For most players who play the game, it is not their primary form of poker. They are typically limit Omaha 8, no-limit hold'em (NLHE), or pot-limit Omaha (PLO) players. There are few resources to learn how to play PLO8. Because of this, most of the players

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you will encounter either have no idea what they are doing, or have misconceptions because they falsely assume that all poker games follow the same principles as their primary game (which is usually NLHE).

There are a few PLO8 specialists, but the specialists that exist have typically been very unwilling to share information. Even amongst these few specialists, there is no clear consensus on the best way to approach the game. Some play a very passive style, some are very aggressive, but they all can beat the game nonetheless. Some beat the game at very high win rates that are simply unattainable in other games like NLHE. The fact that these players can win using such differing styles suggests that:

1. There are very few good PLO8 players.
2. No one really knows what optimal PLO8 play should be like.

Even if someone could ‘solve’ PLO8 and knew how to play optimally, they wouldn’t want to do it. Typical PLO8 play is currently so bad, that it would be better to focus on exploitive strategies instead. I don’t pretend to have the game solved, and I would be suspicious of anyone who claimed to. The strategies presented in this book will tend to be exploitive in nature. I would expect that if the game were to continue to evolve and play became stronger, that at some point you would want to alter the strategies discussed in this book. Fortunately, the state of PLO8 has a very long way to go before we reach that point.

Throughout the book you’ll notice that I mention key concepts over and over again. It will seem repetitive at times, but this repetition serves a purpose. By having key concepts repeated over and over, you better retain the knowledge. You want to understand these concepts very well so they become second nature to you and you can act on them instinctively. I also included numerous hand examples. It’s one thing to read about a concept, but what is important is to know how to apply

these concepts when you're in the heat of battle. If you learn and can apply the concepts presented in this book, you will be able to achieve a win rate far higher than you can at the same levels in other big bet games.





# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## Why Play Pot Limit Omaha 8?

So what is the attraction of a game like PLO8? With the prevalence of no-limit hold'em (NLHE), pot limit Omaha (PLO), and HORSE games, why should you take the time to learn yet another game? There are many reasons why you should, but the primary reason is *you can gain a greater edge with less variance than in almost any other game.*

Few players understand how to successfully play any split pot game. Those that do are predominately Stud/8 and Limit Omaha/8 players, and typically only play games with limit structures. They tend to understand the equity of their hands versus their opponent's range, but they are not experts at the play of big bet games. The players that are experts at big bet games are NLHE and PLO players. Typically these players are not familiar with split pot games, and don't understand how this alters starting hand values, and also don't understand the implications for pot odds when playing for only half the pot. When you add all of these things together, you get a game that most experienced poker players tend to misunderstand.

Very few poker players have spent time learning about PLO8, and few resources are available to help them figure it out. The game has only rarely been played live, and was only added to the WSOP in 2008. At the time of this writing (May 2009), there have been no books published on the subject with the exception of a single chapter in one book. There are a few websites with some tidbits of information, and there is some discussion of the game on internet forums. There are also a handful of videos on training sites. But overall, you have to look pretty hard to find information on the game. As a result, there is no clear

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consensus on the best way to play the game, even amongst the top players.

Here is a summary of the reasons why you should learn PLO8:

- PLO8 offers higher win rates than NLHE or PLO.
  - In PLO8, there are many loose-passive opponents that you can exploit in ways that are no longer possible in NLHE. In some ways, PLO8 plays like NLHE games from 2003-2004 – before the explosion in books and training videos educated the masses on how to play NLHE. Many NLHE players now think to themselves, “I missed my chance. If only I’d known then what I know now, I would have crushed those games.” By playing PLO8, you will find plenty of loose-passive opponents to beat up on; and there are still plenty of opportunities for large profits.
- The variance is much lower than in other big bet games.
  - This is due partly to the split pot nature of the game, but mostly to the softness of the competition. Thus you can play games on a shorter bankroll than you can in other games, and grow that bankroll faster.
- Improved game selection.
  - Although there are fewer PLO8 games available than there are NLHE and PLO games, knowing how to play PLO8 gives you more options when all of the NLHE and PLO tables are tough. By being able to table select from amongst different games, it will be easier to find a soft game. This is particularly important as online NLHE and PLO games become tougher and fish are more difficult to find in those games.

- It will expand your poker mind, and improve how you think about the game.
  - It is easy to get into a mental rut and play on autopilot if you play the same game all of the time. By learning about PLO8, you will better understand some general poker concepts that you can apply to other games.

### **Attainable Win Rates and Variance**

As already mentioned, you can achieve sustainable win rates that are higher playing PLO8 than you currently can in other big bet games. Just how high can you go? In cash games you can sustain win rates of over 10BB/100 hands over the long term, even playing at mid-limits.

According to [www.sharkscope.com](http://www.sharkscope.com), for Sit n' Go's (SNG's) win rates of up to 22% have been achieved in sample sizes of over 20,000 games, played at mid-level and high buy-ins. Good luck attaining win rates like this playing NLHE with tables full of regulars that have NLHE SNG strategy solved.

The higher your win rate, the lower your variance. The split-pot nature of PLO8 lowers the variance even more, since in many situations you will be able to free-roll your opponents, and when you get the money in bad you will have opportunities to suck out and win half the pot. This makes for very low-stress poker, and you will tend to be less prone to tilting than you will be in other poker games.

One of the problems that NLHE cash game grinders have is they have to be very good just to achieve a long term win rate of 2 BB/100. There is also more variance in NLHE due to the structure of the game. This means that players with these small edges will see huge fluctuations in their bankroll. So it requires a much larger bankroll to play NLHE than PLO8 at the same stakes. It also takes more mental strength to deal with the inevitable downswings. For most people, it is difficult to go

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through a downswing and not have it affect their play.

If you play PLO8 you will be able to grow your bankroll much faster, experience less stress while you are doing it, and have less chance of going broke.

## Chapter 2 – The Basics

PLO8 is a split pot game. For hands that go to showdown, the pot is split between the player with the best five card high hand, and the player with the best five card low hand.

To qualify as a low hand, the hand must be at least an eight or better, which means it contains five unmatched cards all less than 9. Aces can count as either a low or a high card, and straights and flushes do not count against you when making a low.

- The best possible low hand is A-2-3-4-5; this is also called a wheel. Although this also makes a straight, it still qualifies as a low hand.
- 8-7-6-5-4 qualifies as a low.
- 7-7-5-4-A is not a qualifying low because there is a pair.
- 9-5-4-3-2 is not a qualifying low because it contains a card higher than an 8.

The winning low hand is determined by ordering the cards highest to lowest, and then comparing the hands by going left to right. Here are some examples:

7-6-4-3-2 beats 8-5-4-3-A, because the 7 is lower than the 8

8-6-4-3-2 beats 8-6-5-2-A, because the 8-6-4 beats 8-6-5

6-4-3-2-A beats 6-5-3-2-A, because 6-4 beats 6-5

This can be confusing at first. With a little practice, determining which low hand is best will become second nature.

### Structure

The flop and betting structures are the same as those in PLO and PLHE (pot-limit hold'em). The player to the left of the dealer is the small blind, the player to left of that is the big blind.

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The small blind and big blinds are forced bets. Typically, the big blind is twice the size of the small blind. Each player is dealt four cards and then there is a round of betting. On this round, the player to the left of the big blind acts first; on all subsequent betting rounds, the player to the left of the dealer button will act first. After this round of betting is the flop, where the first three community cards are dealt. There is another round of betting and then the fourth community card, called the turn, is dealt. Then the fifth community card, called the river, is dealt and the final round of betting takes place.

### **Bet Sizes**

This is a pot-limit game, which means the max bet is always the size of the pot. It is important to remember that the amount of the pot is computed after the player to act calls. The minimum bet size is always the amount of the big blind. Here are some examples:

1. Blinds are .25/.50. It folds to the hero who opens for a pot sized raise. He must first call the .50 blind, making the total size of the pot 1.25 (.25 small blind + .50 big blind + .50 hero's call) The hero now raises 1.25, so his total bet was 1.75, or 3.5 times the big blind.
2. Blinds are 5/10. UTG (under the gun) limps for 10. It folds to the hero who decides to bet the size of the pot. The hero now opens for 45. (10 to call + 5 small blind + 10 big blind + 10 limper)
3. Blinds are 2/4. UTG opens for 14. MP (middle position) calls 14. Now if the hero wants to make a pot sized bet from the button, he can raise to 62. (2 small blind + 4 big blind + 14 UTG raise + 14 MP call + 14 hero call + 48 hero raise)

## Forget Formulas

Instead of focusing on trying to come up with a formula to determine what hands to play in what positions, ***focus on developing a sound thought process.*** Go through this same thought process before you make each decision. If you have spent time reading other poker books or browsing internet forums then there is one phrase you should be very familiar with. This phrase is “*It depends.*” It is almost impossible to make a statement about a poker decision without clarifying that “*It depends.*” The correct decision in almost any poker situation depends on the specific game conditions. The variables that will influence you include: the player types, whether one or more of the players is on tilt, whether players are winning or losing, your image at the table, and a million other things. These factors make it impossible to come up with formulas that will determine the ‘correct’ play for all but the most trivial situations (like push/fold at the end of SNG’s with only a few blinds). Therefore, this book will make no attempt to present cookbook type formulas.

There are many statistics which will be presented, such as the equity of hands versus certain ranges of hands. But this alone is not enough information to tell you how to play a hand. The hand strength is determined by all of the factors mentioned above and then some more, so there will be no starting hand charts of which hands to play in which positions. The focus of this book will be on the thought processes required to make good decisions while playing PLO8, backed up with statistics and other supporting information. If you have a solid understanding of the fundamentals, and have a disciplined set of thought processes to use when making decisions, then you will be able to adapt to any game or situation. From here on, I urge you focus on how to think about the game and less on coming up with formulas for how to play.

## **Play to Scoop, Not to Win Half the Pot**

This is the most fundamental concept in any split pot poker game. Fully understand and apply this concept and you will have a significant edge on the vast majority of PLO8 players. This concept will be addressed in detail later in the book. For now, here are a few of the most important reasons not to play for half:

- If you are heads up, your best case scenario is getting your money back.
- Even if it is a multi-way pot, you will often get quartered. This is particularly true if you are going for the low half.
- If you are going for the low half, you can easily get counterfeited and lose the entire pot.
- The negative effects of playing for half are amplified in PLO8 compared to other split pot games because it is a big bet game.

## **Free-Rolling**

Free-rolling is when you have half of the pot locked up, and have an opportunity to win the other half. You could have the nut high, and be drawing to make a better low than your opponent. Or you could have a made low and a made high hand, and your opponent be drawing to a better low with no high potential. In all of these scenarios you are guaranteed to win at least half of the pot, and have a chance at winning the entire pot. ***Free-rolling means that you have zero risk in the hand, but the possibility of being rewarded with the entire pot. Free-rolling is the key to becoming a big winning PLO8 player.*** You need to set yourself up for situations in which you may be free-rolling your opponent, and avoid situations where you may be the one being free-rolled.



The primary way to accomplish this is to stick to two-way hands. Play starting hands that will tend to make two-way hands on the flop. After the flop, if you only have a one-way hand, then you need to proceed cautiously. Beginning players have a tendency to make the nuts in one direction and have nothing in the other and then go crazy. Since the nuts tend to change from street in street in Omaha, those players often end up losing the side of the pot they were going after and get scooped. They may have an A-2 hand and flop a nut low with no high, only to get counterfeited on the turn or the river. Or they may flop a nut flush with no low, only to have the board pair and lose the high half to a full house. You need to be on the lookout for post-flop situations in which you may be getting free-rolled, and take note of players that go nuts with one-way hands so you can get into hands where you are free-rolling them.

## Quartering

Quartering, also known as three-quartering, your opponent is one of the most profitable situations that can occur in PLO8. To quarter someone is to win  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the pot and leave them with  $\frac{1}{4}$ . This occurs when you win one half the pot and tie for the other half. Hopefully you won't get on the wrong side of this too often. Generally this happens when two players tie with the nut low and one of the players wins the high.

Novice players never seem to grasp the concept until they have got all their money in the pot with the nuts in one direction and lost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of it. Because they are getting some chips back, they often don't realize how much they are losing. If you get an entire 100 BB stack in and get quartered you will have lost 50 BB, which is pretty significant. You always want to keep on the lookout for situations when you may be quartering someone else or they may be quartering you.

You put yourself in position to quarter other people by playing strong starting hands that have the potential to make two-way

hands. You stay away from getting quartered by not playing one-way hands, particularly naked A2 type hands.

Another important factor to consider is that you are much more likely to get quartered when you have A2 for the nut low than when you have a hand like 24 for the nut low. A2 and A3 are played far more often than other lows. When you have A2 for the low and no high, you have a good chance of getting quartered if there is big action. If you are heads up and get quartered, it hurts particularly bad since no other players contribute to the pot.

Consider an example where you are holding A-2-9-10 and the pot is three-handed with a 4-5-8-K board. If there is a lot of action, the odds are good you will get quartered. Sometimes you may even get only one-sixth if two other players hold an A-2. Or you may get nothing if an A or a 2 comes and counterfeits you.

But if the board is A-3-J and you are holding 2-4-5-10 and there are four players in the pot, you can usually continue and win half the pot. You also have counterfeit protection and have a gutshot draw to a wheel which adds a ton of value to your hand. With the other players in the pot, you won't get hurt as badly if you do get quartered. In both examples you have the nut low with no high, but the second hand is much stronger. Learn to recognize the subtle differences in these postflop situations.

### **Position, Position, Position**

The importance of position is one of the key concepts I'll drill on throughout this book. Position is important for several reasons:

- You get to see what your opponents do before you have to act.
  - Most PLO8 players are very straightforward. If they check, it generally means they are weak; if they bet out, it generally means they have something. Having this information before you

have to act makes things much easier for you.

- When your opponents have a big hand and check intending to check raise, sometimes you will check behind with a draw.
  - This saves you money in situations where you would have called a bet when you were behind in the hand.

Basically, you should play fewer hands from out of position, and play more when in position. Also, you should play more aggressively and bluff and semi-bluff more often when in position if you are checked to.

Many players acknowledge that position is important. But they either don't understand how this should affect their play, or they ignore position while playing. This can allow you to take advantage when you have position.

## **Comparing PLO8 to Other Poker Games**

### PLO8 Compared to NLHE

- AA goes way down in value.
  - AA typically flops an over-pair. In PLO8 everyone has four cards instead of two, so one pair becomes a very weak hand. Since you will never really know if your one pair is good or not, you can't play (and thus win) a big pot after the flop.
  - Because the pot is usually split, if you have no low draw, then even when your aces do hold up you will only get half the pot. The strength of your AAxx hand varies dramatically depending on what side cards go with it.
  - In NLHE, AA is a monster starting hand that tends to dominate most anything your opponent can

hold. The only similar hand in PLO8 is A2A3ds, which you will rarely hold. You can see from table 2.1 below that AA is still a very strong hand in PLO8, but nothing compared to its strength in NLHE.

Game	Hand	Heads Up Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100% (random)
NLHE	AA	83.1%	84.4%	84.6%	84.6%	85.2%
PLO8	AAxx	56.1%	58.5%	60.3%	61.9%	64.3%

Table 2.1

- Non-nut flushes lose most of their value.
  - In NLHE, it is difficult to make a flush. Generally even a low made flush is playable depending on the action. But in PLO8, with everyone having four cards, it is likely that if there is significant action that someone holds the nut flush. This is particularly true if it is a high only board. Playing made non-nut flushes can be very expensive in PLO8 because you are up against the nuts so often. *Drawing* to a non-nut flush is suicidal.
- Aggression is crucial to being a winning player in both games.
  - In NLHE aggression is a key to being a winning player; this is also true in PLO8. In some super-soft low stakes PLO8 games, players will call any bet with any four cards so you simply want to peddle the nuts and value bet them to death. Therefore the value of aggression goes down somewhat in these games. But in general, because hand equities run so close in PLO8, much of your profit will come from getting your opponents to

fold when they would have won half the pot.

PLO8 Compared to PLO

- High hands are much less valuable.
  - Since the pot is usually split, having a hand that can only make a high has limited value.
- All big pairs drop in value even more than other high hands.
  - Big pairs lose almost all of their value in PLO8. This is mostly because you usually won't have two good low cards to make a winning low hand, plus the single pair usually won't flop a set and a single pair usually won't hold up.

Game	Hand	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100% (random)
PLO	AAxx	63.2%	64.9%	65.0%	64.3%	65.4%
PLO8	AAxx	56.1%	58.5%	60.3%	61.9%	64.3%
PLO	KKxx	38.2%	48.5%	54.8%	59.3%	62.4%
PLO8	KKxx	36.9%	41.6%	44.8%	49.2%	54.1%
PLO	QQxx	34.1%	41.6%	48.9%	55.9%	60.3%
PLO8	QQxx	36.0%	40.2%	43.2%	47.5%	52.3%

Table 2.2

- Middle cards lose all of their value.
  - Hands like 5-6-7-8 are quite strong in PLO, but are trash in PLO8. Mainly, it is impossible to make the nuts with middle cards and not have a low possible. Even though you may also have a made low, with middle cards the low you make will also be far from the nuts and your best case will be to chop the pot. There is almost no way

to scoop a pot with middle cards in PLO8, and therefore we don't ever want to play them.

- Position has somewhat less importance in PLO8 compared to PLO.
  - Although PLO players tend to play fairly straightforward, PLO8 players are even more straightforward. This means when you are out of position, players will not attempt to steal the pot as often when you check to them. Bluff raises are almost non-existent. Because in PLO8 people don't use their position as effectively as in PLO, being out of position is not quite as bad in PLO8. However, position is still crucial overall and using it effectively will be a key to becoming a big winner. Also, as you play in tougher PLO8 games, position takes on more importance and at the highest levels will have the same importance as in PLO.

### PLO8 Compared to Limit Omaha 8

For both games the rules are the same, with the exception of the betting structure. You might think that if you know how to play Limit O8, then switching to PLO8 should be easy. But there are several subtle but very important differences between the two games. The main difference is that PLO8 is a big bet game. This means your entire stack can be threatened on each hand; and you can threaten your opponent's stack. It's pot limit, so it may take a few bets to get all of the money in depending on the stack sizes, but you would be amazed at how fast the pots can build. Here are the key differences to keep in mind when playing PLO8 versus limit:

- Hand equities are the same for both games.
  - Starting hand values change due to the betting

structure. Some hands become more valuable and others become less valuable.

- The playability and overall value of starting hands can be dramatically different in both games.
  - Notice that the equities are still the same, but the equity is only a part of the strength of a starting hand.
- Naked A-2 hands lose a lot of value.
  - When you play an A-2 with marginal or bad side cards, you will often get quartered if you do make a nut low. This is never a good thing, but when playing pot limit the penalty is much worse than it is in limit.
- You need to bluff more often.
  - In limit O8, the bet sizes are usually very small relative to the size of the pot. This fact, combined with your opponents having four cards and being able to make up to twelve hands, makes bluffing in limit O8 almost impossible. This is particularly true at lower stakes. In PLO8 it is still not easy, but much more feasible since you can often threaten your opponent's entire stack.
- High cards have more value.
  - Since you can punish your opponents with big bets when you do make the nuts with high hands, they go up in value relative to the fixed limit game. Still, keep in mind that the absolute value of high hands is very limited in PLO8.
- Position is even more important.
  - The importance of position always increases when transitioning from a fixed limit to a pot limit format. This is because there is always an

advantage in having position, and the big bet format amplifies this advantage.

- Having counterfeit protection is more important.
  - In the pot limit format, getting counterfeited has a greater cost than it does in fixed limit.
  - Having counterfeit protection in PLO8 permits you to play more aggressively.
- You have to fold the nuts more often.
  - Folding the nuts is not a common occurrence in either game. But in PLO8, the price you pay in situations where you are being free-rolled is much higher than in fixed limit.

### **How Much to Buy in For**

If you are a solid player and are comfortable playing in the game that you are about to sit in, then you should always buy in for the maximum amount permitted. This is usually 100 BB's. By having the largest stack possible, you can take maximum advantage of your skill edge and maximize your expected win rate.

If you are new to PLO8, or you are moving up to a new limit and are uncomfortable, then you may not want to buy in for the maximum amount. In these situations, I recommend buying in for about 60 BB's. Having the smaller stack size means you won't get hurt as badly if you get into trouble and get stacked or quartered. But it also gives you enough chips that you can still have decent implied odds in speculative situations, and you will have enough chips that you can still make some bluffs and threaten your opponents. But if you buy in for much less than 40 BB's, you will lose that leverage and the game becomes very difficult to play.



## Short-Stacking

Short-stacking means buying in for a small amount, maybe 20 or 30 BB's or so. This tactic is common in NLHE and PLO. In those games, players can gain an advantage with this small stack in a variety of ways. Basically they can wait for a good hand and then get all in, without having to worry about playing post-flop.

***Short-stacking does not have much use in PLO8.*** The primary reason for this is that the starting hand equities run so close together. If a short-stacker in PLO8 waits for a top 5 or 10% hand and then gets it all in, they will usually have about a 60/40 edge at best. This small edge doesn't pay for how long they had to wait and the blinds they paid waiting for that top hand.

If you buy in for a short-stack, it makes it impossible for you to profit from your opponents' post-flop mistakes. Since that's where most of the profit comes from in this game, there is really no point in short-stacking.



## Chapter 3 – Starting Hands

### Evaluating Starting Hands

There are two criteria we use to evaluate the strength of a starting hand. These are:

- The hand's equity versus our opponents' hand ranges
- The playability of the hand
  - This is primarily a function of whether or not the hand will tend to make the nuts so that we know the hand is good when it hits.

Equity is the average percentage of the pot we would win if the hand were repeated a large number of times. For example, if a pot contained \$100 and our equity was 60%, over a large sample size on average we will win \$60 each hand. As we discuss each of the hand types, it will become apparent that the equities of starting hands do not vary as widely as they do in NLHE and PLO. Even though a 5% difference in starting hand equity may seem small, it has a large significance in PLO8.

We use hand ranges because they can be approximated, sometimes very accurately depending on how predictable a specific opponent is. We don't use exact hands because we can never accurately access opponents' exact four hole cards. Our opponents' hand ranges will be determined by evaluating the preflop action that takes place prior to it being our turn to act, and also by the way our opponents have played in the past. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 4 – Preflop Play. Each opponent's range of hands is always an estimation, and therefore not an exact number. However, our equity versus a given range is exact.

The playability of the hand is a measure of how easy it will be to make decisions later in the hand. With very strong hands, it will typically be easier to determine if we are ahead or behind of our opponents when playing postflop. With weaker hands, this can be much less obvious. The playability of any hand is always somewhat subjective, and cannot be quantified like equity can.

We want to ***play hands that either clearly hit or clearly miss flops***; this is the key measure of how playable a hand is. Examples of hands that can clearly hit are nut low and nut flush draws. For the case of a low, there is a chance you are tied with someone for the low but it is clear you have a portion of the pot. When you play a suited ace and flop a nut flush draw, you know that any cards that make your flush and don't pair the board are clean outs. If you make your hand, you can jam the pot. This makes it easy to determine whether or not you can call a flop bet with your nut flush draw.

But if you are playing a suited King and flop the second nut flush draw, the situation is much dicier. You cannot simply jam the pot if you make your flush. You must factor in the possibility that when you make your second nut flush, someone else makes the nut flush and crushes you. Another example is playing A-2 for the nut low draw versus a 2-3 draw that makes the nuts much less often.

Here are some guidelines for the types of hand features that will clearly hit:

- Made nut flushes / nut flush draws
- Made nut lows / low draws
- Top full house

These are hand features that are more ambiguous:

- Over-pairs
- Straights

- Second nut flushes / draws and worse
- Second nut lows / draws and worse
- Under full houses

***The playability of hands and whether you will clearly hit or miss is not accounted for in hand equity calculations. Therefore, the starting hand equities can be very deceiving.***

You cannot simply evaluate hands by looking at their equities versus various ranges. You must consider the playability and implied vs. reverse implied odds to determine the true value. If hand values could be determined simply by equities, then the hand values for PLO8 and limit O8 would be the same.

When you play hands where it is unclear whether you are ahead or behind, you will tend to make a lot of mistakes. You may make bad calls when you are behind, and you will often fold the best hand when you are ahead. By playing hands that make the nuts, it is much harder to make postflop mistakes.

What this implies is that the deeper that starting stacks, the more important the playability is and the less important the equity is. The shorter the starting stacks, the more important the equity is and the less important the playability is.

## **General Concepts**

Before we discuss specific hand types, let's look at general concepts about starting hand selection. By the end of this chapter, you will understand why each of these concepts is important.

### Play hands that have a chance to scoop the pot.

This is a fundamental principle of all split-pot poker games. Basically, a hand should have the opportunity to win both the high and the low halves of the pot. If it doesn't, then this severely limits its value. It is rare to win a large pot without a two-way hand.

Play hands that will either clearly hit or clearly miss flops.

This is simply another way of saying play hands that can flop the nuts or flop draws to the nuts. When you are drawing to the nuts, you will usually know where you stand. It is typically fairly easy to figure out how many outs you have. If you have made the nuts, you can figure out how many cards can come that will ruin your hand.

If you are playing hands that can't make the nuts, you will always be guessing if your outs are good or not. Examples of this include drawing to non-nut straights and non-nut lows. In these cases, you always have to worry about reverse implied odds. Suppose you hold Q-10-9-7 and the flop comes 9-10-J rainbow. You are heads up in the pot and call a pot sized bet on the flop, figuring an 8 or a K will give you a straight (8 outs). The turn brings a K and your opponent makes another pot sized bet. What do you do now? Are you happy? You hit one of your outs, didn't you? The problem here is you never quite know where you stand, and so you can't jam the pot for value when you hit. Also, you may fold the best hand if the opponent is the type of person that likes to bet scare cards.

High only hands have limited value.

This complements the first concept. With high only hands, you will only win big pots when no low is possible and you are against someone with a second best high only hand. This doesn't happen very often, and if your opponent knows what they are doing, it will happen even less often since they won't be showing up with many high only hands. Sometimes they have almost none, as you will see later for the case of big pairs.

Overplaying high hands is one of the most common mistakes beginning players make. One of the easiest ways to gain a big edge in PLO8 is by simply having a better understanding of

starting hand values. Knowing the value of high only hands better than your opponents will contribute significantly to your edge.

Stay away from middle cards.

This also goes with the first concept. Having middle cards in your hand kills its strength and makes it very difficult to make the nuts. Middle cards are death in PLO8, especially nines. This will be explained in more detail below.

Don't play only 3 cards in a game that allows you to play 4.

In Omaha games you need to make a much stronger hand by the river than you do in a game like Hold'em because everyone has 4 cards instead of 2. So when playing Omaha, if you are playing hands that effectively have 3 cards, you are putting yourself at a significant disadvantage. To give yourself the best chance of making a winning hand, you want to have all 4 cards working together.

It is easier to play if you have some suited cards, even if they are low.

One of the few ways in which many players undervalue their hands is by overlooking how small flush draws contribute to the strength of a hand.

Hand	Equity Percentile*	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
2347	63%	37.6%	38.7%	40.6%	43.9%	46.5%
2347ss	38%	37.9%	39.0%	40.8%	44.1%	46.8%
2347ds	21%	40.4%	41.6%	43.5%	46.8%	49.5%

Table 3.1

\*Equity percentile refers to the ranking of the hand relative to all other PLO8 hands. I.e.: if a hand is ranked in the 5% equity percentile, it will be better than 95% of hands based on equity.

These small flush draws shouldn't be considered the primary feature of a hand. But they do add equity to a hand, and can add significant equity if the hand is double suited.

The primary benefit when you make these flushes comes when you make them with a non-nut low. If you are in a heads up pot with a decent but non-nut low and a small flush, there are not many hands that your opponent can hold that will scoop you. Typically you will be good for half the pot, and will occasionally scoop. In these situations, you can fire away large bets in an attempt to get your opponent to fold, giving you the entire pot instead of half. But with no flush and only a non-nut low, you would not be able to do this, and often would be forced to fold.

Against most opponents, you will usually have more equity in a given hand than the tables shown below suggest.

This is because the tables give your equity against a given range of hands, but most opponents tend to overvalue some hands and undervalue others. So they will have more weak hands in their ranges than their stats suggest. For example, suppose a player is playing 20% of his hands. Your equity versus his 20% will usually be better than against the theoretically best 20% of hands, because most players will overvalue big pairs and will have some of these hands in their range that these tables do not assume.

Think about what you are trying to flop.

Different types of starting hands have different types of ideal



flops. The kind of flop you are looking for can also depend on how many players are in the pot and what your position is. It pays to think about what you are actually trying to flop before the flop comes out. If you do this, it will tend to make your play on the flop easier and less stressful.

## Starting Hand Types

In this section, we will discuss each of the primary groups of hands that are played in PLO8. For each group, we will discuss the hand's equity versus various ranges of hands. We will also discuss the equity percentile rank of each hand. The equity percentile rank is simply a summation of the hand's equity versus all hands. The lower the equity percentile rank, the better the hand. So a hand that is in the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile will have better equity versus 95% of all hands.

For the hand equity charts below, the abbreviations are defined as follows:

- x = any random card (xx = 2 random cards)
- (xx) = suited cards
- ss = single suited
- ds = double suited
- w = wheel card (A,2,3,4,5)
- m = middle card (T,9,8,7)
- b = big card (A, K, Q, J)

Notice that T is considered a middle card instead of a big card.

A-A-x-x (any 2 aces plus 2 random cards)

These are very strong starting hands. You will get dealt two aces about once every 57 hands. This is much more often than in NLHE (every 221). But even in some of the best cases, this

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hand will never compare to AA in NLHE, and it has much less value than A-A-x-x in PLO high. The reasons for this are pretty obvious. Everyone has 4 cards, so AA will get cracked a lot. It's difficult to tell if your aces are good or not, so when you are ahead it's tough to jam the pot and make money. Also when your aces are good, you will often be splitting the pot.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
AAxx	N/A	56.1%	58.5%	60.3%	61.9%	64.3%
AA38	1%	58.4%	61.1%	63.8%	65.4%	67.2%
ATA8ss	3%	53.2%	55.3%	56.7%	58.9%	63.0%
AA87	3%	54.9%	57.0%	59.0%	62.0%	65.9%
AAT8	4%	53.1%	55.1%	56.7%	58.7%	62.8%
AKAQds	4%	52.3%	54.0%	54.5%	54.6%	57.1%
AAQ8	6%	52.7%	54.6%	55.9%	57.8%	61.8%
AAKQ	10%	50.5%	52.3%	52.9%	52.3%	54.8%
AAT9	10%	49.5%	51.6%	52.6%	53.0%	55.5%

Table 3.2  
A-A-x-x Heads Up Equity

	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	AAxx	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	40.5%	31.7%	27.8%	-	-
	AAxx	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	29.2%	26.7%	22.1%	22.1%	-
	AAxx	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	22.8%	22.6%	18.2%	18.2%	18.2%
	AAxx	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	43.3%	28.3%	28.3%	-	-
	AAxx	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	32.5%	22.5%	22.5%	22.5%	-
	AAxx	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	25.7%	18.6%	18.6%	18.6%	18.6%

Table 3.3

### A-A-x-x Multi-Way Equity

You can see from the equity chart above that A-A-x-x hands are very strong in PLO8 when you are heads up. The only time they are ever an underdog when heads up is when the aces are very weak and they are up against a top hand. It can also be easily seen how the hand strength can vary depending on what the side cards are. But even if we have weak side cards, all AA hands are in the top 10%.

These hands are still very powerful when you are three-handed, but the strength drops off dramatically once four or more players are in the hand. The impact of this fact is that it is very profitable if you can narrow the field preflop. This is not to suggest that you should just simply bet pot or re-pot with aces if it is raised in front of you. If you always do that, you may give away your hand. But if you are four-handed or more, you are really trying to flop a set or a big draw.

One of the downsides of these hands when you are in a multi-way pot is that they tend to flop over-pairs. With an over-pair it will often be unclear whether you are ahead or not. In PLO8, you can not afford to play a large pot with only one pair. This means you will often fold what is the best hand, or call down when you are way behind.

If one or both of the aces are suited, and/or if there are wheel cards, the hand strength will increase significantly. If the side cards are unsuited middle cards like A-A-7-10, then the hand strength is quite poor.

Position also has a huge impact on the value of this hand. From UTG, you absolutely must have at least a suited ace or a wheel card to even think about playing it. From the button, you can raise it up even with lousy side cards. Without any wheel cards, big cards, or suits, this is a very marginal hand at best. If it is raised in front of you, this hand should go in the muck if your side cards are poor. When you play AA out of position, you will tend to win the minimum and lose the maximum. Never be afraid to fold AA when in the blinds or in early position.

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A $A_{xx}$  also has more value against very straightforward players because it will be easier to tell if you are ahead or not. This is a hand that often causes NLHE players to lose a lot of money. If you are new to PLO8, you should tend to play this hand cautiously, and don't be afraid to fold. However, you will make a great deal of money when *your opponents* hold this hand, as most inexperienced players have a tough time folding it even when they are clearly beaten.

### A-2-x-x

A-2-x-x hands are decent, but their strength varies widely depending on the quality of the side cards and your position. You will get dealt A-2-x-x about once every 14 hands, but many times it will not be playable.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
A $2_{xx}$	N/A	44.3%	47.7%	50.3%	54.0%	56.8%
(A $2$ )(34)	3%	45.0%	46.8%	49.0%	54.4%	57.5%
AKQ2	5%	47.3%	51.6%	54.1%	56.1%	58.5%
A234	12%	41.7%	43.4%	45.8%	51.2%	54.4%
AT92	17%	43.1%	46.5%	49.2%	52.5%	55.4%

Table 3.4  
A-2-x-x Heads Up Equity

	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	A2xx	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	33.2%	34.7%	32.1%	-	-
	A2xx	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	25.8%	25.7%	24.3%	24.3%	-
	A2xx	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	21.6%	20.4%	19.3%	19.3%	19.3%
	A2xx	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	38.2%	30.9%	30.9%	-	-
	A2xx	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	30.3%	23.2%	23.2%	23.2%	-
	A2xx	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	25.7%	18.6%	18.6%	18.6%	18.6%

Table 3.5  
A-A-x-x Multi-Way Equity

You can see from table 3.2 that these hands are usually underdogs when heads up against strong holding. Typically, you can't expect to be a favorite when heads up unless you have reason to believe that your opponent's range is >20% of hands. Most A-2 hands tend to only win the low half of the pot, and sometimes won't make a low or will get counterfeited and therefore get scooped.

*A-2 hands have much more value in multi-way pots.* Playing in multi-way pots with these hands:

- Increases your implied odds when you make a nut low.
- Minimizes or eliminates your losses if you get counterfeited

Therefore you will want to play preflop in such a way as to encourage a multi-way pot. This means either limping or raising less than you normally would, thus encouraging players to call. Your equity edge is still not huge when multi-way. But what the hand has going for it is you will usually know when you fit a flop well or if you missed it. Therefore you can put more money

in the pot when you are ahead and tend to fold when you are behind.

The side cards are what determine the strength of this hand. If the ace is suited, it is a tremendous help. But ***the real key to A-2 hands is having counterfeit protection***. This means having at least one other wheel card besides the 2. Having counterfeit protection does several things for your hand. First and foremost, it means you'll make the nut low much more often. You will also tend to make straights more often, which will increase your odds of scooping the pot. With counterfeit protection, it is not as important that the pot is multi-way, and you can play more aggressively when heads up.

There are two disaster scenarios that frequently happen with A2 hands: getting counterfeited and getting quartered. The first step to prevent these from happening is to not play a large pot without good side cards. Having a 3 or a 4 will permit you to play this hand very aggressively, and generally you can open for a raise in just about any position. You won't muck A2xx very often preflop though, unless you are out of position with lousy side cards. The more aggressive the game is, the more often you will fold since you can't take much heat in this game with only a naked A-2. If the side cards are bad, tend to just limp unless you are in late position, and fold if it is raised in front of you. If the side cards are good, then you can usually raise from most any position.

### A-A-2-x

This is a premium hand, and the closest you can come in hand strength to AA in NLHE. In fact, you will be dealt this hand once every 230 times, similar to how often you are dealt AA in NLHE.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
AA2x	N/A	63.0%	65.4%	66.9%	67.0%	67.9%
(A2)(A3)	0%	68.1%	70.7%	72.4%	72.4%	72.6%
AA25	0%	64.2%	66.6%	68.4%	69.2%	69.7%
AA29	1%	60.7%	63.2%	64.6%	64.7%	65.8%
(A2)A9	1%	60.9%	63.3%	64.8%	64.8%	66.1%

Table 3.6  
A-A-2-x Heads Up Equity

	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	AA2x	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	47.3%	27.1%	25.6%	-	-
	AA2x	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	35.5%	22.5%	21.0%	21.0%	-
	AA2x	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	28.7%	19.2%	17.4%	17.4%	17.4%
	AA2x	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	49.0%	25.5%	25.5%	-	-
	AA2x	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	38.4%	20.5%	20.5%	20.5%	-
	AA2x	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	31.6%	17.1%	17.1%	17.1%	17.1%

Table 3.7  
A-A-2-x Multi-Way Equity

If one or both of the aces are suited, it becomes a true monster. If the side card is a 3, then it's the mortal nuts. With AA2x, don't be afraid to get as much money in the pot as possible preflop, even if you are out of position. Raise and re-raise as much as possible preflop. There is no need to worry about awkward stack sizes when going to the flop. When you are holding AA without a low draw, there will be many flops that are difficult to play. But with AA2, you will usually have a nut low or nut low draw to go with your over-pair. It is much easier to be pot committed after

the flop. Get as much money in as you can preflop and then let the postflop play itself.

A-Big-Big-Wheel (A-K-J-5, A-Q-J-4)

When you have an ace with two big cards and a wheel card, you have a very strong hand. These hands will tend to flop marginal hands in both the high and low directions. This is valuable because in these situations, if you can get the pot heads up, you can then hammer away on your opponent and will rarely get scooped. Now you will have the advantage of not only the equity of your hand, but more importantly you will have lots of fold equity.

But it is important to note that if you cannot get the pot heads up, then you cannot just bet away with these hands unless you happen to flop a monster. Also, even if you are heads up, you don't want to get carried away unless you have made something in both the high and low directions.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
AKT3	13%	44.4%	48.3%	51.3%	54.7%	57.3%
AKJ4	18%	43.3%	47.1%	50.2%	54.3%	57.3%
AQJ5	24%	41.8%	45.4%	48.4%	53.2%	56.9%
AJT5	28%	41.3%	44.5%	47.5%	52.5%	56.6%

Table 3.8  
A-Big-Big-Wheel Heads Up Equity



	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	ABBW	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	35.1%	34.1%	30.8%	-	-
	ABBW	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	26.8%	26.3%	23.5%	23.5%	-
	ABBW	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	20.9%	21.7%	19.1%	19.1%	19.1%
	ABBW	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	40.4%	29.8%	29.8%	-	-
	ABBW	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	31.5%	22.8%	22.8%	22.8%	-
	ABBW	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	26.1%	18.5%	18.5%	18.5%	18.5%

Table 3.9  
A-Big-Big-Wheel Multi-Way Equity

3 Wheel Cards Without an Ace (2-3-4-x, 2-4-5-x, 2-3-5-x, 3-4-5-x)

These hands overall are very good under certain circumstances. The equities versus various ranges are poor, but they have very high implied odds and very low reverse implied odds. Don't let the low equities fool you, these are much stronger than they appear. With these hands you want to see cheap flops and win large pots when you hit. Most of the time you should lose a small pot, and occasionally you will win a large one.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
234x	N/A	38.2%	39.5%	41.9%	46.1%	48.7%
2349	68%	37.7%	39.0%	41.4%	45.2%	47.2%
245x	N/A	38.8%	40.4%	42.3%	46.1%	49.0%
245T	70%	37.5%	39.0%	41.1%	45.2%	48.1%
235x	N/A	38.4%	39.9%	42.1%	46.1%	48.9%
2359	58%	38.3%	39.7%	41.9%	45.6%	47.9%
345x	N/A	39.7%	41.1%	42.5%	46.0%	49.2%
3459	63%	39.3%	40.4%	41.9%	45.0%	47.6%

Table 3.10  
3 Wheel Cards Heads Up Equity

	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	W W W x	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	27.9%	38.1%	34.1%	-	-
	W W W x	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	19.3%	28.9%	25.9%	25.9%	-
	W W W x	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	13.3%	23.4%	21.1%	21.1%	21.1%
	W W W x	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	33.6%	33.2%	33.2%	-	-
	W W W x	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	25.2%	24.9%	24.9%	24.9%	-
	W W W x	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%

Table 3.11  
3 Wheel Cards Multi-Way Equity

*The strength of these hands depends on whether or not the aces are live in the deck.* To scoop a big pot with this hand, you will usually need an ace to flop. If the preflop action suggests some of the aces are already out then you should tend to muck it. But if you do flop an ace, you will generally have a very strong hand that you can play a big pot with.

Generally *your goal should be to see a cheap flop and try to hit an ace*. If there is a raise and callers in front of you, then there are probably at least one or two aces dead, and you should muck your hand. But if there are only limpers or it is folded to you, it is likely that the aces are live and you should play the hand.

But it's usually not worth a preflop raise. Even if all four of the aces are live, you still need one on the flop. So keep the pot small preflop, then get out quickly after the flop if there is no ace.

If you do get a favorable flop, you can be very aggressive with this hand. When an ace does flop and you have a nut low or nut low draw, someone else will often have top pair. Some players don't like to fold top pair, even in PLO8 where it has little value. These hands have the added bonus of getting lots of value when they do hit.

### 3 Wheel Cards and a 6

This is a premium hand, particularly if it contains an ace. The reason these hands are so powerful in PLO8 is you will sometimes be able to free-roll against a player that has a wheel. You will end up chopping the low and you will win the high with a higher straight for the three-quarter. This is much more powerful in PLO8 than in limit O8 because it is a big bet game. There are not many players that will ever fold a wheel, so you will be able to get your entire stack in almost every time in these situations.

The overall hand equity is low, but this is more than compensated for by its high implied odds.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
www6	N/A	41.1%	43.3%	45.1%	49.2%	52.5%

Table 3.12  
3 Wheel Cards and a 6 Heads Up Equity

	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	W W W 6	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	28.4%	37.9%	33.7%	-	-
	W W W 6	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	20.0%	28.6%	25.7%	25.7%	-
	W W W 6	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	14.0%	23.3%	20.9%	20.9%	20.9%
	W W W 6	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	33.4%	33.3%	33.3%	-	-
	W W W 6	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	25.1%	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	-
	W W W 6	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	19.9%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%

Table 3.13  
3 Wheel Cards and a 6 Multi-Way Equity

2 Wheel Cards and a 6

This is a fair hand. It plays very similar to the 3 wheel cards and a 6 hand, except it will obviously hit flops less often. However, there is value because you can still three-quarter a wheel with a 6 high straight. The problem with only 2 wheel cards versus 3 is this situation will come up far less frequently. Play it only in position, and tend to limp in unless you are on the button and the players in the blinds are weak. You will want to play fit or fold very often after the flop. You will lose tons of small pots with these hands and every now and then win a huge one. But if you are playing out of position and/or putting too much money

in preflop, the edge from the few times you can free-roll will be quickly eroded. As should be expected, the equities are slightly less than if there were 3 wheel cards.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
ww6x	N/A	40.0%	42.2%	44.0%	48.1%	51.7%

Table 3.14  
2 Wheels and a 6 Heads Up Equity

Big Pairs (K-K-x-x, Q-Q-x-x)

Hands like K-K-x-x and Q-Q-x-x have almost no value in PLO8. They have poor equity and poor playability.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
KKxx	N/A	36.9%	41.6%	44.8%	49.2%	54.1%
(AK)(KQ)	7%	42.6%	47.8%	50.4%	52.1%	55.1%
(KT)K8	28%	36.7%	40.8%	43.7%	47.9%	52.7%
KKQ8	68%	34.3%	38.8%	41.8%	46.2%	50.9%
(K2)K9	69%	32.9%	37.6%	40.7%	45.3%	49.9%
KK92	89%	32.2%	36.9%	40.2%	44.7%	49.4%
KKKQ	98%	25.6%	31.7%	35.7%	40.0%	44.7%
QQxx	N/A	36.0%	40.2%	43.2%	47.5%	52.3%
(AQ)(KQ)	9%	41.9%	46.9%	49.4%	51.4%	54.7%
(QT)Q8	33%	36.6%	40.2%	42.7%	46.5%	50.9%
QQT8	55%	36.0%	39.7%	42.2%	46.1%	50.5%
(Q2)Q9	80%	32.5%	36.6%	39.5%	43.6%	48.0%
QQ92	93%	31.9%	36.0%	39.0%	43.1%	47.5%
QQQ8	99%	23.9%	29.2%	32.5%	37.5%	42.2%

Table 3.15  
Big Pairs Heads Up Equity

	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	KKxx	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	31.5%	36.4%	32.1%	-	-
	KKxx	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	26.7%	26.6%	23.3%	23.4%	-
	KKxx	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	23.5%	21.4%	18.4%	18.4%	18.4%
	KKxx	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	33.4%	33.3%	33.3%	-	-
	KKxx	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	25.8%	24.7%	24.7%	24.7%	-
	KKxx	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	21.5%	19.6%	19.6%	19.6%	19.6%

Table 3.16  
Big Pairs Multi-Way Equity

To understand why the equity is so bad, think about what you are trying to flop. You are trying to flop a set. Now think about it some more: you are trying to flop a set on a board that does not have straight, flush, or low draws. You especially don't want a low draw to hit.

Now let's think even further about what happens after we hit a dream flop. Suppose you hold K-K-2-10. The flop comes down K-9-5 rainbow. This is basically the best flop you could possibly hit for your hand in terms of equity versus your opponent. But you still have a few major problems. If you jam the pot on the flop, who is going to give you action? A set of 9's is out there only if it is in the hands of a complete moron (remember middle cards are bad!) Anyone who has the slightest clue will not be holding 99 unless they have A-2-9-9 or possibly A-A-9-9. You might get some action from a set of 5's.

Essentially, *you will very rarely get a good flop, and when you do, you will rarely get action.* The idea behind PLO8 is to stack people, and that is very difficult to do with a set of kings or queens. But you also have an even bigger problem. What kind

of a turn card are you hoping to hit if you do get action? In this example, any Q, J, or 10 puts a possible straight on the board. Any A, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, or 8 puts a low draw on the board. There is also about a 70% chance a back door flush draw will hit the board. If the straight comes in, you will not know if you are way ahead or way behind. If you think about the hands that could have called you on the flop, wraps like 10-J-Q-9 are a decent portion of the villain's range. If a 10 hits the turn and the villain fires a pot sized bet, what do you do? If a low card hits, this is ok in one sense because a sucker may draw badly against you and you have the chance to extract some value.

Now what kind of card are you trying to hit on the river? Your best case scenario is if you boat up, but how much action are you going to get then? Almost all of the time, either a low or a straight is going to be possible on the river. When the low comes, you have the nut high, but you are going to be against the low a serious portion of the time. Your only hope to stack someone is if they are a donkey with no low draw and they overplayed an underset. This will happen fairly infrequently. Often when they get the money in on the river, you'll be chopping and paying some rake.

You also have reverse implied odds working against you when a straight or flush draw comes in and you call a bet hoping to catch a bluff. There is no value in these hands and they should be folded except in very rare circumstances.

### High Straight Hands (A-K-Q-J, K-Q-J-10)

These types of hands have much less value in PLO8 than they do in PLO. Part of the reason for this is that when you make the nuts or a good hand, there usually will not be a low possible. This means you will only get serious action when there is another strong high hand. Generally these will either be lower straights, sets, and nut flush draws. If your opponent has one of these hands with a back door low draw to go with it, they will

have quite a bit of equity. Given that there are not many flops that fit these hands, and that when you can get a lot of money in your equity edge will typically be small, these hands are only considered to be of fair value overall.

The equity for these hands tends to be fairly weak. This is primarily because they can only win half the pot, or require no low to be possible to scoop.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
(AK)(QJ)	16%	39.5%	43.4%	45.4%	47.0%	50.0%
(AQ)(JT)	17%	39.4%	42.7%	44.6%	46.5%	49.5%
AKQJ	44%	37.2%	41.4%	43.4%	44.8%	47.8%
AQJT	44%	37.1%	40.5%	42.5%	44.4%	47.5%
(KJ)T9	50%	35.1%	36.9%	38.4%	41.4%	45.0%
KJT9	64%	34.5%	36.8%	38.2%	41.2%	45.0%
KQJT	66%	34.9%	37.1%	38.5%	41.6%	45.5%

Table 3.17  
High Straight Hands Heads Up Equity

However, these hands do have decent playability. You will usually know when you are ahead or behind.

Tend to play them with shorter stacks, and only in position. You don't want to play them with a larger stack because when you get that entire stack in the pot you will tend to be against multiple players drawing to lots of outs. There will be at best a small equity edge and at worst a ton of variance from getting drawn out on. With a big stack, you are better off waiting for premium hands that contain wheel cards.

Middle Cards (6-7-8-9, 6-8-9-10)

*Middle cards in PLO8 are death.* This simply can't be emphasized enough. You do not want to play them under almost



any circumstances.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
MMMM	N/A	35.9%	38.5%	40.3%	43.0%	45.9%
99TT	47%	37.1%	40.0%	41.7%	44.4%	47.6%
7788	45%	42.2%	45.0%	46.5%	48.9%	51.5%
99TJ	77%	34.9%	37.9%	39.7%	42.5%	46.2%

Table 3.18  
Middle Cards Heads Up Equity

	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	MMMM	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	28.5%	38.2%	33.3%	-	-
	MMMM	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	24.0%	27.8%	24.1%	24.1%	-
	MMMM	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	21.1%	22.1%	18.9%	18.9%	18.9%
	MMMM	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	27.8%	36.1%	36.1%	-	-
	MMMM	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	21.2%	26.3%	26.3%	26.3%	-
	MMMM	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	17.6%	20.6%	20.6%	20.6%	20.6%

Table 3.19  
Middle Cards Multi-Way Equity

The reason these hands are so toxic is you will almost never be able to scoop a pot. You will never ever make the nut low with these hands. The only time you will ever win the low is if your opponents are going high only or if they get counterfeited. The only likely way to scoop is to win the high when no low is possible. But this also rarely happens, because if no low is possible then you can't make the nuts for high. Let's look at the example of 6-7-8-9. In PLO this is a very strong hand, but

in PLO8 it is useless. What kind of boards will enable you to win a big pot with this hand? It is obvious we don't want a low possible, so it should consist of at least three high cards. We would like to make a straight. How about 2-3-9-10-J, or 7-8-10-K-Q? The problem with these boards is we don't have the nuts. In fact, there is no way for us to make a nut straight unless a low is possible. Therefore we can't play a big pot and expect to scoop. This is the fundamental reason why hands like this are unplayable in PLO8. The only way we can make the nuts is to somehow make miracle quads, or very specific full houses.

3 Card Hands (A-4-K-9, A-K-Q-8)

Three cards hands are hands that have a dangler, or a fourth card that does not work with the other three. Usually you won't want to play these hands, unless the game is short-handed. You will get good 4-card hands often enough that it's not worth bothering with these since you will hit flops far less often.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
AK94	41%	40.7%	44.3%	47.7%	51.8%	54.7%
AKQ8	56%	38.8%	42.8%	45.0%	48.2%	52.8%
KQJ3	94%	32.1%	34.2%	36.0%	39.2%	42.9%

Table 3.20  
3 Card Hand Heads Up Equity

On the occasions when you do hit the flop, you will usually not have redraws. These two factors combine to kill the value of these hands. The game permits you to play four cards, so why would you want to play with only three? Some situations when you may consider playing these hands are: when you are in late position versus weak players in the blinds, if you are playing

short-handed, or if you are in the late stages of a tournament and you can't wait for better hands.

Mixed Hands (K-J-2-4, Q-T-2-3)

This group of hands consist of cards that have both high and low features, but will rarely be able to scoop. They don't scoop much because the 4 cards don't really work together. To beginners these hands tend to look pretty because there is a mix of high and low cards. But don't be fooled, they are sucker hands.

Hand	Equity Percentile	Equity versus range of hands:				
		Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 50%	All 100%
QT23	58%	37.5%	39.7%	42.1%	47.1%	50.4%
KJ24	68%	36.2%	38.5%	41.2%	46.8%	51.1%
JT46	71%	39.3%	40.9%	42.1%	45.4%	49.1%

Table 3.21  
Mixed Hand Heads Up Equity

	Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5
	KJ24	Top 10%	Top 20%	-	-
Equity	26.2%	39.0%	34.9%	-	-
	KJ24	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	-
Equity	18.9%	29.2%	26.0%	26.0%	-
	KJ24	Top 10%	Top 20%	Top 20%	Top 20%
Equity	13.8%	23.7%	20.8%	20.8%	20.8%
	KJ24	Top 50%	Top 50%	-	-
Equity	31.1%	34.4%	34.4%	-	-
	KJ24	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	-
Equity	23.2%	25.6%	25.6%	25.6%	-
	KJ24	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%	Top 50%
Equity	18.3%	20.4%	20.4%	20.4%	20.4%

Table 3.22  
Mixed Hand Multi-Way Equity

If you hit a flop with one of these hands, you will always be hitting either a high or low, but never both. At best this can prevent you from being able to play the hand aggressively, and at worst can you get you into big trouble.

When you see opponents playing hands like these, you should take a note.

### **Some Final Thoughts**

Starting hands in PLO8 can be very confusing. What is a good or a bad hand varies dramatically from other poker games. A significant portion of your edge will come simply from not playing bad hands that your opponents choose to play. Knowing what hands to stay away from can have more value than knowing what hands are good. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind when trying to figure out if your hand is bad. Your hand is probably bad if some or all of the following are true:

- You have middle cards.
- There is no way for you to make a low.
- You don't have an ace.
- You don't have any suits.

## Chapter 4 – Preflop Play

### Reasons to Raise Preflop

The primary reason you will bet before the flop is you think you have the best hand and you want to take advantage of the fact that your equity in the hand is larger than that of your opponents. The only situation where this wouldn't be sensible is if you believe your opponent can outplay you postflop. However, this doesn't mean that you should always raise when you feel you have the best hand. You may call with a strong hand, hoping to be able to make a large re-raise if an aggressive opponent raises. Or you may not want to give away the strength of your hand. For example, if there has already been a raise and you have a decent AA hand, if you 3-bet your opponents will put you on exactly what you have. But in general, you usually want to bet to increase the size of the pot if you feel you have the best hand. If you have the best hand and you can play at least as well as your opponents postflop, then you want to increase the pot size to take maximum advantage of your equity edge.

A second reason to raise is to eliminate players in an attempt to get the pot either heads up or 3-handed. If you are a better postflop player than your opponents, then you can best exploit this advantage by narrowing the size of the field. Not only does this narrow the size of the field, but it also narrows the hand ranges of the opponents that call. Having some idea of the players' ranges will make the postflop play much easier. You will also have more opportunities to utilize your postflop skills. Consider a situation where seven players limp and see the flop. In this case, you pretty much will need to make the nuts to win the pot. You will not be able to bluff everyone out, and you can only bet for value when you make a strong hand. You will also

have no idea what each player holds, since your opponents either limped, completed the small blind, or checked in the big blind. But if there are only one or two other players in the pot with you, you now have the option of bluffing or semi-bluffing.

Another reason to raise preflop is to buy the button and ensure that you will be in position postflop. These raises are made from the cutoff or the hijack. This play works best if the players to your left are relatively tight and are likely to fold.

Notice that you will basically never be raising preflop as a bluff to get a player to fold a better hand. This is a very important concept and you should stop and think about it for a moment so it sinks in. ***Do not bluff preflop in PLO8.*** Squeeze plays and re-stealing plays can have a lot of value in other poker games, but they should rarely be attempted in PLO8. The reason for this is very simple: most players feel like since they have 4 cards and have 2 ways to win a portion of the pot, they are not going to fold until they at least see the flop. Then you must take into account that when an opponent does make an error and calls when they should be folding against your range, they are not making that big of a mistake. This is because starting hand equities run so close together. Now when you are bluffing and are likely behind, things get even worse for you. Don't try to bluff preflop. Don't raise with trash on the button or in the cutoff trying to steal the blinds. When it open folds to someone on the cutoff and they raise in an apparent blind steal, don't re-raise from the button with a weak hand assuming the opening raiser can't have much and the likelihood the blinds have a hand big enough to play is small. Remember, this is not NLHE. The opening raiser will almost always call, and will typically be correct to do so. You will have a few opportunities to bluff postflop, which we'll discuss later in the book. But even then, pure bluffs will be few and far between. PLO8 is a game of free-rolling and value-betting when you are way ahead, or semi-bluffing to get someone to fold half the pot. It is not a game of pure bluffing and fancy plays. When transitioning from NLHE, you must completely overhaul the

way you think about preflop play.

### **Preflop Raise Sizing**

Generally when you open raise preflop you want to bet the pot, although there are some exceptions. Usually you want to try to limit the size of the field to get it heads up or 3-handed. Betting as much as you can helps you do this. Anything less and you tend to get a lot of callers. Having a smaller field makes it easier to outplay your opponents postflop.

3-betting, or re-raising, can be a different story. When someone raises and you come over the top of them preflop, you are saying that you have a very big hand. Whether you raise full pot or  $\frac{3}{4}$  pot, the message to your opponents is basically the same. If the stack sizes are deep, I prefer to bet a little less than full pot. This saves you some money in the event there is an unfavorable flop and you have to fold, or in the more rare case that you get 4-bet and you need to fold. However, if the stack sizes are shorter, you may want to bet full pot. It can make it easier for you to commit to the pot on the flop.

### **Attacking Limpers**

People love to limp when playing PLO8. You will make a lot of profit by attacking them when they do it. When you raise limpers, you should always raise the size of the pot, unless you want to play a large multi-way pot. This doesn't mean that you always have to raise; it is often ok to limp behind. If several players have limped and you have a hand that you want to play but don't want to create a gigantic pot, it's ok to limp. If you throw in a raise and there are three or four players left to act behind you, there is a huge probability that one or more of the remaining players will call you. Don't do it with a marginal hand if you may end up out of position. Suppose UTG and UTG+1 both open limp. You are next to act in middle position with A-4-5-9 with no suits and raise pot. Now the cutoff and the button both

call. The flop comes 3-8-J rainbow. Now what are you going to do? You would have been much better off had you limped. Save these out of position raises for your stronger AA and A2 hands.

### 3-Betting

3-betting preflop is extremely rare in PLO8, particularly at the lower limits. Most players want to try to see a flop before committing a lot of money, and will rarely raise at all, let alone 3-bet. But to neglect preflop 3-betting is to give up an important tool in your arsenal. By making a 3-bet, you will be able to get more money in the pot with a hand that is ahead of your opponents' range, and you also tend to get other players to fold so you can play a pot heads up. Post flop play is much easier when you are heads up, so narrowing the field has a lot of benefits. But the most important benefit of 3-betting is that *most players tend to play very straightforwardly in 3-bet pots*. In general most play PLO8 straightforwardly, but they will do this even more so in a 3-bet pot. If they miss the flop, they will tend to check and if they hit something they will tend to bet out. This will give you a nice advantage in the larger pots that you will play. Add to this that you are likely to be heads up, and you have opportunities to win a lot of large pots.

### Folding to Raises When out of Position

It is difficult to go wrong folding to a raise when you are out of position preflop. We know that hand equities run close to one another, but position can in many ways be more important than your hand strength. If you are in the blinds and face a late position raise and you hold a mediocre hand, folding is never a mistake assuming the raiser is remotely competent. If the raiser is a good postflop player and knows how to exploit his position, there is nothing wrong with folding good hands. We want to do everything we can to play pots in position, and not play them out



of position unless we really have to.

### **An Alternate Preflop Strategy for Nut Peddlers**

There is an alternate strategy that you can sometimes employ, which is the min-raise strategy. You can consider using this strategy if the following conditions are met:

- You are playing on a short bankroll and trying to minimize your variance.
- The game is filled with weak players who will call almost any bet preflop, and draw very badly postflop.
- Your response to these game conditions is to simply ‘nut peddle’. This means you are trying to make the nuts and then extract value from players who are playing weak hands and drawing badly. You are not trying to narrow the field, or get players to fold half the pot postflop, because it is almost impossible against these calling stations.
- The stack sizes are relatively shallow, making it easier to get your entire stack in.

Making the nuts in PLO8 is difficult, and it won’t happen very often. But when you do, your goal is to get all of your money in the pot. Min-raising helps you do this by beginning to build a pot preflop. This small bet preflop amplifies the size of the pot postflop. Here’s an example to help illustrate this point:

Effective stack sizes are 100 BB’s. You open limp preflop, and 2 other players limp, the small blind completes, and the big blind checks. The pot size is 5 BB’s. The flop comes out and you bet 3 BB’s and get 2 callers. The pot size is now 14 BB’s, and you have 4 BB’s in the pot. On the turn you bet 10 BB’s and both players call. The pot size is now 34 BB’s and you have 14 BB’s in the pot. On the river you have the nuts in both directions and bet out the size of the pot. You get one caller and scoop a nice pot. The final pot size was 102 BB’s and you got a total of 48

BB's of your 100 BB stack into the pot. Not a bad result at all but it could have been much better.

Let's see what happens when you min-raise instead of limp. Again we have effective stacks of 100 BB's. You min-raise to 2 BB's and 1 cold caller and the blinds come along. The pot size is now 8 BB's and you have 2 BB's in. Now you bet 5 BB's on the flop and get 2 callers, for 23 BB's in the pot with 7 BB's from your stack. On the turn, you bet 15 BB's and both players call. The pot is now up to 68 BB's and you have 22 BB's in the pot. On the river, you again make the nuts in both directions and bet the size of the pot. There is 1 caller and you scoop a nice big 204 BB pot. You were able to get 90 BB's in the pot this time instead of the 48 in the previous example.

Granted these examples are fairly contrived, but you can see how the size of your raise preflop amplifies the size of the pot by the time you get to the river. By increasing your raise size, you were able to get much more of your stack in. If min-raising was good because you got 90% of your stack in instead of 48%, isn't betting the max simply better? Well, in general it is. But not as much if you are playing this fit or fold strategy. You must consider that when you increase your preflop bet size, you increase the amount you lose when your hand misses, and most of the time you will miss. It is very rare that you will make the nuts in both directions like in this example, so there is a tradeoff here you must consider. But assuming these super loose passive conditions found at the lowest limits, the min-raise seems to work best if your goal is to minimize your variance. Of course, keep in mind that this is by no means an optimal strategy. It is an exploitive one to be used only under very specific game conditions.

This also does not mean that you couldn't have a higher expected win rate by betting the pot instead of min-raising. ***You are trading a small portion of your win rate for a large reduction in your variance.*** Most donkeys that will limp with any 4 cards

will typically also call any min-raise, especially once one player in front of them calls the raise. Games like this are very common at low limits. Although nut peddling is not necessarily the most optimal strategy to use, it can be a very effective way for a player to build up a bankroll with very low variance.

## Preflop Profiling

You want to collect information about how often your opponents call and raise so you will know how to interpret their preflop plays. I highly recommend that you use some sort of tracking software that keeps a database of your hands and your opponents' play. I use software that tracks all of my hands during play on the most popular online sites, and then puts statistics up on the screen so I can see how everyone is playing in real time. For preflop play, you want to know how often someone voluntarily puts money in the pot (VPIP), and the percentage of time that they preflop raise (PFR). Once you collect about 50 hands on someone, you can begin to get a pretty good idea of how they play. 50 hands is by no means statistically significant, but it is enough that you can begin to use the data. The more hands you have on someone, the more you will be able to rely on it. Here are some things to look for in preflop stats, and the conclusions you can tentatively draw from them. ***These statistics assume the game is 6-handed.***

VPIP < 20%,      This type of player is very tight, and typically they are trying to wait for premium hands and then make the nuts postflop. Most of them are tight/bad, but some players with a VPIP over 15% may be good postflop but a bit too tight preflop. When this type of player opens the pot they usually have a good 2-way starting hand. Typically their tight preflop

- play is followed by tight postflop play.
- VPIP 20% to 40% The players who know what they're doing usually fall somewhere in this category. This certainly does not mean that anyone falling into this category is a good player; most will still not be. It is difficult to draw many conclusions about these types of players based on this statistic alone.
- VPIP 40% to 70% These players are the typical PLO8 donkeys. They are playing way too many hands. They look at their four cards and can almost always find a reason to play. Most of your profit will come from these players, mostly because there are so many of them. Generally they will follow up their loose preflop flop with more loose postflop play. You want to try to play as many pots with these players as you can. Don't bluff as often as you would against the first two types of players, because these players love to call.
- VPIP > 70% Players in this category are an extension of the previous category. These players are worst of the worst; they play almost every single hand. Some of them may just be home game type players that like to be in every pot. Some of them may be drunk. Some of them may normally play other games like NLHE at higher levels and just be messing around. Expect them to call any bet. So forget about attempting any play that is remotely tricky or semi-

bluffing. Just get some decent two-way hands and then bet to extract maximum value.

PFR < 5%

When players have a PFR % this low, it means they are only raising AA and sometimes strong A2 hands. These are the most exploitable players to play against, because you always know what they have when they raise. Some of these players will not be able to fold AA when they get it. One of the odd attributes of tight poker players is that when they get a good starting hand, they often have trouble folding it. You need to take notes on these players. Because when you know you are up against a very tight player and they raise, you can call with almost any four cards in position. If you outflop aces, you can extract value in a big pot. If not, you can simply fold and lose a small one.

PFR 5% to 10%

With these stats players are moving beyond AA and including a lot of A2 and A3 hands. This is a much more difficult range to play against than the <5%. You can no longer just call with any cards, but their range is still fairly narrow.

PFR 10% to 20%

This is a much more ideal opening range. It is difficult to say what an optimal preflop opening percentage would be, but it's probably somewhere within this range. It is much tougher to put these players on hands. If a player has this

range it may be a tip off that they are a good player, although you will need more information to make that determination. Players who are regulars in the games and have a PFR > 10% tend to be the toughest opponents.

PFR > 20%

These players are maniacs. Their opening range is way too wide. As a result, you should not give their raises the respect you would from other players. You are going to call their raises with a wider range of hands and call them more often than normal from out of position. Players who are opening a lot of hands also tend to play very aggressively postflop.

## Position

One of the key criteria for deciding whether or not to play a hand is your position. You should call and bet much less in early position, and much more often in late position. This is a subject that is discussed throughout the book, but here are some guidelines to keep in mind when playing pre-flop:

- Rarely make a raise from UTG and UTG+1.
  - If you are going to play a hand from these positions, you should tend to call.
  - The tougher the game, the more this guideline applies. In softer games, it is ok to make a raise more often from early position because your weaker opponents will not fully utilize their positional advantage.
- If it is folded to you on the button or the cutoff, you should raise a large percentage of your hands, in excess of 20%.

- In these situations you will usually have position throughout the hand, unless you make a raise from the cutoff and get called by the button.
- By making raises more often, you are playing large pots more often when you have a positional advantage.

## Hand Examples

### Example 4.1

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds – 5 players

SB: \$72.95, BB: \$44.80, UTG: \$15.00, CO: \$113.25, Hero (BTN): \$48.65

UTG posts a big blind (\$0.50)

Preflop: (\$1.25) Hero is BTN with  $5\clubsuit 8\heartsuit A\spadesuit 3\spadesuit$

UTG checks, CO calls \$0.50, **Hero raises to \$1.50**, SB calls \$1.25, *1 fold*, UTG calls \$1, CO calls \$1

This is a very strong hand on the button, so a raise is in order. The hero raises 3X the BB, which will entice more players to call. This is fine since he has a hand that plays well multi-way and can make the nuts in both directions. There is the potential for a nut flush, straights, and good lows with some counterfeited protection. Another alternative is to raise the size of the pot, which would be \$2.25. This will make the blinds much more likely to fold. If they call or re-raise, it much better defines their hands. With the \$1.50 raise, if the blinds call they could have just about anything, especially the big blind. With the \$2.25 raise, you are more likely to get the pot heads up, which isn't a bad thing either. So either raise size is ok, it depends on what you are trying to accomplish.

### Example 4.2

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds – 6 players

SB: \$47.75, BB: \$247.30, UTG: \$72.75, MP: \$50.00, CO: \$134.05, Hero (BTN): \$50.30

Pre Flop: (\$0.75) Hero is BTN with A♥ Q♠ J♣ 5♥  
*3 folds, Hero raises to \$1.75, 1 fold, BB calls \$1.25*

This is another easy button raise, although the hand is not quite as strong as the one in example 4.1. Folding is not an option with a hand this strong on the button with no action in front. Limping is also a big mistake. You don't want to let the blinds in for free, particularly without getting them to define their hands a little. If we end up stealing the blinds, then that's fine. If one or both of blinds call then we can use our positional advantage to abuse them after the flop.

### Example 4.3

\$0.50/\$1.00 Blinds - 9 players

SB: \$259.10, Hero (BB): \$61.65, UTG: \$119.80, UTG+1: \$100.30, UTG+2: \$147.50, MP1: \$31.45, MP2: \$44.85, CO: \$28.50, BTN: \$50.90

Preflop: (\$1.50) Hero is BB with A♥ T♣ Q♣ Q♥  
UTG calls \$1, *2 folds*, MP1 calls \$1, MP2 calls \$1, *1 fold*, BTN calls \$1, *1 fold, Hero checks*

Here the hero has a pretty decent high hand, and we don't mind seeing a cheap flop in a multi-way pot. If the flop comes with two or more low cards, this hand will plummet in value, so



we are not looking to build a pot preflop. But the most important reason why we wouldn't want to throw in a raise and bloat the pot is that we are out of position. The worse your position, the more you should try to control the size of the pot preflop. A pot sized raise here would probably be a worse mistake than to open fold instead of checking the option.

#### Example 4.4

\$0.10/\$0.25 Blinds – 6 players

SB: \$14.40, Hero (BB): \$25.00, UTG: \$7.45, MP: \$5.15, CO: \$9.25, BTN: \$26.40

Preflop: (\$0.35) Hero is BB with 2♠ 5♠ 3♠ 4♣  
 UTG calls \$0.25, *1 fold*, CO calls \$0.25, *1 fold*, SB calls \$0.15,  
**Hero raises to \$0.50**, UTG calls \$0.25, CO calls \$0.25, SB  
 calls \$0.25

A hand with three wheel cards without an ace can still be a very strong hand. This one actually has four so it has a lot of potential. There is the potential to make a wheel, possibly with a 6 high straight, which can scoop or take three-quarters of some very large pots. This won't happen often, but when it does the rewards are great. Keep in mind that this is a very ace dependent hand. We need to flop an ace with a low or a low draw, and/or some straight possibilities. If we don't get this type of flop we are going to be done with the hand. The hand is suited but unfortunately we have four of the same suit, so it helps but not very much. Our biggest weakness is our position. The hero puts in a min-raise, which is a good play with this type of hand. Most of the time, we'll end up missing the flop and folding, and we'll lose a little bit of money. But this min raise will encourage everyone to call, and the pot will be a decent size preflop. Plus the aces are likely to be live in the deck since no one raised in

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front of us. Checking the option is ok, but the min-raise is better because it increases the potential payoff if we hit our hand for only one extra big blind. A pot sized re-raise would be a big mistake. We don't want to build pots out of position, and we increase our cost to get the same potential reward.

### Example 4.5

\$1.00/\$2.00 Blinds – 5 players

Hero (SB): \$191.00, BB: \$200.00, UTG: \$142.40, CO: \$362.20, BTN: \$86.00

Preflop: (\$3.00) Hero is SB with Q♠ J♠ T♣ 8♣

*I fold*, CO calls \$2.00, BTN calls \$2.00, **Hero calls \$1.00**, BB checks

This is a very marginal high hand and the hero is out of position in the SB. It is double suited which certainly helps, but it has a gap in it and the rank of the cards is a little lower than we would prefer it to be for a high only starting hand. If it were folded to us we could simply muck it. With some limpers in front the price we are getting is greatly improved and a call is ok. But skillful play postflop will be required to keep from getting into trouble. Notice that this hand would have far more value if the hero were in position. If you held it on the button and it was folded to you, you could certainly raise to try to take the blinds. But out of position, I would recommend novice PLO8 players just muck this hand, even from the small blind with limpers.

### Example 4.6

\$2.00/\$4.00 Blinds – 6 players

SB: \$679.60, BB: \$489.20, UTG: \$202.40, MP: \$227.60, CO:

\$421.20 , Hero (BTN): \$377.20

UTG posts a big blind (\$4.00)

Pre Flop: (\$1.25) Hero is BTN with J♦ J♣ A♦ Q♥

UTG checks, MP calls \$4.00, *I fold*, Hero calls \$4.00, SB calls \$2.00, BB checks

We already know that high only hands tend to be marginal. This one looks very pretty but is not nearly as strong as it seems. The pair of jacks actually hurts the value of the hand, we would prefer to have a high straight hand. The gap between the ace and the queen doesn't help either. But we do have a suited ace and most importantly we have position on the button. We definitely want to play the hand but we don't really want to play a huge pot. There is a poster and a limper ahead, and the hero just checks behind. The idea is to not put any more money in than necessary until seeing a flop, then utilizing our position if the flop is favorable. Raising here has some merits though. UTG posted the blind as opposed to waiting just one more hand. Making a move like this, he may as well hang a giant neon sign around his neck that says "I'm a donkey, please take my money." He has a random hand and you have position on him, so punishing him is not a bad idea. With the poster and the limper, you can make a raise to \$2.75, giving them tougher than normal odds to call and forcing them to play a decent size pot out of position if they do. But you will be unlikely to have much fold equity against players like this, even if they miss the flop. And you will often miss the flop with your high only hand, so limping seems like the best play although raising is worth some consideration.

### Example 4.7

\$0.10/\$0.25 Blinds – 9 players

SB: \$11.10, BB: \$5.70, UTG: \$12.95, UTG+1: \$41.60,

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UTG+2: \$14.50, Hero (MP1): \$32.20, MP2: \$6.80,  
CO: \$20.10, BTN: \$8.65

Preflop: (\$0.35) Hero is MP1 with 5♥ 2♠ 3♦ 6♣

UTG raises to \$0.75, 2 folds, **Hero calls \$0.75**, 2 folds, BTN  
calls \$0.75, 1 fold, BB calls \$0.50

When someone raises UTG they usually have a very good hand. It is generally AAxx, A2xx, or an ace with two wheel cards. The exception is a player that has no concept of position, which isn't all that uncommon in PLO8. Our hand is an ace dependent one, and one or more aces are likely in the hand of the raiser. But if an ace does flop, many players with that hand range will have a hard time letting their hand go. We have the type of hand that can make a wheel with a higher straight, which can crush the raiser if it hits. If the UTG raiser holds something like AAxx and we get a flop with an ace and two low cards, we can easily end up with a complete free-roll. It is worth taking a flop and trying to crack him provided the stacks are deep enough. Here the effective stacks are over 120 BB's deep, so we are getting terrific implied odds. 5-2-3-6 is likely behind the range of most any UTG raiser, so we would never be re-raising for value. Flat calling is the correct play, as re-raising would not accomplish anything. It would only inflate the pot and cut down on the implied odds.

### Example 4.8

\$.50/\$1.00 Blinds – 6 players

SB: \$95.50, BB: \$169.1, Hero (UTG): \$109.2, MP: \$116.70,  
CO: \$97.60, BTN: \$23.60

Preflop: (\$1.50) Hero is UTG with 2♥ 8♠ Q♦ A♥

**Hero raises to \$3.50**, 2 folds, BTN raises to \$12, 2 folds, **Hero**

**raises to \$37.50**, BTN calls \$11.60 all in

This is a good hand that can be raised UTG, although there is nothing wrong with limping if the game is fairly passive. We have an A-2 with a suited ace, and Q for some high value. The 8 is kind of a banana in that it doesn't really provide much counterfeit protection for the low draw and doesn't help the high potential very much. If the 8 were a wheel card then this would be an automatic raise no matter the situation, and we would be looking to get as much money as possible in preflop.

As played, we open raise and get 3-bet from the BTN and the blinds fold, leaving us heads up. The button now has half of his stack in the pot. If we flat call and put him all in on the flop he'll be getting about 2:1 to call, so he's rarely folding. We have a very strong hand so we decide just to get the money in right now. This is the correct play because the button has such a small stack. Notice that if he had a full stack, we would not be 4-betting and creating a big pot out of position. In that case, we would likely just flat call and see the flop. Always pay attention to the stack sizes, as they often make a difference in determining the correct play.

### Example 4.9

\$0.10/\$0.25 Blinds – 9 players

SB: \$12.85, BB: \$12.65, UTG: \$31.35, UTG+1: \$13.90, Hero (UTG+2): \$27.55, MP1: \$9.90, MP2: \$7.05, CO: \$7.10, BTN: \$13.30

Preflop: (\$0.35) Hero is UTG+2 with  $6\clubsuit A\heartsuit A\spadesuit J\spadesuit$

UTG calls \$0.25, *1 fold*, **Hero raises to \$1.10**, *4 folds*, SB calls \$1, *1 fold*, UTG calls \$0.85

These aces are marginal, and the raise in early position is questionable. The A-6 is a bad low draw, there is no counterfeit

protection, and neither of the aces is suited. There are very few flops that this hand is going to hit, and if someone that has position on us calls, they can really give us a hard time after the flop. As it turns out, everyone with position on us folds and there are only two callers. This is about the best case scenario that could be hoped for before the flop. But this is still not a great hand and the pot is multi-way. If the pot had been raised in front, this would be a clear fold. To most poker players folding aces preflop seems impossible, but in PLO8 there are many cases where it is vital that you fold them. With only a limper in front there is no reason to fold. If the game is relatively passive, you can limp behind and try to spike an ace on the flop. The takeaway here is that A-A-x-x can be very marginal and sometimes you need to be very careful with it. This is a case where NLHE players with little PLO8 experience can get themselves into some major trouble.

### Example 4.10

\$2.00/\$4.00 Blinds – 5 players

SB: \$340.00, Hero (BB): \$410.00, UTG: \$380.80, CO: \$226, BTN: \$197.20

Preflop: (\$6.00) Hero is BB with 4♦ A♠ A♦ 2♦

UTG calls \$4.00, CO calls \$4.00, BTN calls \$4.00, SB calls \$2.00, **Hero raises to \$24**, 1 fold, CO calls \$20, BTN calls \$20, 1 fold

Unlike the previous hand, these are premium aces. There is a 2 to give potential for a nut low, and a 4 for counterfeit protection. One of the aces is suited which helps, although we would prefer not to have three cards of the suit. This is one of the few hands we can raise and build a large pot out of position. We will hit a lot of flops very hard, and we want to get as much

money in the pot as possible. Notice that the range of hands that we raise out of position with is very narrow. Playing this way is very unbalanced, and a skilled player who is paying attention will easily be able to put us on this narrow range and exploit it. But in PLO8 we will encounter very few players like this, particularly at the lower limits. We don't need to worry too much about balancing as we would in a game like NLHE at mid-stakes that has many skilled players. Just keep in mind that if you are playing in a higher limit games against tough players, they may be able to put you on a very small range of hands.

### Example 4.11

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds

SB: \$57.20, Hero (BB): \$49.25, UTG: \$49.00, UTG+1: \$46.40,  
 UTG+2: \$28.10, MP1: \$13.40, MP2: \$49.50,  
 CO: \$14.80, BTN: \$41.00

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is BB with K♥ 2♣ A♣ 2♥

UTG calls \$0.50, *4 folds*, CO calls \$0.50, *1 fold*, SB calls

\$0.25, ***Hero raises to \$2.50***, UTG calls \$2, CO calls \$2, *1 fold*

This is another very strong hand we can raise out of position, although it is at about the bottom of the range of hands we will do this with. It is a big hand but not nearly as strong as the one in the previous example. We have A-K instead of the big pair of aces, and there is no counterfeit protection for the A-2 low. Having the additional 2 has some value in that if we do make a nut low it is harder for someone to also have it and quarter us. But unlike the previous hand, we would not want to get our entire stack in preflop if we could.

### Example 4.12

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds – 5 players

SB: \$21.45, BB: \$36.55, UTG: \$98.90, CO: \$66.95, Hero (BTN): \$58.70

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is BTN with  $K\spadesuit 4\heartsuit K\diamond 6\heartsuit$

*2 folds, Hero raises to \$1.75, SB calls \$1.50, 1 fold*

We know that big pairs have little value in PLO8, and this one doesn't even have either of the K's suited. The 4-6 is a very horrendous low draw. But this hand can be raised only because it has been folded to us on the button. In most any other circumstances, it would be a clear fold. Over 90% of the time you are dealt this hand preflop you should be folding it. This example shows one of the rare exceptions.

### Example 4.13

\$1.00/\$2.00 Blinds – 6 players

SB: \$199.20, BB: \$52.20, UTG: \$195.00, MP: \$350.60, Hero (CO): \$197.00, BTN: \$243.40

Preflop: (\$3.00) Hero is CO with  $T\clubsuit J\heartsuit 7\heartsuit K\diamond$

*1 fold, MP calls \$2.00, Hero calls \$2.00, 2 folds, BB checks*

Not only is this a high only hand, but it's very junky. It should be folded in almost any situation, including this one. There are not many flops that will yield a wrap straight draw, and there is only one flush draw to a J high. It could be played if it was folded to you and you were on the button, but that's about it. Calling here is a leak.



**Example 4.14**

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds – 9 players

SB: \$43.45, BB: \$25.95, UTG: \$9.15, UTG+1: \$32.85,  
 UTG+2: \$16.70, MP1: \$36.25, MP2: \$15.90, CO: \$65.20,  
 Hero (BTN): \$42.85

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is BTN with  $K\clubsuit 2\spadesuit J\heartsuit 3\clubsuit$   
 2 *folds*, UTG+2 calls \$0.50, 1 *fold*, MP2 calls \$0.50, CO raises  
 to \$2.75, **Hero folds**, 2 *folds*, UTG+2 calls \$2.25, MP2 calls  
 \$2.25

This is a sucker hand, and one that newbies and fish often play. To the player that doesn't know much about this game, they see K-J for a high, and 2-3 for a low. That's a two-way hand so they figure they're good to go. There is even a K high flush draw. But this hand is complete trash because the four cards don't work together at all. You can't flop a wrap with only 2 high cards. The low draw needs an ace to flop, and there is no counterfeit protection. The flush draw is also to the non nuts. There is just almost no way to win both halves of the pot with a hand like this, and it should almost never be played. This is especially true with a raise in front.

**Example 4.15**

\$5.00/\$10.00 Blinds – 6 players

SB: \$551.00, BB: \$400.00, UTG: \$219.00, MP: \$946.00,  
 Hero (CO): \$906.00, BTN: \$2459.00

Preflop: (\$15.00) Hero is CO with  $8\spadesuit T\spadesuit 9\heartsuit Q\heartsuit$   
 UTG raises to \$30.00, 1 *fold*, **Hero folds**, 1 *fold*, SB calls  
 \$25.00, 1 *fold*

This is another trash hand that sometimes looks good to beginning players. This one may seem very pretty to a player coming from a PLO background. But even if this were PLO, the gap at the top significantly cuts down on the number of flops that will give you a wrap. We would also like the run to be to a K or an A instead of to a Q. With a raise in front, this is a no-brainer fold. About the only place you could consider playing this would be from the button.

## Chapter 5 – Basic Postflop Play

Most of your edge in this game will come from your superior postflop play. You can overcome many preflop mistakes with solid postflop play. This is the most important chapter in the book. Re-read this chapter at least once or twice to make sure you absorb all of the material. If you simply skim through it once, you will be doing yourself a disservice. The concepts presented in this chapter will be reinforced with examples both at the end of this chapter and in chapter 8.

### **What do you have?**

After the flop comes out, the first thing you need to do is figure out what you have. (That's not the only thing of course because you will also be thinking about what your opponents have, but that is for another section). For players who are new to PLO8, it can be very easy at times to misread your hand. But with some practice, correctly reading your hand will become second nature. When reading the board, take an inventory of all of the high and low features you have. Look at all of the straight, flush, and low draws. Also consider the quality of each draw. There is a huge difference between having an open end straight when there is a 2 flush that you don't have, and having a 15 wrap draw. Also do not forget about back door draws, they have a much larger impact on your equity than you think. Let's look at some examples.

### Example 5.1

Hand: 5♥ 4♣ 4♥ 3♣

Flop: J♠ 2♥ T♦

High features = pair of 4's, back door low heart draw, back door straight draw

Low features = back door 3<sup>rd</sup> nut low draw

This hand is very weak in both directions. Although each back door draw adds a few percentage points of equity to your hand, you can't just depend on several different back door draws. In this case, you will be lucky to make a hand in either the high or the low direction; it will almost never happen in both. Back door draws have the most benefit when they complement another hand feature. For example if you have a made straight and a backdoor flush draw, you can now play and take advantage of the extra flush equity. For this hand though, you should be looking to fold here.

### Example 5.2

Hand: A♣ Q♣ 7♥ 2♣

Flop: 4♣ J♠ 8♦

High features = back door nut flush draw with 3 of a suit, back door straight draw

Low features = Nut low draw with 7 backup

This hand is a little better but still not great. You still have only back door draws for the high, although at least they are to the nuts. You can make a nut flush, or if it comes K-10, you can make a Broadway straight. The real value of this hand is the nut low draw. But even this feature has some problems. You have a draw to only half the pot, so it doesn't enable you to get really

aggressive. Plus you don't have any real counterfeit protection. The 7 in your hand can only be considered an 'emergency' low. The only way to continue with this hand is if the pot is multi-way and it doesn't cost you too much.

### Example 5.3

Our hand: A♥ Q♣ Q♥ T♣  
 Flop: 6♥ T♦ T♥

High features = Trips with top kicker, nut flush draw, back door straight draw

Low features = none

This hand is a monster. We've got trips with top kicker and the nut flush draw. The only thing we need to worry about is a pair of 6's or someone spiking a full house, which are not huge concerns. We don't have any low cards, which in this case is ok because a low draw will only be possible if it comes runner runner. We're ready to put in significant action, but not necessarily ready to go all in if the stack sizes are too deep. The only problem is we have the deck crippled and are unlikely to get much action unless someone has the case 10 or a pair of 6's. If someone decided to draw at a non-nut flush on this paired board, they would have to be suicidal. Having the pair of Q's in our hand hurts us some, since we have fewer draws to a full house.

### Example 5.4

Our hand: A♠ A♣ 3♣ 5♠  
 Flop: K♠ 2♣ 8♠

High features = nut flush draw, back door nut flush draw, over-pair, back door straight draw

Low features = nut low draw with counterfeit protection

You should be willing to get a lot of money in on a flop like this. This is a premium hand that hit a good flop. You will win some monster pots with this type of hand.

### **Playing for ½ the Pot**

Every book on split pot poker games advises you to play to try to scoop the pot and avoid playing for half. This advice applies as well to PLO8. In fact because PLO8 is a big bet game, it applies even more so. But rather than rehash the same basic discussion that can be found in other books, we're going to look at some examples to better understand why playing for half the pot is so horrible.

#### **Example 5.5**

Stack sizes: 100 BB's

Our hand: A-2-9-J

Flop: 6-7-8

Let's consider a sample hand where the effective stack sizes are 100 BB's and we are dealt A-2-9-J with no suits. We feel A-2 is a premium hand and raise the size of the pot from the cutoff position and get called by the small blind. The button and the big blind both fold. We go to the flop and there are 8 BB's in the pot. The flop comes out 6-7-8 rainbow. We've flopped the nut low! The SB bets out the size of the pot (8 BB's) and we call with what we feel is a good hand. There are now 24 BB's in the pot and we go to the turn. The turn is an offsuit J. We still have the nut low and now have a pair of jacks to go with it, we are delighted. The villain bets the pot again (24 BB's) and again we call. The pot is now 72 BB's. The river is a K and the villain

pushes all in. We call and the villain turns over A-4-5-6 and we chop the pot.

What just happened here? Should we be happy? We did start with an A-2 hand and made the nut low and then got it all in. Isn't that what we wanted? Well no, not really. First, let's consider our hand. We had a naked A-2, and we made the nut low, didn't get counterfeited, and didn't get three-quartered by another nut low. That's a pretty good result. In fact, it's just about the best result we could expect with this hand. If an A or a 2 had come on the turn or the river we would have likely been scooped, so let's be happy about the way things turned out. Let's now consider what we won after getting lucky and having our dream scenario unfold. We got our entire 100BB stack in the pot along with the villain's; there was also the 1 BB that the big blind folded. We won half of the 201 BB pot, or 100.5 BB's. But we put in 100 BB's to win 100.5, so our profit was only .5 BB's!!! Now this is starting to not look quite so good. We just risked 100 BB's to win only .5 BB's. This is not exactly the type of risk/reward ratio we are looking for if we want to be a winning player. Remember, if an A or a 2 had fallen, we would have been scooped. This example illustrates why playing for half the pot is so bad, especially when heads up. At best we get our money back, at worst we lose a big pot in a situation where we had little or nothing to gain.

### Example 5.6

Stack sizes: 100 BB's

Our Hand: A-2-9-J

Flop: 4-5-K

Now consider a situation where the flop comes out 4-5-K instead. Now we are drawing for half the pot. If playing a made nut low for half is bad, *drawing* to half the pot is basically suicidal.

Our A-2-9-J only gave us the chance to lose a big pot, not

win one. This example shows us that even with a premium low starting hand like A-2, you don't have a lot of value unless the other cards give you some opportunity to make a high hand.

### **Making A-2 a More Playable Hand**

Having a suited ace is a terrific starting point. Having a couple of wheel cards makes this a powerhouse. Having two high cards to go with your A-2 isn't bad either, but not as good as having a suited ace or wheel cards. Having a wheel card or two adds a lot of equity to your hand because it provides counterfeit protection. One of the primary considerations when deciding whether or not to proceed with a low hand is if you have counterfeit protection.

#### **Example 5.7**

Stack sizes: 150 BB's

Our Hand: Q-J-10-9

Flop: 6-7-8

Let's consider another example where we have a strong high hand. We hold Q-J-10-9 double suited with effective stacks of 150 BB's. This time we are in the small blind and we call the pot size raise of an early position opener. Everyone else folds and we go to the flop with 8 BB's in the pot. The flop comes out 6-7-8 with two hearts and we have flopped the nut straight with redraws to a bigger straight, but we don't have any hearts or backdoor flush draws.

We lead with a  $\frac{3}{4}$  pot size bet of 6 BB's and the villain re-raises to 20 BB's. The villain in this case is a rather tight player, so we suspect he has a nut low. He could also have a nut low with a flush draw. Against an A-2-x-x hand, we have 42% equity in the pot. But we have no idea if our high hand is ok if the flush card comes or the board pairs. If the stack sizes were smaller



here, then we would have the option of just getting our money in right now, or calling and then getting it in if a safe turn card hits. ***But the problem in this situation is that the stack sizes are relatively deep.***

If we re-raise and bloat the pot, we may be getting free-rolled by a low hand with a flush draw. If we just call, a safe card falls on the turn, and our opponent fires a pot sized bet on the turn, what will we do? If we call and a flush card comes and our opponent bets half the pot, what will we do? The answer to all of the questions depends highly on the particular opponent and the flow of the game. If the opponent is at all competent, I would lean towards a fold here. We haven't invested much and nothing about our hand warrants trying to play a massive pot when 150 BB's deep. But there are scenarios where the opponent could show up with any four cards and is very passive that I would peel and re-evaluate on the turn. The point of this example is the extreme difficulty you can encounter when playing high only hands. They are certainly playable in many situations, but their value is much lower than what most beginning players think. This is because they either win half the pot, or you scoop a small pot on a high only board. When you do make the nuts with these types of hands, you tend to win small pots because it is not that common that you have two high hands going against each other and you get a high only board.

When we only play for half, our opponents are often free-rolling us to scoop or three-quarter. In these examples, the pots were played heads up. In multi-way pots things get a little better, but we still have problems. If the pot is raised and there is flop betting, your 2-3 opponents will usually have at least a little something. Here make sure your hand is the nuts in the direction you are going, and have counterfeit protection if you are going low. These situations are much more dangerous in PLO8 than they are in limit O8 because of the big bet nature of the game. If you get quartered or counterfeited and scooped in limit, you still get hurt, but it's not quite the end of the world either. In

PLO8, this can cost you your entire stack. There will be many more situations where you need to fold if you have the nuts in one direction but nothing in the other direction. That is one of the key adjustments you absolutely must make when going from limit to pot limit Omaha.

### **PLO8 is Not a Game of Trapping**

You generally don't make a lot of money in PLO8 by making hands that dominate your opponent and then getting them to dump their chips off to you.

Consider some situations that often come up in NLHE. It is common for one hand to dominate another before the flop. AK versus AQ, KK versus QQ, and on and on. You can often trap opponents when you have their hands dominated. This is partially due to the way starting hand equities can dominate one another, but it is also the aggression that many NLHE players have that makes it possible to trap them.

For the most part, these things don't really apply to PLO8. Preflop starting hand equities run close to one another. Postflop one hand will often dominate another, but competent players will usually know when they are likely to be dominated. Also, the aggression levels in PLO8 are usually much lower than they are in NLHE, so people won't bet into you nearly as often without a strong hand.

In PLO8 *when we have a strong hand, it is generally better to bet for value than to check and expect the other player to do the betting for you.* Slow-playing has little value except against very specific aggressive opponents. You should usually be betting out with your strong hands to take advantage of your equity edge. This also balances the times when you are semi-bluffing with marginal hands trying to take advantage of fold equity.

## Opponent Types

This is one of the most important sections in this book. Knowing your opponents is vital if you are going to exploit them and maximize your win rate. Read it carefully and go over it multiple times so you fully understand it.

There are 3 basic player types in PLO8:

- Calling station
- Weak-tight
- Competent
  - Can be either tight-aggressive (TAG) or loose-aggressive (LAG)

There are of course many variations on these player types, and this section will by no means describe every player you are going to face. But if you understand these basic player types, it will be easier later on to understand the individual tendencies of the players you face.

### Calling Stations

These are the most common players you will find in PLO8, particularly in the lower limits. Their outlook on the game is basically, “Hey I have four cards and might win the high or the low, I should play the hand.” Their starting requirements are that they have four cards. They are happy to play middle cards and don’t care if anything is suited. After the flop, they can always see some kind of draw. They’re not really concerned with scooping pots; they just want to win part of the pot. No matter what the situation, they will concoct some reason to call your bet. They will even *draw* at only half the pot when heads up.

The one thing they will rarely do is become aggressive. Sometimes they will make little probing bets. But usually they won’t come out of the woodwork unless they have the stone cold

nuts. When they do bet, you can usually rest assured that they have something. Even then, they won't necessarily have the nuts in both directions. When they make the bare nut low or a nut high they will often blast away at the pot. They are especially prone to overplaying the bare nut low without counterfeit protection.

***The way to combat calling stations is simply to value bet them to death.*** Do not be tempted to get fancy against them. If you have a strong hand, bet it for value. Don't bet into them unless you want them to call. Do not ever attempt a pure bluff against a player like this. It will almost never work. Semi-bluffing is ok at times, but you should tend to do it less than you would against the other player types. This player does have a tendency to try slow-play some of their big hands. Occasionally when you have a decent but not great hand, you will lose a lot when you value bet into them with the worse hand. But since they are very passive, they never get as much value they should from their big hands.

### Weak-Tight

Weak-tight players are the next most common type of player. Typically these players began as calling stations and eventually figured out that you can't just play every hand and call every bet and expect not to lose a ton of money. They may have read some articles about the game online or visited some internet poker forums for advice. They understand that the goal of the game is to scoop pots. They know that it is good to have suited aces and have wheel cards in your hand. High only hands still get them into trouble, since they still don't understand how truly weak they are in this game. They are obsessed with trying to make the nuts in both directions. The problem is they will check and call until they make the nuts, and then and only then come out betting.

These tendencies make these players the easiest ones to play against. Basically their hand is always facing up. If they check,

they are probably weak. If they call, they probably have some sort of hand or draw but not a strong made hand yet. If they bet into you, they usually have the goods. Generally you should assume that their actions mean what they indicate. These players are not prone to trying to get tricky.

With your strong hands, you should be value betting them liberally, just like you would against a calling station. The difference is this player will not draw as badly as the calling station, so you should not go for thin value quite as often. If you have a weak to mediocre hand and this player shows weakness, you should be semi-bluffing them like crazy. Most of the value you will get from these players will come from getting them to fold hands.

### Competent

These are the rarest of PLO8 players. Part of the reason for this is that so little literature and coaching exists for the game. Although they are rare, they also the most diverse group, and there is no way to lump all of them together. Some are very tight aggressive (TAG); some are very loose aggressive (LAG). The best ones can shift gears back and forth so you have to understand not only the player type but what mode they are in at the time you are playing a given hand. Even some of the best players from this group will still overvalue high only hands. But in general these players will know how to value their starting hands. One of the other key differences between these players and the others is that some will understand the value of position. Most of the players in the first two groups don't even know what position is. Competent players understand that it is important, although not all of them implement it appropriately. What makes this player most dangerous is that they do not simply wait around to make the nuts before showing aggression. They understand that hand equities tend to run close and the way to gain a big edge to take full advantage of their fold equity. They will go after the

weak-tight players when they show their typical weakness. But they are smart enough not to waste their money trying to bluff a calling station.

The keying to playing against competent players is not to give in to fancy play syndrome. You can still beat them just by playing good solid poker. If you understand starting hand values and the importance of position, you will be off to a great start against them. If you are a reasonable hand reader and maximize your fold equity, you will do well against them postflop. Unfortunately, they usually don't have flagrant flaws that you can exploit. But don't over-think things and play solid poker and you'll do fine against them.

### **Postflop Bet Sizing**

How do you determine how much you should bet when playing after the flop? The short answer is you should tend to bet the size of the pot. There are a few reasons for this:

- Your fold equity is maximized.
  - Much of the profit from PLO8 comes from getting opponents to fold. Therefore maximizing your fold equity tends to increase your win rate.
- You make your opponents pay the maximum to chase after their draws.
  - Most PLO8 players will tend to draw when they are way behind in the hand. By betting as much as you can, you can fully capitalize on their mistakes.

This does not mean that you will bet the pot 100% of the time. Often you should be betting half or three-quarters of the pot. Here are some guidelines for when you may want to bet less:

- Your specific opponent tends to be tight and you know he is capable of folding hands post-flop.
  - In this case, you can get the same result as betting full pot while risking fewer chips.
- You want to make a ‘blocking bet’.
  - Blocking bets are small bets, typically made on the river, that are intended to set the size of the bet for that street. Sometimes you are out of position and are afraid to check because you think your opponent may make a large bet that you can’t call. But if you make a small  $\frac{1}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  pot size bet, your opponent may simply call instead.
- You have a strong hand and you don’t want your opponent(s) to fold.
  - Just be careful not to get carried away with this concept. If you typically always bet pot except when you are very strong, observant players will eventually catch on.

## Continuation Betting

If you make a raise before the flop and then bet out after the flop, that’s a continuation bet. Basically you’ve shown strength before the flop, and now you’re saying to your opponents “I started with a good hand and hit the flop, you should probably fold.” You should continuation bet often, but not every time or you will become too predictable.

Here are some guidelines for when you should tend to continuation bet:

- You hit the flop and want to get value.
- There is only one low card on the board.
  - Your opponent(s) are less likely to call if there is no low draw.
- The board is paired and there is no low draw.

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- If the board is paired, most players won't call without trips or a full house, which they usually won't have.
- Notice that continuation betting into paired boards is generally good since it is less likely that someone has hit the flop, just like in NLHE. But there are some things you must consider. If there is a low draw, like on a 4-4-6 board, you are much more likely to get called since your opponent could have trips, a straight draw, and/or the low draw. You should be less likely to continuation bet this board type unless you have a low draw yourself. On the other hand, high paired boards, like K-K-10, can be continuation bet much more often since it is less likely that anyone has a piece of that flop.
- You are heads up, or sometimes when you are against 2 opponents.
  - The fewer opponents you are up against, the more likely your continuation bet is to take down the pot.
- Your opponent(s) are tight and you have seen them fold hands postflop.
  - Abusing tight players is one of the primary ways to profit when playing PLO8.

Here are some guidelines for when you should tend not to continuation bet:

- You have a lousy high and no low draw.
  - This means you will have little equity in the pot if called. When you continuation bet, you want to have some sort of hand; you don't want to be making pure bluffs.
- You are against multiple opponents.



- The more opponents, the more likely you are to get called.
- There is a flush draw on the board and you don't have two of that suit.
  - This really diminishes the equity of your hand. If a third flush card comes on the turn you will likely be playing to chop the pot, which we already know is a very bad situation.
  - If a board has a two flush and you have no flush draw, you should be less likely to bet. This is partly because of the increased probability of being called because someone may have a flush draw. But it is also because if you are called and a flush card hits and then it is checked to you, you won't know where you stand and whether you can fire another barrel or not. Inversely, if there is a two flush and you do have a flush draw, you should be more likely to continuation bet, even if you have a low flush draw. There is usually a good chance that your flush draw is live, but even if it isn't, your two flush cards will serve as 'blockers' to make it less probable that your opponent will make his higher flush.
- There is a low draw on the board and you can't make a low.
  - Again, this sets you up for a situation where you are playing to only split the pot.

### **Folding the Nuts**

PLO8 is unique in that there are many situations where it is correct to fold the nuts. Occasionally it is correct to fold the nuts in PLO, but it happens much more often in PLO8. This typically occurs when you have a one way hand, the pot is multi-way, and there is lots of action. The most common scenario is when you

have top set with no draws when there are low and/or straight and flush draws on the board.

Consider an example where you hold  $J\heartsuit J\heartsuit Q\diamondsuit T\heartsuit$  on a  $J\spadesuit 2\spadesuit 3\clubsuit$  board against 2 other players. You lead out on the flop and it is raised and then re-raised. The stacks are 150BB's deep. This is a situation where you have the nuts but clearly have to fold. If any A, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8 falls, you will win half the pot at most. If any spade falls that doesn't pair the board, you will likely be getting scooped. Any A, 4, 5, or 6 completes straights. Let's look at what your equity would be against some hands you could expect to be up against:

$J\heartsuit J\heartsuit Q\diamondsuit T\heartsuit = 24.6\%$

$A\spadesuit A\clubsuit 5\spadesuit 4\clubsuit = 70.9\%$

$A\heartsuit 3\heartsuit 3\diamondsuit J\clubsuit = 4.5\%$

More common is when you have the nut low and suspect you may be getting free-rolled. For example if the board is  $5\clubsuit 6\clubsuit 7\clubsuit$  and you hold  $A\spadesuit 2\heartsuit K\heartsuit Q\diamondsuit$ , you should fold to almost any bet in a heads up pot. *If you have the nut low only with almost no chance for high, you can rarely continue in the hand.* Exceptions typically occur in multi-way pots with minimal action.

## How Many Turn Cards are Good?

When making decisions on the flop, one of the key considerations is how many turn cards will be good for your hand. The more turns cards that are good, then the more likely you should be to call or to raise. The fewer turn cards that are good for you, the more likely you should be to fold.

This seems like an obvious concept but it is often overlooked. Sometimes decisions that seem borderline at first will become crystal clear when you think about exactly what you would like to see on the turn.

**Example 5.8:**

Our hand: J♠ J♦ 9♠ 10♥

Flop: J♣ 4♦ 5♥

Suppose you hold J♠ J♦ 9♠ 10♥ and it was limped to you on the BB. The flop comes J♣ 4♦ 5♥, giving you top set. The SB checks to you and you need to decide whether to bet out into several players or to check. We see that we have the current nuts and it looks like a bet is in order. But let's wait a minute and think about what kinds of turn cards we would like to see.

Any A, 2, 3, 6, 7, or 8 makes a low possible. Any A, K or Q makes a higher set possible. Any club, diamond, or heart makes a flush draw possible. Any 9, T, Q, K, or A makes a straight draw possible that we either won't have or can't make the nuts with. Even some of the 'safe' cards that we will still have the nuts with on the turn make even more cards scary on the river and therefore diminish the value of our hand. Given all of this, what turn cards are we really happy with? The answer is there really aren't any. Sometimes what may be the nuts can turn out to be almost unplayable when you consider what turn card you really want to see.

**The Importance of Backdoor Outs**

You always want to take into account all of your backdoor and other draws. Here are some examples to illustrate the impact they can have on your equity.

**Example 5.9: Adding a Back Door Flush Draw**

Flop = 4♦ 6♠ K♣

Hand 1 = A♥ 2♥ 7♣ 8♦, equity = 42.35%

Hand 2 = A♠ 3♥ J♣ J♦, equity = 57.65%

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Now watch what happens when we change the 6♠ on the flop to the 6♥ giving hand #1 a back door heart draw.

Flop = 4♦ 6♥ K♣

Hand 1 = A♥ 2♥ 7♣ 8♦, equity = 44.54%

Hand 2 = A♠ 3♥ J♣ J♦, equity = 55.46%

As a rule of thumb, each back door flush draw will add about 2% to the equity of your hand. It doesn't sound like much, but you must consider how close hand equities run in this game. When you are 55/45 or 45/55, two percentage points here and there will make a huge difference over time. The exact percentage will always vary somewhat depending on the exact cards that are out. The point here is to get a rough idea of how your equity changes.

### Example 5.10: Adding Another Gutshot Straight Draw

Flop = 4♦ 6♠ J♣

Hand 1 = A♥ 2♥ 7♣ 8♦, equity = 42.4%

Hand 2 = A♠ 3♥ Q♣ Q♦, equity = 57.6%

The setup for this hand is slightly different than the one in example 1, although in both cases hand 1 has a gutshot straight draw (needs a 5). In this case we'll change the J♣ that came on the flop to the T♣, giving hand number 1 a double gutter instead.

Flop = 4♦ 6♥ T♣

Hand 1 = A♥ 2♥ 7♣ 8♦, equity = 53.8%

Hand 2 = A♠ 3♥ Q♣ Q♦, equity = 46.2%

This is a massive change in equity, an increase of 10 percentage points! Why was there such a dramatic change? It's because if any of the four 9's falls, you will now scoop the pot.

They don't just win half the pot for you, they win the whole thing. It is important to notice these subtle differences in hand strength postflop. They can make the difference between being able to commit to getting all in, and having to fold.

### **Example 5.11: Having Counterfeit Protection with a Naked Low**

Flop = 4♦ 6♠ 8♣

Hand 1 = A♥ 2♥ K♣ 9♦, equity = 49.6%

Hand 2 = 5♠ 3♥ Q♣ Q♦, equity = 50.4%

Holding only a bare nut low with no counterfeit protection when the pot is heads up is always a dangerous situation. This is actually one of the best possible scenarios for this type of hand, with nearly 50% equity in the pot. But if the hand had counterfeit protection, the situation would be much better. If we change the K♣ to a 3♣ for hand 1, the equity will improve substantially.

Flop = 4♦ 6♠ 8♣

Hand 1 = A♥ 2♥ 3♣ 9♦, equity = 61.1%

Hand 2 = 5♠ 3♥ Q♣ Q♦, equity = 38.9%

Some of this equity comes from also picking up a gutshot straight draw. But if you have three low cards and a low is possible, you will often have at least a gutshot, if not a made straight already. If you have a nut low with counterfeit protection, you can play much more aggressively postflop than if you only had the bare nut low.

### Example 5.12: Back Door Low Draw

Flop = 3♦ 9♠ J♣

Hand 1 = A♥ 7♥ 9♣ T♦, equity = 53.2%

Hand 2 = 4♠ 9♥ Q♣ Q♦, equity = 46.8%

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In this example, hand 1 has a pair and a gutshot with a backdoor low draw. Hand 2 has an over-pair with a pair of 9's. If hand 2 were to change the 9♥ to a 2♥, it will now also have a better backdoor low draw and its equity will improve.

Flop = 3♦ 9♠ J♣

Hand 1 = A♥ 7♥ 9♣ T♦, equity = 50.1%

Hand 2 = 4♠ 2♥ Q♣ Q♦, equity = 49.9%

The equity for hand 2 has improved by about 3%. This is typical for adding a backdoor low draw.

### Raise or Fold

Generally, if you are in a heads up pot and are faced with a full pot sized bet, the decision will be to raise or fold. It is usually not correct to flat call in these situations. If you have a big made hand, you should usually re-raise and try to get as much money in as possible. Usually when players make a big bet like this, they are not folding to a re-raise unless they happened to be on a pure bluff. In this case with a big hand, you want to exploit your equity advantage to the maximum by bloating the pot as much as you can.

If you don't have a big made hand and are on a draw, you will usually be getting incorrect odds to call the pot sized raise. If you have a super-strong draw then you usually can re-raise and get the money in anyway. While there will be some situations in heads up pots where you can flat call pot sized raises, they tend to be infrequent. Multi-way pots can be a different story. If there is a pot sized bet and a call in front of you and you close the action, it is frequently correct to call with many draws.

### Implied Odds

PLO8 is more of a game about implied odds than it is about

the equity of your hand versus your opponent's hand (or his range). You can often make what may be  $-EV$  calls based on hand equity, but is actually  $+EV$  overall due to the implied odds you have.

Suppose you and your opponent are both deep stacked, with 150 BB's each. You see a flop and you are holding an inferior hand that only has only 25% equity with a weak draw to a scoop. There are 6 BB's in the pot and your opponent makes a pot sized bet of 6 more BB's. This means you must call 6 BB's into a pot of 12 BB's. You don't have the expressed pot odds to call, but that doesn't matter when you have huge implied odds. If you know your opponent tends to overplay his hands when you make yours, then you may win his entire 150 BB stack. If you miss your draw and the opponent fires a big bet on the turn, you can safely fold.

It is important to realize that your implied odds will almost never be as good as they are in NLHE. The most common example in NLHE is when you have a pocket pair and are trying to flop a set. When this happens, you will generally have a huge equity in the pot. But in PLO8, no matter how hard you hit a flop, your opponents will usually have more redraws. Implied odds are still very important in PLO8, just not quite as powerful as they are in NLHE.

The stack sizes and the opponent tendencies determine what your implied odds are. Of course you can never determine your implied odds exactly, they will always be subjective. But in situations where you think you are not quite getting the pot odds to call versus the villain's range, and the stack sizes are reasonably large and you think your opponent will pay you off, then you will be getting the correct price to proceed.

### **Reverse Implied Odds**

This is simply the opposite of implied odds. Reverse implied odds are the negative odds you have for the times when you

draw to a hand and make it, only to lose anyway.

For example, suppose you draw to a K high flush on a high only board. You must consider more than the odds of making your hand and the implied odds of the stack sizes if you can get your money in and win. There will be many times where if you hit your flush and get your money in, you will lose to an A high flush and lose your stack. In fact, if there is a flush possible on a high only board, the A high flush will almost always be out there when there is significant action.

This means that when the stacks are deep, you need to be drawing to strong two-way hands or nut one-way hands in multi-way pots. The other situation where you need to consider your reverse implied odds is with the nut low in a 3-way pot. Getting quartered with 200BB stacks is much more painful than when the stacks are only 40BB's deep.

## **Stack Sizes**

The subject of stack sizes goes hand in hand with implied odds. The deeper the effective stack sizes, the greater the implied odds.

The effective stack size for a given situation is the smallest stack. For example, if you have 200 BB's and you are heads up in a pot with a player with 30BB's, then the effective stacks are 30BB's, because that is the most that can be bet. Before making a decision, you always want to note what the stack sizes are. This will also be discussed in the pre-shot routine section. The correct decision will often vary depending on the stack sizes.

Before the flop, stack sizes are usually described in the number of BB's of the effective stacks. But after the flop, it is more helpful to think in terms of the stack to pot ratio. This lets you know how many more pot sized bets are left.

Consider an example where you hold A-4-4-9 and the flop is 4-2-J rainbow. You have middle set with no low draw. If you



are heads up in a pot that has 30BB's in it and you and your opponent each have only 15BB's left, then you are basically pot committed at this point. You should shove your stack in and hope your hand holds up. There is only a  $\frac{1}{2}$  pot sized bet left.

But would we make the same play if you each had 120BB's left? Now the stack to pot ratio is 5 instead of  $\frac{1}{2}$ . There are 2 full pot sized bets left. This is a much different scenario and you are definitely not just going to stack off here. That doesn't mean you won't bet and try to take the pot down, but you are certainly not going to just get it all in on this flop.

Here are some things to keep in mind when playing with large and small effective stacks.

#### Playing with Small Effective Stack Sizes:

- Tend to either fold or get your money in; there is little value in calling.
- Tend to make fewer pure bluffs.
  - Your fold equity is smaller due to the small stack sizes.
  - When called or re-raised you will be committed to the pot, so you will have to show down your pure bluff which can hurt your table image.
- You can make more semi-bluffs with one-way made hands and one-way draws.
  - The goal here is to get your opponent to fold. But if you get called, it's not the end of the world since the stack sizes are small and you won't get hurt much.

#### Playing with Larger Effective Stack Sizes:

- Your implied odds and reverse implied odds have a much larger impact on your decisions.
- You can use your image and your stack size to take

advantage of your ‘fear equity’. This is the advantage you have from being able to threaten your opponents’ entire stack at any given time.

- You can call more with reasonable draws because you have large implied odds.
- One-way hands go way down in value.
  - The larger the stack sizes, the more important it is to have a two-way hand.

### **Straight Draws Vary Greatly in Value**

This is a very basic concept but is a very important one that should not be overlooked. *Not all straight draws are created equal*. In Omaha, a basic open end straight draw has little value. What you want is to have wraps. Wraps are simply draws that have more than 8 outs. For example if you hold K-Q-J-10 on an 8-9-J board, you have a 13 card wrap. Any 7, 10, Q or K will make you a straight. But notice what kind of straights this wrap makes. All of them make you the nuts. The value of a wrap is not based just on how many cards make a straight, it is mostly based on how many cards make you the nut straight.

In Omaha when everyone has 4 cards, if you have a non-nut straight and there is significant action, you are likely facing the nuts. You do not want to be drawing to hands that have reverse implied odds. Now if you have the nut low or a nut low draw or a very strong low draw to go with your wrap, then your non-nut ‘outs’ don’t hurt you nearly as much.

Consider an example where you hold 6-4-3-2. You have a gap and it’s at the top, which if you remember from the chapter on starting hands means you’ll flop a lot of wraps that have non-nut outs. But this hand has the advantage of having good low potential, with the added bonus of being able to make the prized wheel with a 6 high straight. If the flop comes out K-5-4, you can make a straight with a 7, 6, 3, 2, or A for a 17 card wrap. But only the 2 or A will make you the nut straight, for a total

of 7 nut outs. The A also makes you the nut low. The 2 gives you the nut straight but not the nut low, although it is possible it counterfeited someone with an A2 draw. So although this hand does not have as many nut high outs, it has a lot of other potential. It is important to consider all aspects of your hand when assessing its strength.

For beginning players, actual hand strengths can be somewhat counterintuitive. Review your hand histories and actually write down everything your hand has going for it and against it. After awhile you will be able to understand your hand strength very quickly.

Straight draws go down in value when there is a 2-flush on the board and you don't have a flush draw. You need to have a very big wrap and/or strong low potential without much betting action to proceed in this situation. This is another very basic concept, but it's one that the vast majority of players fail to grasp and it costs them a lot of money. But if you have the flush draw, even if it is a low one, your equity is improved greatly. Because if your flush draw is live, this helps your hand tremendously; but even if a higher flush draw is out there, then your flush cards will serve as blockers. Life is always a little easier when you hold suited cards.

A similar situation occurs when the board is paired. When the board is paired, you will often need a full house to win the high. If you have a made straight and the board is paired (say on the turn), you may be able to proceed depending on the situation. But we don't ever want to draw at a straight or a flush when the board is already paired. The exception to this is if you have a strong low or low draw to go with it.

## **Nut Flush Draws**

Having a nut flush draws adds significant equity to your hand. Although lesser flushes also add a fair bit of equity, they are far less valuable because you won't have the nuts and can't play a

large pot without fear of running into the nut flush. The actual difference in value between a nut flush and a non-nut flush is much greater than the equities makes it seem.

**Example 5.13:**

Flop: 4♥ 6♥ J♦

Your hand: A♦ K♣ 9♥ 5♥, 45.1% equity (9 high flush draw)

Opponent's range: 20%, 54.9% equity

Flop: 4♥ 6♥ J♦

Your hand: A♥ K♣ 9♦ 5♥, 50.1% equity (nut flush draw)

Opponent's range: 20%, 49.9% equity

An increase of 5% equity may not seem significant, but it is huge in PLO8 since equity of hands tends to run so close together. But the real difference in these two hands is much greater than that. This is because when you do make a nine-high flush, you won't know if your hand is good or not and you won't be able to play it aggressively.

If you are playing a multi-way pot, it is absolutely essential that you fold non-nut draws. The exception is if you have strong but non-nut hands in both directions. In multi-way pots, the probability that the nut draw is out there is much higher than when you are heads up. This is not only because there are more cards out there, but also because many players realize that playing non-nut draws is bad and they will tend to have not play unless they have the nuts themselves.

**Playing a Wheel**

A wheel is A-2-3-4-5, which gives you the nut low and a very strong high. When you make this hand, you will scoop the pot most of the time. But this doesn't mean you can just go berserk and indiscriminately jam the pot. There are two different types

of wheels:

- Wheels with redraws
- Wheels without redraws

***This is one of the most common situations that come up in PLO8 that cause inexperienced players to lose a lot of money when they shouldn't.*** When you do not have a redraw, you absolutely must slow down. If you encounter significant action, there is a huge probability that you are being free-rolled. As you should know by now a lot of your profit in PLO8 will come from free-rolling other people, and you should avoid being free-rolled yourself at all costs. You cannot just jam a made wheel unless you have: a flush draw, a draw to a higher straight, a set, or two-pair. Let's take a look at the equity edge a player with a wheel and a redraw has over a player with a bare wheel:

Flop: 2♠ 4♣ 5♥

Hand 1: A♣ 3♦ J♦ Q♦ (wheel with no redraws), 48.6%

Hand 2: A♠ 3♠ 10♣ 9♦ (wheel with backdoor flush draw), 52.4%

Hand 1: A♣ 3♦ J♦ Q♦ (wheel with no redraws), 48.1%

Hand 2: A♠ 3♠ 3♣ 9♦ (wheel with set), 51.9%

This situation is not too bad, but keep in mind that instead of being able to jam for value, you are actually behind and just hoping you can chop the pot.

Flop: 2♠ 4♣ 5♠

Hand 1: A♣ 3♦ J♦ Q♦ (wheel with no redraws), 40.1%

Hand 2: A♠ 3♠ 10♣ 9♦ (wheel with flush draw), 59.9%

## 98 Chapter 5 - Basic Postflop Play

Hand 1: A♣ 3♦ J♦ Q♦ (wheel with no redraws), 37.4%

Hand 2: A♠ 3♠ 7♣ 9♦ (wheel with flush draw and gutshot), 62.6%

This situation demonstrates just how horrible it can be to get free-rolled when you have a wheel. Keep these equities in mind when you have a wheel but don't have redraws on the flop. It might be wise to try to wait for a safe turn card before getting too crazy.

Realize that in these situations if you have the hand with no redraws and the pot is heads up, it is impossible for you to make money on the hand. You will either break even or lose half of your stack if you are getting free-rolled and the other player hits. This is a poker nightmare, and you should always be aware of your situation and not lose your mind just because you have a wheel.

### **Flopping Top Set**

In PLO8, play top set like a drawing hand. Top set in NLHE is an incredibly strong hand, but in PLO8 it can be fairly weak depending on the board. The problem is even if there is no low, flush, straight, or full house possible on the flop, there almost always will be on the turn. Because more turn cards will hurt your hand than will help it, it plays kind of like a draw. Unless you have a strong low or low draw to go with your top set, if you put a lot of money in on the flop you will usually find yourself in a difficult position on the turn. It is much easier if you slow down somewhat on the flop and 'draw' for a safe turn card before committing serious chips.

### **River Play**

Typically by the time you get to the river, you should have a good idea where you are in the hand. Here are some keys to keep

in mind for river play:

- Rarely bluff on the river.
  - If there was a preflop raise, and betting on the flop and turn, your opponent is rarely folding on the river.
- If you bet and get raised, your opponent will have the nuts in at least one direction.
  - If it is a high only board, you will usually be folding.
  - If there is a low possible, they often have a nut low. Notice that this can be a huge mistake on their part if the previous action suggests they may be getting quartered.
- If you have a mediocre hand in both directions, your goal should be to try to get to a cheap showdown.
  - Getting aggressive usually won't pay off since it is difficult to get someone to fold on the river, and you will run into big hands and get scooped too often.
- If you have the nut high, you should always jam the pot.
  - With the nut high it is impossible to get scooped, and you should maximize your fold equity against someone with a low and give players with a second best high the chance to hang themselves.
  - The exception is when you have a nut straight. Here you can be tied and get quartered. Depending on your low and the preceding action, it can still be appropriate to jam the pot, but it won't necessarily be automatic.
- Don't get lazy with a mediocre hand.
  - Too often players are just happy to get to a showdown when they have a medium to poor strength hand. They check, hoping they can pick up half the pot. Far too often these people miss

opportunities for thin value bets or bluffs when it's clear their opponent can't have anything.

- Before simply checking back these hands, replay the entire hand over in your mind. What kind of hands is your opponent likely to be holding? Can they be holding something that is worse than what you have but something they may be able to justify a call with? If so, value bet. Is it clear they can't have the draw that came in on the river? If so and it is the type of player that is capable of folding, you may be able to bluff and take the whole pot instead of half.



## Chapter 6 – Advanced Postflop Concepts

### Be Aggressive Heads Up with Marginal Two-Way Hands

This is the key concept to playing winning PLO8 poker. It is what is required to become a big winner, and is not understood by most players. When a beginning and/or bad PLO8 player has a medium strength two-way hand, they will almost always just try to check the hand down and get to a cheap showdown. This is the exact opposite of what you should be doing.

In these situations, you will usually end up chopping the pot if the hand gets to showdown. By being aggressive and creating fold equity, you can turn a break-even situation into a very profitable one. It also keeps the pressure on your opponents and takes them out of their comfort zones. Your opponents will often have a one-way hand, and they will be in a very difficult position when deciding whether or not to call.

#### Example 6.1:

Consider an example where you hold  $2♥ 4♥ 5♠ 7♣$  and your opponent holds  $A♠ A♣ 4♦ T♣$ . It was folded to you in the CO, you raised 3.5BB's, and your opponent flat called out of the BB. There are 7.5 BB's in the pot. The flop comes out  $3♦ 6♣ Q♠$ . You have a draw to the third nut low and a straight draw. The villain checks his over-pair of aces with second-nut low draw. You bet pot and the villain calls. There are now 22.5BB's in the pot. The turn card is an  $8♦$  and the villain checks again. You now have made the third nut low and have a wrap straight draw. The villain has now check-called the flop and checked again on the turn. Given that most PLO8 players are very straightforward, he

most likely has a weak hand. This is a great situation to continue applying the pressure. You bet the pot again. The villain now is faced with calling 22.5BB's into a 45BB pot. He knows there are no flush or straight draws possible yet and his aces may be good for the high and has made the second nut low, so he makes the call hoping it will go check-check on the river. The pot is now 67.5BB's. The river card is a 5♠ giving you a non-nut straight to go with your fourth-nut low. Now you have marginal made hands in both directions.

Now let's stop and think about what our opponent would need to scoop us. The first thing they need is a better low, which means they must have A-2 or A-4 for a low. Then they need a better high, which means they need exactly 7-9. So the only way you will get scooped is if your opponent holds exactly A-2-7-9 or A-4-7-9. If the villain held one of these hands, it's reasonable that he could have played the hand the way he did. But given the range of hands that he could have, the probability that he has one of these hands is extremely small.

Now consider the hands he could hold that would win half the pot, or that you would scoop him with. This is a very large set of hands, basically everything that isn't the two hands mentioned above.

You bet pot again and now the villain has to call 67.5BB's into a 135BB pot. Given the way you have played the hand by betting out on every street, he knows he can't reasonably expect to scoop, unless you have been playing like a maniac. He knows at best he will get half the pot and effectively be calling 67.5BB's to win 67.5BB's back. Since this was a heads up pot, he'll ultimately be risking most of his stack to simply win his money back. Since his hand is marginal in both directions and considering the heat you have put on him throughout the hand, he decides to fold.

This is an excellent result for us. Because of our aggression, we turned a situation where we should have been simply getting our money back into one where we won 67BB's.

This is a prime example of how you can profit from being hyper-aggressive when heads up. But realize that the reason we were able to do this was that we always had something going for us in each direction. Had we been played back at, we could have gotten it all in. We would not have been able to bet every street if we only had a one-way hand like the bare nut or second-nut low; we would have had to fold to a pot-sized re-raise on the flop or the turn.

## Hand Reading

This is one of the most important sections in this book, and is perhaps the biggest factor that separates good players from great PLO8 players. Learning to read hands is an absolutely vital skill that you must learn. Most players are already familiar with the importance of this from NLHE. Unfortunately most people feel that because there are four cards, and there are both high and low hands, and because many players play such a high percentage of their hands, that hand reading in PLO8 is basically impossible. Instead they just focus on playing their own cards. Let me assure you that *hand reading is feasible in PLO8*, and once you learn some basic concepts, your game will improve dramatically.

The basic process for reading hands begins by assuming that our opponent can have any four cards. But as the hand progresses on each street and they make decisions, each decision they make will narrow down their possible holdings. This is the same basic process used when playing NLHE. We usually won't be able to be quite as accurate as is possible in NLHE since the number of hand combinations is much larger in PLO8, but we can be accurate enough that hand reading will dramatically increase our win rate. In tougher games at higher limits, hand reading becomes essential to be a winning player. The key is to learn how to apply this to PLO8, which very few players actually understand.

Let's start by discussing preflop hand ranges. Basically there are four types of hands someone may hold preflop:

- AAxx hands
- A2xx hands
- Good to mediocre hands
  - Ace plus wheel cards
  - Low cards with a suit or two
  - Connected high cards
- Trash hands
  - Middle cards
  - Hands with 'danglers'
  - Disconnected high cards
  - Non-ace big pairs

The last two groups encompass an extremely large number of hands, but if we can get an idea what group our opponent's hand may be in, it is still a tremendous value in helping us play the hand.

To do this, we need to look at the pre-flop raise %, VPIP of the player, and their position. Note that for extremely loose-passive or loose-aggressive players, they are probably not considering position in their decision to bet, limp, or fold preflop (or on any other decision for that matter). The easiest situation is when you have a player with a very low preflop raise % (5% or lower) in early position and they open for a raise. This is usually A-A-x-x. For a player with an 8% PFR, they may have A-A-x-x or A-2-x-x. For a player with a VPIP of 25% and 0% PFR that limps, they could have anything from a good to mediocre hand to an A-A-x-x hand. We're not going to be able to narrow ranges down super far preflop, but we can begin the process.

It is very profitable if you can figure out when a player has A-A-x-x. Many weaker players will hold onto aces far too long postflop when it is obvious they are beat. If you are against a monkey with a 60% VPIP and 2% PFR that opens for a raise,

this is a scenario where he likely has A-A-x-x and isn't looking to fold it after the flop. In this situation, you can call with almost any 4 cards and then just get the money in if you out-flop aces.

Postflop is where things begin to get interesting. Here there are again four basic types of hands that your opponent can have plus combinations.

- Made lows
- Low draws
- Made highs
- High draws
- Any of the 4 combinations: made low / made high, made low / high draw, low draw / made high, low draw / high draw.

The primary key to narrowing down ranges postflop is to look at a player's aggression factor. If they have a very low aggression factor and they are betting, they are likely to have made hands, and could possibly have the nuts. The higher their aggression factor, the less the fact that they made a bet helps us narrow down their range.

The next step is to consider the board texture. If the board texture is very dry, such as 2-9-K rainbow, and a passive player bets out, their range is likely to be sets and two pair. The more texture the board has, the more possibilities there are. If there is a low draw, a flush draw, and a straight draw on the board, it will be difficult to narrow your opponent's range. If there are multiple draws and one of them hits on the turn, and then someone bets out, it likely hit him since most players are straightforward. If one of the draws hits and a player checks and calls, then it generally doesn't tell you much about his hand. The exception is if a high draw was completed and no low is possible. In this case, it is unlikely they have a nut high. If they had, they may have bet out or check-raised, but would be less likely to check and call and give you a chance to make a low and split the pot

with them. Here are some guidelines on how the basic player types handle different types of flops:

- Calling station
  - They love to check and call, and will do it a huge percentage of the time. Since they do it so often, it doesn't say much about their hands when they do, other than they usually don't have complete air.
  - When they bet out this says a lot. It means they hit the flop and like their hand. If a low is possible, they may have the nut low.
  - If someone bets out and then they make a raise, it means they usually have the nuts. Or at a minimum, they have the nuts in one direction and likely have some potential for the other direction.
  - Pay attention to the aggression factor of these opponents. Most are loose and passive, with an aggression factor under 2. But a few are loose and aggressive players who will make strange raises. When you are against a very loose and aggressive player, their bets and raises don't narrow their range nearly as much.
- Weak-tight
  - These players love to check and fold. When they check and call, it generally signals that their hand is weak, or they may have some kind of draw. But if they check, they will tend to fold to a bet.
  - If they bet or make a raise, they usually have the nuts.
  - If they check and call and then a draw hits on the turn, you can often bet the scare card and get them to fold. In general, you should fire two barrels

against these players much more often than you do against the other types of players.

- **Competent**
  - When they call they will certainly have something, so you can narrow their range much more than you can against a calling station.
  - Inversely, when they bet or make a raise their ranges are not as polarized as the other types of players. The reason for this is they tend to be more aggressive than the other players and bet a wider variety of hands.
  - When you are heads up against them and they bet into you, you should tend to call them lighter than you would the other types of players. Since these players generally understand the importance of being aggressive when heads up, they will be betting much more often. It's important that they don't get an idea that you are weak-tight.
  - They may also shut down on the turn if a scare card comes. It is ok to sometimes float them lightly on the flop and then try to take the pot away from them on the turn if they show weakness. Don't overdo this though. There should be at least a few turn cards that make you a strong hand. Even a few scoop outs dramatically increase your equity. If you make too big of a habit of calling flops with air and then trying to bluff turns, you will end up spewing off a lot of chips.

## **Playing Heads Up SNG's to Learn Hand Reading**

One of the best ways you can improve your hand reading skills is to play heads up sit n' goes. This will give you the opportunity to focus on a single opponent and learn to recognize their patterns and tendencies.

It is better to do this with sit n' goes as opposed to cash games for several reasons:

- Your opponent cannot quit on you after only a few hands (unless of course the match only lasts a few hands).
- The rake is much smaller. The rake is significant in heads up cash games unless you are playing at least mid stakes levels. Assuming you are learning how to play the game, you don't want to play mid stakes or higher even if you are bankrolled for it.
- You are less likely to run into a heads up specialist, although few PLO8 heads up specialists exist at the time of this writing.

As you learn to adapt to different opponents and exploit them, it will become easier to do this in games with multiple opponents. While in general it is easier begin learning PLO8 in a full ring game and then progress to short handed game, when learning to play postflop it is actually easier to learn playing heads up and then move to games with more players. Remember that your goal is to focus on a single opponent and improve your post flop play. Only play one table at a time when doing this. Don't surf the internet and turn off AIM. Just focus in and you will be amazed at how much you learn.

Here is a list of things to be thinking about during each match:

- Focus on trying to keep the pot smaller when you are out of position and playing bigger pots when you are in position to maximize your advantage when you have position and minimize your disadvantage when you don't have it.
  - Notice how much easier it is to play postflop in position versus when you are out of position.



- Does your opponent vary his play or does he tend to do the same thing every time in a given situation?
- What are your opponent's pre flop tendencies?
  - What does a raise from the button mean? Do they do it every time? Or only with certain hands? What does it say about their range?
  - How willing is he to play out of position? Is his range of hands significantly different when in or out of position? Does he only build pots in position, or does he not seem to care either way?
- What does your opponent do with strong made hands?
  - Does he tend to fast play them?
  - Or is he a habitual slow player?
  - Or somewhere in between?
- What does he do with weak hands?
  - Will he tend to simply check-fold?
  - Or will he sometimes attempt bluffs?
  - Can you induce bluffs when your opponent has a weak hand?
- Does he understand the difference between good and bad draws?
  - Will he consistently draw when he shouldn't?
  - Is he aggressive with draws? Or does he tend to wait until his draw hits to inflate the pot?
- Is he aggressive with one-way hands? Or does he tend to try to make nut-nut before building a pot?
- Will he fold to scare cards, or is he a relentless calling station?

These are just a few of the things you should be thinking about. A complete list would be almost limitless.

Also, remember that the purpose of this is to improve your postflop play. Don't worry so much about what your pre flop strategy is. You know by now that hand equities run very close

in this game. If you have a significant post flop edge you can justify playing almost every hand, particularly in position. But there is nothing wrong with throwing away a lot of your weaker holdings preflop. Just don't give away the strength of your hand. In other words, don't check or limp preflop with all of your weak hands and fold to raises, and then make raises with your stronger hands.

Of course, your opponent's hand ranges will be much wider than they will in a 6-max or full ring game. That actually helps you learn to play postflop because it makes it more difficult to narrow down his range of hands as each street progresses. But once you learn to do it heads up, it will become much easier in regular games. This will put you on your way to developing a huge postflop edge over most opponents.

### **Thinking Ahead**

When considering decisions, think in terms of bet-fold, check-call, etc instead of simply thinking about fold, call, raise, check....

When making a decision, try to think more than one move ahead. If you are first to act after the flop, your decision is to check or bet. But in reality you have more decisions than that. Are you going to check and call if your opponent bets? Are you going to check and raise? Check and fold? Bet with the intention of calling a raise? Bet with the intention of folding to a re-raise? What kind of card will be good for you on the turn, which cards are bad? How will you react to a good or bad card on the turn? These are things you can and should be thinking about *before* you act on the flop.

Think of the game in terms of chess. The best chess players in the world can think several moves ahead, and quickly grasp all of the possible permutations. In poker you don't necessarily need to be capable of thinking five moves ahead, but the further ahead you can think the easier the game will be for you. It will

keep you out of marginal situations, and lower your stress levels because you will already have a good idea how you will react to situations before they happen.

The last thing you want is to be in a position where you bet into a pot and get re-raised and have no idea how you are going to react. When you are bewildered and confused and trying to think quickly under stress, you have a recipe for making bad decisions. If you have already decided that you are going to fold to a re-raise or re-pot a re-raise, there is no stress; you just follow through.

Now this doesn't mean that you can't change your mind. Sometimes you think of something in the middle of a hand that you didn't realize when you made your initial decision and you need to change it. Perhaps you planned to bet and shove to a re-raise. Then you bet and it gets re-raised but you realize that this particular player has a very small aggression factor and he is likely to have the nuts. You may change your mind and fold. That's fine. The point though is that the farther you are thinking ahead, the better your decisions will be and the less stress you will have.

### **Controlling the Pot Size**

Thinking ahead also means thinking about your ideal pot size. Do you want to play a large pot or a small one? If you are thinking about the size of pot you want, you can manipulate it in your favor.

In general if you have a big hand, you want a big pot. The more marginal or weak your hand is, the more you should tend to control the size of the pot and keep it smaller. Hand strength is not the only variable that determines how large of a pot you want to play.

It is also important to consider your position. Generally:

- Play larger pots in position.
- Try to keep the pot smaller when out of position.

### **Min Bets Generally Mean Weakness**

This concept applies to PLO8 in the same way that it does to NLHE. Usually when a player makes a min bet into a reasonable size pot, it indicates weakness. Their thought process goes something like, “I have a weak hand so I don’t want to make a bet, but if I check the other player will bet and I can’t call, so I’ll just make a min bet and hope the other guy calls and I’ll get to see another card.” You can often raise these bets with air if the pot is heads up, and it usually works.

An exception to watch out for is when someone makes a min bet with a monster. The thought process here is “I have a monster but I don’t want to bet because the other guy may fold, but I don’t want to check because he might check behind, so I’ll just min bet and I’ll be assured of getting at least some money in the pot.” So if you raise a min-bettor and get played back at, you should tend to back off unless you have a big hand yourself. But the vast majority of the time a min-bet will indicate weakness, and that weakness should be attacked. When you are attacking weakness you generally want to do it with full pot-sized bets to maximize your fold equity and the value of your hand relative to your opponent’s.

### **Implied Tilt Odds**

Another concept to consider is implied tilt odds. If you know a given opponent has a tendency to steam or go on tilt, then you can try to help push him over the edge to get him on tilt and playing badly.

One way to do this is to intentionally draw to a hand where

you do not have even close to the correct pot odds or implied odds to call, in hope of putting a bad beat on the villain. Against a steamer, you can sometimes cause them to ‘go off’ and begin to play very hard at you, thinking you are a terrible player.

If you can get them to berate you in the chat box so much the better! I love it when someone calls me a donkey or other assorted things, because this lets me know I have them right where I want them. Of course, don’t take this concept too far. It only works against very specific players, and you have to have some very good reason to believe you are up against someone who will tilt to try this play.

Plus the vast majority of the time the play won’t work (it is by definition a low probability play), and you will lose money. Sometimes you can get someone to tilt but they will respond by quitting the game instead of dumping money to you.

## **Bluffing**

There are many different types of bluffs. But to keep things simple I’m going to divide them into two categories. These are pure bluffs and semi-bluffs.

Pure bluffs are when your hand has completely missed the board and the only way you can win is to get your opponent to fold. For example if the board is A-4-6 and you hold 8-9-10-J, you don’t expect to have much if any equity if called.

Semi-bluffs are when you do have some equity in the hand, and if you are called you may still win. When you have situations where the equities between your hand and your opponent’s are likely to be close but you are somewhat behind, if you can get him to fold it is a tremendous victory to you. This is what you are trying to accomplish when you semi-bluff. ***Semi-bluffing often is one of the qualities that distinguish top PLO8 players from the others.***

It is very difficult in PLO8 to have a hand that dominates another hand and extract a lot of value unless your opponent is

a very bad player. When hand equities are close, the player with the edge will be the one that does the best job of maximizing his fold equity. Although semi-bluffing is very important, this doesn't mean that you will do it every time. If you do, your opponents will begin to call you down very light and will begin to play back at you.

Now that we know how important it is to semi-bluff, let's look at the different situations that commonly arise and consider when we should do it and when we shouldn't.

### Good Bluffing and Semi-bluffing Situations

If you are against competent opponents, tend to bet boards with middle cards. Any remotely reasonable player should know that middle cards are trash in PLO8. Therefore, if the flop has a lot of 8's 9's and 10's, it is unlikely to have hit a player that knows what he's doing.

The next type of board that you should bet into often is high only boards. Generally because players tend to like wheel cards, they should be less likely than normal to have hit the board. The other bonus you get when you bet into a board like this is you tend to know exactly where you stand in the hand. If you bet into a high only board and get called, you can be sure that your opponent has something. This means that on the turn you should tend not to fire a second barrel unless you have made some kind of hand.

The other time that is good to try to take a player off of a hand is when a wheel card falls on the turn, particularly if it is a 2. Players love to play any A2 hand, and often when an A or a 2 falls they will get counterfeited. Although the A counterfeits the A2, many players will still be reluctant to fold because they now have a pair of aces, and may have made 2 pair. It is much easier to get them off of their hand when they get counterfeited by a 2.

But ***one of the best times to bet is when a scare card falls.*** Scare cards are ones that make hands that beat the hand your

opponent was likely to have on the flop. For example, suppose the flop is 3♥ 4♥ 9♦. You hold the bare ace of hearts. It is checked to you on the flop and you bet 2/3 the size of the pot and get called by one opponent. In this scenario, is it likely your opponent has a low draw and could have a non-nut flush draw to go with it. The turn is the 9♥ completing the flush draw and giving anyone with a 9 trips. It is checked to you again and this time you bet full pot. Usually this bet will take the pot down. You are blocking the nut flush and it is somewhat unlikely that your opponent has a 9 since he shouldn't be playing middle cards (although if he is a bad player that does play middle cards this changes the equation somewhat). If your opponent is drawing to a low, he would be incorrect to draw for half. You should tend to get a lot of folds from bets like this.

### Bad Bluffing and Semi-Bluffing Situations

Almost never bluff against calling stations. Some players can find any reason to call no matter how hopeless their situation. You should be value betting into these players and not trying to bluff them.

In general one of the worst times to bluff is on the river. Typically if a player has made it that far in the hand they are never going to fold. The exception is if they have been drawing the entire way and bricked out. You may consider a bluff on the river if there were obvious draws that all missed.

### **Double and Triple Barreling**

If you make a continuation bet, and then bet again on the turn, that is a double barrel. Betting the river in addition to the other streets is a triple barrel. Usually it's only considered a double or triple barrel when you are bluffing.

Very few players in PLO8 will make double or triple barrel bluffs. The exception is usually if they are tilting and frustrated

and just shoving their chips in with any cards. Generally players are very passive and if they make a continuation bet and get called and then don't improve on the turn, they will shut down. Unless you have reason to believe a player is on monster tilt when they bet the flop and the turn, you can be pretty sure they have a hand.

How often should you be making double and triple barrel bluffs? The short answer is not nearly as often as you would in NLHE or PLO. But there are still times when it is appropriate.

The best time to fire a second barrel is when you are heads up against an opponent who you know is capable of folding and an obvious draw misses on the turn. Although most players are willing to draw badly, they will almost always give you credit for a hand if you bet the flop and the turn. Very few players expect double barrel bluffs to be attempted against them.

The best turn cards to fire a second barrel on are blanks. PLO8 is a game of draws, and players will tend to have draws on the flop more often than made hands. When a blank comes off they may give up, especially if they hold a one-way hand. Most players will give you credit for a strong hand if you bet both the flop and the turn. This is mostly because they themselves are relatively passive and would only do this if they had a monster.

It is almost never correct to triple barrel when on a bluff. If a player calls a significant bet on the flop and the turn, they are almost always calling on the river.

### **Check-Raising and Check-Raise Bluffing**

Check-raising is not used very often in PLO8. Part of the reason for this is that it is often used to keep overly aggressive players in line, but in PLO8 there are few aggressive players. Most players are too passive, so if you check to them they will often check behind.

Occasionally you will run into a player that is trying to run you over and you can check raise them for value. The good thing



about check-raising in PLO8 is that when you can do it your opponent will rarely ever fold. Players love to call, so when you do check raise you can usually count on getting called. For this reason ***you want to do it for value and rarely as a bluff***. An exception would be if you've seen a player fold in this situation before. But it is rare to see a player do this and then get into a situation where you can check raise them.

One scenario where a check raise bluff often works is when the board is paired. Most players understand that a paired board on the flop is difficult to hit and therefore is a good flop to bluff. Also, for most players if they flop trips on a paired board, they will generally check to you. You sometimes can check on a paired board to induce a bet and then check raise to take the pot down. But if you get played back at, be sure to give up unless you have a strong hand.

## Getting Bluffed

If you are playing good poker, then you are going to get bluffed from time to time. If you never get bluffed, it means you are calling way too often. However, ***in PLO8 you shouldn't worry about getting bluffed too much***. You should certainly worry less than in other poker games. This is because most players play very straightforwardly and usually won't bet unless they have some kind of hand.

If you hold a marginal hand and are facing a big river bet and feel it is a very close decision between calling and folding, you should tend to give your opponent credit for a good hand. Players just won't attempt to bluff you very often.

Some players absolutely hate the idea of being bluffed and try to make too many 'hero' calls on the end. While you will face bluffs from time to time, you just shouldn't worry about them too much in PLO8. As far as getting check-raise bluffed, you should take a note if you ever see this because very few players ever attempt it.



## Chapter 7 – SNG’s and MTT’s

This book focuses primarily on cash games, but it would be incomplete without some information on tournament play. Here is a primer on the basics of playing PLO8 Sit and Go’s (SNG’s) and Multi-Table Tournaments (MTT’s).

### **Sit and Go (SNG) Strategy**

The basic strategy for PLO8 SNG’s is identical to that of NLHE SNG’s. You want to play very, very tight early on, and then open up when the blinds get bigger. Your edge comes primarily from two things:

1. Opponents who play too many hands early and spew chips.
2. Opponents who play incorrectly at and beyond the bubble.

Notice that the edge does not come so much from your own fantastic play but from your opponents’ mistakes. To some degree this is true in all poker games, but it is particularly true in PLO8 SNG’s. It’s tough to get much of an edge because the hand equities run so close, and most poker players have some understanding of basic SNG strategy.

Generally in cash games, you get an edge either from value-betting calling stations or by getting weak-tight players to fold when they shouldn’t. The difficulty with SNG’s is that you can’t wait around very long for a good hand to value bet a calling station to death with. Likewise, because the stack sizes are so small, it is difficult to get players to fold when they shouldn’t.

There is much less postflop play in SNG’s than there is in

cash games, due to the small starting stack sizes and rapidly increasing blinds. Therefore *when assessing starting hands, the strength will be evaluated mostly on the equity versus ranges of hands, and less on the playability of the hand.*

### Basic PLO8 SNG Strategy

The basic SNG strategy is simply to play tight early, then accurately jam or fold late when the blinds get large. This is the same strategy that is applied to NLHE but with some key differences in the way these games play out. The first difference is that your competition will tend to make more early game mistakes. They will have a tendency to play too many hands. The second is that because starting hand equities run closer, it will be easier to play accurately late. The third (and this one stinks) is that it is also easier for your opponents to play accurately. The fourth is that while I say it is push or fold late, often you will not be pushing all in because your bet is limited to the size of the pot, but you will be committing yourself and will essentially be pushing all in.

### Early Play

Early on in the game you want to play super tight. Stick to hands like A-2-low-x, A-A-low-x, etc. Typically you want to just limp from early to middle position. Raising from late position is ok if you are the first player into the pot, but not raising at all until the blinds get to the 100-200 level is ok as well.

***The key to early game play is conserving your chips.***

If you flop a monster, then by all means jam. Or if there are particularly bad players in the game, you should try to take advantage of them. But overall if you play a pot and lose, the chips you lost hurt you worse than the chips you might have won would have helped you. Assuming a structure that is not winner take all, you will lose slightly more tournament equity

for the chips you lose than the gain if you win. But early on with 9 or 10 players, this effect is fairly small. The bigger reason you don't want to lose chips early is you will get into a push/fold scenario much earlier. Once you are in that push/fold scenario, your options are severely limited, and once you push you are likely to get called and most of the time will be facing a coin flip situation for your SNG life.

***Don't be afraid to limp.*** Even early in the SNG, the stack sizes will be relatively short compared to a cash game. Hand equities don't begin to diverge until the flop comes out, so you can wait until after the flop to put serious chips in. If you raise preflop you will tend to get more callers anyway than you would in a cash game, so save the chips preflop. If you hit a flop hard, you will usually find someone to come along with you since there will be so many people seeing the flop.

### Late Play

When you get down to about 7 BB's or less, it can be considered late game play. At this point you are either folding or betting the pot, and putting the rest of the money in on the flop almost no matter what. There are a few exceptions, such as when you have a bigger hand, you may want to just min-raise. But this is not a play that you will frequently make.

It is important to realize that PLO8 end-game SNG play is different than NLHE end-game SNG play. ***Because the hand equities run close and given the split pot nature of the game, you can let your stack size get shorter before you need to go into push/fold mode.***

It is important in late game play to know your players. Hopefully you will have been paying attention and you know who is a calling station, who will fold, and who seems to know what they're doing. You often will not be able to determine this since you don't get to play many hands in a SNG. Also, the correct strategy changes as you get later in the SNG, so you

won't necessarily know if your opponents will adjust to the small stack sizes in the late game until it is too late.

Although you will open up later in the game, you still want to try to play as tight as you can. This is a somewhat paradoxical statement, but I'll explain. When the stacks get short, you will have to go with your good hands since you may be blinded off before you see another one. But you will gain a lot of equity when other players knock each other out, particularly on the bubble. Consider a situation when you are on the bubble and you have the shortest stack. The two middle sized stacks, which have roughly equal chips, go all in. When this happens, you instantly gain significant equity in the tournament by virtue of doing basically nothing. There can be lots of benefit from letting your opponents get antsy and push early with marginal hands.

A key concept for late game play is that it is far better to push with a marginal hand than to call with a good one. When you are the one doing the pushing you have fold equity. When you call you will need your hand to hold up. But given how close the starting hand equities run you will usually not be a significant favorite even with a good hand. Plus most of your edge in PLO8 SNG's comes from your opponents making bad folds, so when you push you are giving them an opportunity to make a mistake.

***When you do get it in near the end of an SNG, it is vital that you have some potential to make both a high and a low, no matter how weak.*** High hands go down even further in value in SNG's than they do in cash games. Late in a SNG, players are desperate and will often get in with less than premium hands. Having any low potential is vitally important, even if it is lousy. As you learned in Chapter 3, high only hands usually have poor hot and cold equity versus most hands. And late in a SNG you will usually be going to showdown when you play a hand, so you will typically be an underdog when you play these hands.

A naked A-2 hand is always marginal, but it is basically useless near the end of a SNG. The reason for this is realistically

you can only make a low, and a low will not always be possible. Thus when you get all in with a naked A-2 hand, you will usually either chop or get eliminated. You need some sort of a high feature to go with an A-2 for it to be playable.

If you are fortunate enough to have a big stack when the blinds are high, you can usually win the game by bullying the desperate small stacks. Even with a lousy hand, you usually won't be too far behind. You may be behind in the hand equity when you get called, but you will more than make up for that with the tournament equity you will gain the times when you knock players out.

### Some Comments About Bubble Play

This section will not provide an in-depth discussion of ICM (Independent Chip Modeling), but it will provide a brief overview of it and its implications on bubble play. A complete discussion of PLO8 SNG end game play requires its own book; this section is merely intended to provide an overview. But there is enough information that the motivated reader should have the knowledge to go out and solve these end game problems himself. This takes a lot of work due to the lack of software to quickly solve these problems. Such software is widely available for NLHE, but at this time none exists for PLO8.

ICM is a method of calculating your equity in the tournament given the chip stacks of all of the players remaining. Notice that this is not your equity in a given hand, but your equity in the prize pool. Many websites have free calculators that will compute your equity. It is important to realize that your equity in the tournament is not the same as the percentage of the tournament chips you have, except in a few special cases. (One of these cases is when all of the players have exactly the same number of chips.)

## **Multi-Table Tournament (MTT) Strategy**

As with the SNG's, proper MTT strategy for PLO8 can vary dramatically from proper MTT strategy for NLHE. Of course having a good fundamental understanding of how to play NLHE tournaments is very helpful. You need to understand that not all of those concepts apply and know when and how to vary from that strategy.

There are two basics styles that you can employ in PLO8 MTT's. They are the aggressive style and the passive style. Both of these styles only apply until it is late in the tournament. Late in the tournament you will always want to play very aggressively to maximize your chances of finishing in the top three.

### The Aggressive Style

When playing the aggressive style, you will basically push small edges whenever you can. The idea is that hand equities in PLO8 run close, so you can't afford to pass up on 60/40 edges and 55/45 edges. You should play essentially the same as you would in a cash game, raising 3x and 3.5x pre-flop and sometimes re-raising when in position.

This is a high volatility style that will either enable you to build up a large stack of chips or bust out early. You will need a larger bankroll to employ the aggressive style than if you were using the passive style. You will have fewer cashes, but the cashes you do have will tend to be larger.

### The Passive Style

When playing the passive style you will almost never raise pre-flop, with the exception of maybe some min-raises from position. The theory behind this style is since your edge over the field is very large, you do not want to risk busting early. This style also takes advantage of one of the unique features of



PLO8, free-rolling. You will have many opportunities to free-roll during a PLO8 tournament. This is much different than in games like NLHE where you will rarely have a free-roll. So why should you risk your tournament life on a 60/40 when you will have multiple opportunities to win a big pot with zero risk? This is a very strong argument for taking the passive approach for playing tournaments.

### Which Style is Better?

For most players, the passive style is the superior one. It gives you the opportunity to take maximum advantage of the ability to free-roll or to make the nuts. The play in MTT's tends to be even softer than in cash games, and there is lots of limping and calling pre-flop. Raising pre-flop in these games will result in very large multi-way pots. This means you will encounter very high variance, and this variance means you will often bust out before you have a chance to take advantage of your skill edge.

Playing the high variance style can make sense if there is a juicy cash game that you can jump into if you bust. In this case, you may want to either build a large stack or be eliminated early. The other scenario where you may want to be more aggressive early is if the field is very tough and you don't feel that you have an edge. By creating large pots pre-flop and increasing the variance, you can dilute your opponents' advantage. But tough PLO8 games are few and far between, and if you digest the information in this book and can apply it, you will never find a table where you are at a disadvantage.

While there are some rare circumstances where it could make sense to use the aggressive style, ***if you want to maximize your return on investment (ROI), you should tend to play a passive style in tournaments.***

Just focusing on survival can result in large returns in MTT's. The reason for this is that during the course of a tournament, you

will have several opportunities to free-roll and quarter opponents. When you are free-rolling or have half of the pot locked up, it means you can get your chips in with zero risk. This means you can afford to wait for these situations and can build up a chip stack despite playing very tight. It is ok to pass up on small equity edges to ensure that you survive to get more opportunities to quarter people. Sometimes it is ok to even pass up large edges. This holds true only because so many of the MTT players you will encounter are extremely bad. If there were more competent players then you could not afford to pass up these edges. ***Being able to get your money in with zero risk is an aspect of PLO8 MTT's that is unique and causes your strategy to vary from a NLHE MTT.***

Here is a series of guidelines for playing PLO8 MTT's:

- Survival is the key.
  - You will have many opportunities to free-roll and quarter opponents so you can afford to play very tight.
- Play tight early on.
  - You will have lots of opportunities where you can free-roll opponents. Therefore you should not feel pressured to take advantage of small edges. Players in PLO8 MTT's tend to be even worse than in cash games, so the value of taking advantage of a small edge is diminished.
- Stealing the blinds is not as important.
  - This is mostly because there are no antes in PLO8 tournaments. It is also because, since your stack effectively plays larger, you won't need to steal the blinds to keep out of desperation mode.
- Limping behind and open limping is ok.
  - In general limping is not such a bad thing in PLO8. It is certainly not the cardinal sin that it is in NLHE. There are many reasons why if

there are some limpers in front of you that you may want to limp behind instead of raise, even if you have a very strong starting hand. Most players will call regardless of what they have, so you will have very little fold equity. Another is that even early in the MTT, the stack sizes will be relatively small. There is nothing wrong with waiting until the flop to decide whether or not you want to commit significant chips to the pot. Plus most players in PLO8 MTT's are even more passive than they are in a cash game, so if you limp you usually don't have to worry as much about someone behind you making a big raise, and you won't have to put in more chips to see a flop.

- Stack sizes in PLO8 tournaments play effectively larger than they do in NLHE tournaments.
  - This is largely due to the split pot nature of the game and the close starting hand equities. Don't feel nearly as pressured to make moves as you normally would in an NLHE tournament.
  - Your stack will play approximately twice as large as it will in a NLH MTT.
- Rarely re-raise a late position raiser out of the blinds unless your stack is short enough that you are committed to the pot.
  - In general you don't want to build large pots pre-flop; you want to wait until after the flop to do that. You also don't want to play pots out of position. Position is every bit as important in a tournament as it is in a cash game. To combine playing a large pot preflop and playing out of position is suicidal.
  - The exception is when you want to commit yourself to the pot and you plan to get all-in no

matter what comes on the flop.

- Your long term ROI will ultimately be determined by how often you finish in the top three.
  - In the late game stages of a tournament, you should not be afraid to take flips and go for the win.
  - When the tournament gets down to about the last two tables you can throw many of the rules listed about out the window. Now raising pre-flop to apply pressure has lots of value as players are trying to hang on to make the final table and then move up to the next payout. By this stage in the tournament, you will have also cultivated a very tight image, so any players who may be paying attention (there may not be too many) will tend to give you credit for a good hand when you raise and your fold equity should be increased.
- A decent portion of the field in PLO8 MTT's has no idea how to play, which makes MTT's perhaps the juiciest form of PLO8 poker.
  - Many players enter PLO8 MTT's purely for entertainment purposes, perhaps just to try out a new game.

PLO8 tournaments are very juicy, even when the buy-ins are relatively high. PLO8 is now included in the WSOP, and in every online tournament series. Many players will enter these PLO8 events simply because they are part of one of these tournament series, and don't necessarily know how to play the game and have no idea what adjustments to make. Since most players come from a NLHE background, they will tend to overvalue high only hands, and push too soon in the late game stages of a tournament. This means that these PLO8 events can be some of your best opportunities to win a bracelet or to make a major score.

## Chapter 8 – Miscellaneous Topics

### Data-mining

Data-mining is simply collecting hand histories to generate a database of information. Note that it is not permitted by all poker sites. For information gained from data-mining to be useful, a large sample size is required. It is difficult to get a large sample size from PLO8 players because there are so few regulars, and relatively few games to collect data from relative to NLHE and PLO.

In preparation for writing this book, I collected data over several weeks. The data was filtered for players which had at least 5,000 hands with at least 6 players in the hand. There were only 44 players in the database which met these criteria. This is by no means a large enough sample to draw conclusions that are statistically valid. But it is enough that we can get some general ideas of which statistics correlate to a high win rate and which ones don't.

Of these 44 players, 27 were winning players and 17 were losing players. This makes sense since the only players that play enough to not get filtered out of this study are the regular players. Regular players are much more likely to be winners than casual or recreational players. Unfortunately these recreational players either play infrequently, or go broke, so it is rare to be able to collect enough hands on a player like this for it to have any statistical significance. This means that the sample of hands in this study is not indicative of the typical PLO8 player; they are indicative of regular players that tend to be better than average. But this is actually good for this study since the purpose is to determine what statistics separate the best players from the others.

***The only statistics which correlated with win rate in this study were preflop raise % (PFR), and preflop aggression factor.*** VPIP and postflop aggression did not correlate at all. Neither did other factors like: how often the player went to showdown, how often they won at showdown, % folding to steals, and % attempting steals.

***The primary conclusion that can be drawn from this data set is that there is a wide variety of playing styles that can be successful at PLO8.***

You can successfully play PLO8 with almost any VPIP. If you play tighter and have a smaller VPIP, you can win money because you will tend to make stronger hands postflop. If you are very skillful post-flop, then you can play with a very high VPIP. But beware you should be very experienced before you play with a high VPIP. You need to be very good at hand reading and be able to understand how your opponents are playing, and know when to lay down marginal hands and when to push small edges. If you are a beginning player, you should tend to play a tighter, lower VPIP style. This advice applies even if you are a strong and experienced NLHE or PLO player.

Why do preflop raising and aggression correlate so well to win rate? First realize that these two statistics basically go hand in hand and are not really that different. If you have a high PFR you will tend to have a high preflop aggression factor and vice versa. There are several reasons why these statistics correlate with win rate:

- You widen your opening hand range and make it more difficult for players to put you on a hand.
  - This means they will make more mistakes against you post-flop.
  - Most players only raise with AA or A2, so they will tend to put you on these exact hands when you raise. When you raise with other hands and then make the nuts, your opponents will tend to

not give you credit for the hand you have.

- You get more value out of your good position.
  - Not raising enough on the button or in the cutoff is one of the most common leaks of decent PLO8 players.
- Raising preflop gets players out of their comfort zone.
  - Most PLO8 players like to almost always limp in, and then see if they hit the flop before committing significant chips. Raising preflop dramatically amplifies the size of the pot by the time you get to the river. Many players are not comfortable playing in these larger pots. When players are out of their comfort zone, they will have more of a tendency to make mistakes.
- By creating a larger pot preflop, your opponents' postflop mistakes are magnified.

## Taking Notes

It is vital that you take notes on your opponents, particularly the regulars that you run into often. Most players either don't take notes at all, or they do it sporadically. Most people when they do take notes tend to take useless or bad ones. When we are taking notes what want to record information that:

1. Accurately describes the way the player plays.
2. Gives us information that we can *act on* to exploit the player in the future.
3. Are very succinct.

The key here is that we want information that we can act on. If you record tons of information on players but that information never actually influences any of your decisions, then you are wasting your time taking notes and may distract yourself if you are multi-tabling. One of the main advantages of playing poker

on the internet is the ability to take notes, and you are doing yourself a disservice if you fail to take advantage of it.

I recommend you keep a file with a list of standard notes. Then you can simply copy and paste the notes quickly. This will save you lots of time when taking notes, and will ensure that your notes are consistent. It is also a good idea to add the day's date when you take the note. I have run into players that I have had notes on that I took over 3 years previously. These player's games have likely changed dramatically in that amount of time and the notes may have become useless. Adding dates when taking notes will prevent you from acting on a note that has become obsolete.

You want to make sure you have a reasonable hand sample size against an opponent before reaching a conclusion about a person's play and taking a note. Making a snap judgment after seeing a person play one hand a certain way can cause you to draw the wrong conclusion. If you take notes based on these false conclusions and then act on them later, you can end up making some pretty bad decisions. It's generally a good idea to see someone make a specific play at least twice before assuming they always play that way. Misclicks happen all of the time, and sometimes players are just playing too many tables and make bad moves they wouldn't normally make. Sometimes people just brain fart, or they're drunk. Make sure you have some reasonable data before getting carried away taking notes. If you can keep detailed and accurate notes, you will be able to make far better decisions when you find yourself in marginal situations.

Here is the list of standard notes that I use and corresponding adjustments you should make.

- Will draw to the low side only
  - With a made high hand on a board with a low draw, tend to bet more than you normally would.
- Plays middle cards (8's, 9's, 10's)
  - Play your medium strength two-way hands even



more aggressively than you normally would since you will scoop more pots against this weaker hand range.

- Overplays the bare nut low
  - You can play more aggressively if you have a nut low and a mediocre high; you are more likely to scoop or quarter your opponent since they may not even have a pair for the high.
  - There are many players who will jam a pot with the nut low when it is clear they are going to get quartered. High hands go way up in value against these players.
- Plays big pairs (KK, QQ, JJ)
  - No real adjustment to make. The result will be that you end up scooping them a lot with hands that have two pair plus a low.
- Draws to non-nut hands
  - Value bet more often / thinner.
- Overplays sets on a low board
  - You can play a nut more aggressively as long as you have some high potential.
- Will draw to a high only hand when a low is possible
  - Play marginal two-way hands more aggressively.

## Table Awareness

Table awareness is a measure of how in tune you are with the state of each game you are playing. Do you understand who is a good player, who is a bad one, who is on tilt, who is winning, and countless other things? Many of these details may seem inconsequential, but being aware of them and reacting to them will have a dramatic impact on your win rate. It is often the difference between being a moderately winning player and being a big winning player.

Here's a checklist of things you should be aware of at all times. Once or twice every hour, you should run through the checklist for each table you are playing and rate your awareness. If you are not able to keep track of everything that is going on, you should play fewer tables. Players add tables to increase their hourly rate and to keep from getting bored. But if you cannot keep of track these things then you should not be getting bored.

- Who is the biggest fish at the table?
- Who is the strongest player?
- Is there anyone who is winning big?
- Is there anyone who is losing big?
- Has anyone gone on tilt or recently taken a bad beat?
- Have you been caught bluffing?
- Have the hands you have shown down been strong or weak?
- Are there any players in particular who you have shown the nuts?

Poker tracking software can greatly improve your table awareness by letting you know everyone's stats. But it won't tell you what is going on in the moment. If someone is losing and tilting, they may not be playing anything like what their stats would suggest is their normal game. The biggest winning players are aware of the current table dynamics.

### **Bankroll Management**

For the super loose-passive low limit games, you can play PLO8 on an extremely short bankroll. There are styles you can use that give you a big edge while enjoying very low variance. Basically if you play tight and rarely raise pre-flop, and then exploit your post-flop skills but don't push small edges, you can still have a solid win rate but your variance will be reduced. Mostly this is because of how bad the vast majority of players

are at this level, although the split pot nature of the game also contributes to the lower variance compared to PLO or NLHE. Of course if you were to raise more than 10% of hands pre-flop and push small edges post-flop, you will have a higher win rate. But you will also have much higher variance and therefore require a larger bankroll to play at a given limit.

As you move to the higher limits, you won't be able to win much or perhaps not at all if you employ the passive style. Your opponents won't be making as many basic errors that you can exploit. When the games become more aggressive and your opponents get better at valuing their hands appropriately, you will need to get it in much lighter and be much more aggressive. This means you will be pushing small edges and getting your money in with a lot of 55/45's and 50/50's. This results in higher variance and means a much larger bankroll is in order, no matter what your playing style. This change begins to happen around the \$1/\$2 level.

The next thing to consider is the type of player that you are. Are you simply a recreational player with a small bankroll that you can easily replace? If so, you don't need to be too concerned about bankroll management and can play with a very small number of buy-ins. The consequences of going broke are minimal for this player. However, if you are a serious amateur player with a larger roll, this won't be the case. You will need a larger bankroll for a given limit since the consequences of going broke are more severe. You may not be able to easily replace your roll and may have to start all over at the lowest limits. The last type of player we will consider here is the professional who derives all or a significant portion of his bankroll from playing poker. Now going broke means you are out of work. This is a big deal and you need to keep the probability of this happening to a bare minimum. Below is a chart with some guidelines on a minimum number of buy-ins given the player type and the limits they are playing at.

	Recreational Player	Serious Amateur	Professional
Cash game <\$1/\$2	10	20	N/A
Cash game >\$1/2	20	40	75
SNG	15	25	60
MTT	25	40	100

Keep in mind that these are simply guidelines; they are not hard and fast rules. Other things to consider are your goals in poker and your comfort level. The goals you have in poker will influence your bankroll decisions. If you are a serious amateur with the goal of becoming a professional, then you may be a bit more conservative with your bankroll, since losing your roll would prevent you from becoming a pro.

Comfort levels also vary greatly and depend on your personality, mood, and how you have been running lately. You rarely want to play outside your comfort level, and you never want to play with ‘scared money’. The times you want to play a little outside your comfort level are when you are taking shots, as will be discussed in the next section. Occasional shot-taking is a very healthy thing that will improve your game. But you don’t want to do this all of the time, or you will effectively be playing above your bankroll as opposed to taking a shot. Most importantly, you never want to play so high that you are scared and don’t follow your normal decision-making process.

### **Taking shots**

Taking shots is vital for both growing a bankroll and growing as a player. It simply means playing a game that is above your current bankroll threshold. If you haven’t heard of this concept before, it might seem rather strange immediately following a discussion on the importance of playing games within certain limits. But by occasionally playing a level or two higher than you normally do, you will learn new things about the game and encounter player types you may not have seen before. This will accelerate your understanding of the game. If you win, your

bankroll is going to grow at a much larger rate. Playing at a higher level, your intensity will be much higher and you will tend to make better decisions, providing you don't try to nit up too much. The last thing you want to do when taking shots is to play scared money. Tend to take shots when the following conditions are met:

- You are relaxed, rested, and in a good frame of mind
- A seat is available in a game that is weaker than normal.
  - You have some indication that there are multiple bad players in the game.
- You have not been on a losing streak.
  - There is no need to wait until you are on a big upswing to take a shot, but you don't ever want to be tempted to chase losses by moving up in stakes. Also, if you lose for a while and then take a shot that goes awry, you can put a serious hurt on your bankroll. Plus you are typically not in the best frame of mind when going through a losing streak.

The percentage of your bankroll that you can use for a shot will vary, but in general you don't want to ever have more 10% of your bankroll on the table at one time in a cash game or SNG, assuming you are not a recreational player. For MTT's, you should not have more than 5%.

Taking shots is not something you should do very often, but taking them occasionally when the conditions are appropriate will go a long ways to helping you improve as a player.

## **Online Tells**

To people inexperienced with playing online, the idea of there being tells usually seems far fetched. But you can pick up an incredible amount of information if you are paying attention.

No tell is perfectly reliable, and they should almost never be the sole basis for making a decision. But they can often sway you one way or another when you are in a marginal situation. Here are some common online tells:

- If a player takes a lot of time before acting on a big decision, they will tend to be strong if they bet and be weak if they check.
  - You usually only see this tell from weaker players.
  - Their thought process goes something like this. With a big hand they think, “I’ll take a lot of time so it looks like I have either a tough decision or no hand at all and am thinking about bluffing. Then when I bet they will be more likely to call.” With a bad hand they think, “I’ll take a long time before checking, that way it will look like I have a pretty strong hand and I’m deciding whether to bet or just check to induce a bet so I can re-raise. Then they’ll be scared and be more likely to just check behind.”
  - If someone timebanks and then makes a big bet, you should usually fold unless you have a very strong hand.
  - If someone timebanks and then checks, you should usually bet out assuming the stack sizes are large enough that your opponent is not pot-committed. This is particularly true if your hand is very weak and you have little showdown value.
  - This tell doesn’t apply unless the pot is big. Almost no one will mess around with timing down in a tiny limped pot. But when the pot is raised preflop and there is betting on the flop and turn, many players will make these moves on the river.

- Min-bets usually indicate weakness.
  - Players min-bet when they don't like their hand, and they are afraid you will bet at them if they check to you. But since their hand strength is poor, they don't want to risk many chips with a large bet. A happy compromise seems to be to just make the minimum bet so they're not really doing either one.
  - Occasionally strong players will make this move with a big hand to induce a raise if they think you are capable of picking up on this tell and reacting to it. But this won't happen too often. There are not that many strong players out there and they usually don't expect their opponents to show a lot of aggression. But if there is a min-bet and you raise and you then get re-raised by the min-bettor, then they likely have a very strong hand.
- A very quick bet often indicates a bluff.
  - If someone has a good or even mediocre hand, they usually need some time to think about how they are going to play it. Should they slow play, make a medium sized bet, or make a pot sized bet? Almost no one thinks about all of their options and then acts on their decision instantly. When someone does act very quickly, they are often weak. Part of the thought process is they figure it will look stronger if they bet right away.
  - This tell tends to be less reliable than some of the other ones. Don't just re-raise pot with trash because someone instantly bets into you.
- If someone calls instantly, they are usually on a draw.
  - This indicates they may have checked the 'call any' button. (This is a serious mistake that you should never make.)
  - Tend to slow down on the next street if an obvious

draw hits.

- If someone checks instantly, they may have checked the ‘fold to any bet’ button.
  - This is another serious mistake. If you check to an opponent and they instantly check behind, you should almost always bet the next street. If your hand is very weak you can even min-bet the next street, since if they checked fold to any bet that’s all you need to do to take the pot down.
  - You should take note of players who do this. If you are in a decent sized pot and you have a lousy hand, you can sometimes min-bet hoping the player has the ‘fold to any bet’ button checked.
- When someone talks trash in the chat box, they are typically a fish.
  - Not many decent players like to talk trash, except on rare occasions and usually with players they know. When someone is talking lots of smack they are usually a very immature person that doesn’t actually know anything about poker.
- If someone is giving advice or critiquing hands in the chat, they usually don’t know what they are doing.
  - These players usually think they know something about the game but actually have no clue.
- Players who complain about their luck are usually bad.
  - This indicates a complete non-understanding of variance in poker, which has a far bigger impact than beginners and fish ever realize.
- Postflop bet sizes often indicate hand strength.
  - What a given bet size indicates varies from player to player. Some players bet pot with their nut hands and bet smaller with their weaker ones so they will get paid the max with their big hands and lose less when they get called with their weaker hands. Other players bet smaller with their strong



hands and bet the pot with their weaker ones, so they don't scare people away with their good hands and they maximize their fold equity with their weak ones. You need to take notes on the individual players and get a good sample size for these tells to be reliable. But once you map someone's betting patterns, this can be one of the most profitable tells that exists.

While spotting and reacting to tells is important, you should also try to minimize tells that you give off yourself. Here are some guidelines:

- Try to take roughly the same amount of time on each decision.
  - This is hard to do if you are playing multiple tables, and there is no reason to get carried away with this concept. The key is you don't ever want to act instantly, use the auto action buttons, or purposely run down the time bank before acting.
  - Don't ever use the 'fold to any bet' button, even if you are convinced your hand is hopeless. It gives people a license to bet into you. Every now and then a hand you think has no equity will get checked down and you will manage to get at least part of the pot. These situations are infrequent and the pots tend to be small, but there is no reason to give up even this small amount of value.
- Don't vary your bet-sizes based on your hand strength.
  - There are several reasons to vary bet-sizes, both before the flop and after the flop. The reasons may be based on your position, the size of the stacks, the particular players you are up against, or any number of other factors. But the reason should never be your hand strength.

## Going to Full-Ring from 6-Max

You are not going to play the same way in a full ring game as you would in a 6-max game. Basically the 6-max game is going to play much looser and more aggressive. For the full ring game, you need to tighten up. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you adjust to a full-ring game:

- Play super tight in the first 3 positions. Fold all weak to medium strength hands. With strong hands, you can limp or raise. Note that if you do raise from early position, your opposition will assume you have AAxx or A2xx.
- If someone raises from early position in a full ring game, it is usually safe to assume that they have a super strong hand unless their stats indicate that they are a maniac.
- Play just as aggressively from the button and the cutoff as you would in a 6-max game.
- You will find yourself in many more multi-way pots, so you need to play less aggressively and ‘nut peddle’ more.
- More of your bets will be for value than will be semi-bluffs.
- The variance will be lower and you can therefore play on a smaller bankroll.

## Fear Equity

When you are an aggressive player that gets pots heads up and then semi-bluffs liberally, you will generate something called fear equity. Fear equity is the equity you gain when players make a fold early in a hand they normally wouldn't against another opponent, but they make against you because they fear playing a large pot in which they might get scooped. Fear equity not only makes you money, but it can allow you to control a table. When

you have it, your opponents will not only tend to make bad folds, but they will tend to play very straightforwardly against you. When people play weak/tight and straightforward, it can make for some profitable and low stress poker for you. Here is how you gain fear equity:

- Make big raises to get pots heads up and 3 handed.
- Play very aggressively with marginal two-way hands in heads up pots.
- Always have at least a full 100BB stack.

Having a full stack is crucial. The fear is generated by threatening your opponent's stack at all times. You can't do this if you have a short stack, no matter how skillful and aggressive your opponent thinks you are. The benefits of fear equity are:

- Your opponents will fold a lot of marginal hands on the flop that are likely good for half the pot.
- Your opponents will tend to play very straightforwardly against you. They will fold bad hands, check and call decent hands, and only raise with the nuts.

### **Pre-Shot Routine**

If you have ever taken a golf lesson, you have probably heard about the importance of a 'pre-shot routine'. Baseball pitchers also have one and so do people in some other sports. A pre-shot routine is simply a ritual that you follow every time before you act. The purpose is to focus your mind before each play and maximize the probability that you will make a good decision. This isn't really talked about in regards to poker, but it can be a tremendous help, particularly if you are multi-tabling. All we are really doing is creating a checklist that we go through before making each decision. Below is the checklist that I use and recommend:

1. What is my position?
  - a. The earlier the position the more we'll tend towards a passive decision, the later the position the more we'll tend towards an aggressive one.
2. What are the stack sizes?
  - a. This helps in determining whether or not we are committed to a pot, and whether we are willing to bloat a pot or to keep it small. It also determines our implied and reverse implied odds, and thus will have a big influence on the hands we draw to.
3. What are my opponents' ranges?
  - a. What were their actions preflop? On the flop? How does this compare to their preflop raise %, VPIP, and aggression factors? How have they played weak, strong, and marginal hands? Based on all of this, what are their likely holdings?
4. What type of players are my opponents?
  - a. Are they calling stations, weak-tight, or are they competent? If they are competent, how aggressive are they?
5. What is my opponents' perception of my range?
  - a. Does this question even apply? Most players just play their own cards so this question generally doesn't apply.
6. Are there any table dynamics that could influence this situation?
  - a. Is anyone on tilt? Are any players trash talking back and forth with each other and are they in this pot? Has anyone just lost a big pot or gotten sucked out on? Who is winning? Who is losing?
  - b. Players who are losing will tend to play worse and will not like to fold. They will also be likely to raise with more hands than they normally would.

- c. Players that are winning tend to play better and will be more likely to fold hands in marginal spots.
- d. Players who are talking trash to one another will tend to try to outplay one another.

This seems like a lot to do before each action, particularly if you are multi-tabling, but they really are just things that you should be thinking about anyway. The purpose of putting them into a checklist and making them a routine is so that you don't forget about any of them. If you are playing too many tables or playing a long session or just tilting, it is very easy to go on autopilot and begin making mistakes. Often when someone is playing bad, it is because their normal thought processes have broken down. The insidious thing about this is people usually don't realize it when it happens. Most players have an A, a B, and a C game, and they usually make money when playing their 'A' game. In the long term how much of a winner you are is not necessarily a function of how good your 'A' game is, but more of a function of how often you are playing it. Many players have great 'A' games and atrocious 'C' games. Having a good pre-shot routine and sticking to it will keep you playing your 'A' game much more often.

## **Reviewing Hand Histories**

One of the best ways to improve your game is to review your hand histories. The importance of doing this cannot be underestimated. Especially if you multi-table and play a few hundred hands an hour, you do not have much time to think about decisions while you are actually playing. Without much time to think about your game, it can be difficult to detect leaks and to improve. Taking time away from the table to think about and study your game is key to improving as a poker player.

You should review not only the big pots you play, but also

some of the middle and small size pots. It is tempting to focus only on the big pots, and they are very important, but you also want to look for leaks you may have in all types of situations. You will play many more small pots than you will large pots. Even though a mistake made in a large pot can be very damaging, a mistake repeated over and over in smaller pots can do just as much harm. Make sure when you are reviewing hands you look at your entire game.

It is easiest to review your hands in some sort of hand re-player. There are several available online. If you use Poker Tracker Omaha (PTO), it has a built in re-player you can use. This feature is handy since you can use PTO to filter for specific types of hands you want to review.

When reviewing your hands, you should go through the same thought processes that you should be going through during the actual play of the hand. Consider your position and the position of your opponents at all times. Look at their stats and make estimates of their hand ranges and adjust them throughout the play of the hand. The key here is to review your equity in the hand versus your perceived range as the hand is played out. Don't be tempted to simply look at their actual cards and be influenced by that. PTO has a feature that hides your opponents' cards until the end of the hand.

For calculating hand equities, I recommend ProPokerTools.com. Many of the hand equity percentages cited in this book were calculated using ProPokerTools.com. This site is an excellent resource for calculating hand equities, as well as calculating the percentage of the time you will have a certain equity after the flop. This resource is free and you should take advantage of it to improve your game.

## Chapter 9 – Hand Examples

### Example 9.1

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds - 5 players

SB: \$56.60, BB: \$24.50, Hero (UTG): \$51.65, CO: \$90.85,  
BTN: \$41.75

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is UTG with 5♦ A♦ 7♠ 8♦  
*1 fold*, CO raises to \$1.75, *2 folds*, BB calls \$1.25

Few beginning players will fold this hand preflop even from UTG. The first thing they see is an ace, then that the ace is suited, then they see there are three additional cards that can make a low, then there are the straight possibilities. Clearly this hand should be playable right? Well... no not quite. The best thing that this hand has going for it is that the ace is suited. It drops off pretty quickly after that. The A-5 low draw is pretty horrible. You are starting behind A-2, A-3, 2-3, A-4, 2-4, and 3-4 low draws. The straight possibilities with 5-7-8 are also not good. The main problem is the 7 and 8 are middle cards. When you do make a straight, there will either be a low possible or a higher straight. It is impossible to make the nuts. We are almost never going to scoop with this hand except in the rare cases where we make the nut flush, there is no low possible, and the board doesn't pair. That is not going to happen very often. Not only that, but we are UTG so we are going to be out of position for the entire hand. This all adds up to a very easy muck. Playing this hand is a good way to get into some very awkward and unprofitable situations after the flop.

## Example 9.2

\$2.00/\$4.00 Blinds - 3 players

Hero (SB): \$389.60, BB: \$386.00, BTN: \$612.40

Preflop: (\$6.00) Hero is SB with 3♣ T♠ 4♣ A♠

BTN calls \$4.00, ***Hero raises to \$16***, BB calls \$12.00, BTN calls \$12.00

This is a super strong starting hand. We have a suited ace, and an A-3 low draw with a 4 for counterfeit protection. We also have a second flush draw and an A-10 that can sometimes make Broadway. Plus we are 3-handed, so the hand value increases given that there are fewer players. Although we should rarely be raising out of the small blind, this is a great situation for it. Had the button raised instead of limping, we could have 3-bet.

Flop: (\$48.00) 5♠ 4♦ A♥ (3 players)

***Hero checks***, BB bets \$28.00, BTN calls \$28.00, Hero calls \$28.00

We flop two-pair, a gutshot straight draw, a low draw, and a backdoor nut flush draw. Overall this is a pretty bad flop for us. Our 2 pair is not very strong given that someone could already have a wheel and there are other straight draws possible. Our goal is to keep the pot as small as possible and hope for a good turn card, although there are not that many turn cards that help us. The turn cards we would like are any spade, or a 2. Our best card would be the 2♠.

We check and then the BB bets a little over half pot and the BTN calls. There is \$104 in the pot and it costs us \$28.00 to call. Our hand is not great but getting almost 4:1 we can call here.



Turn: (\$132.00) 9♦

***Hero checks***, BB bets \$125.00, BTN folds, Hero folds

The turn card is a brick for us and we're done with the hand. We can only hope it gets checked around and we hit a good river. As played, we check and the BB bets just under pot. There is absolutely no way we can call this bet so we fold. Bluff-raising is not an option. Given the BB has bet the flop and the turn into multiple players, he is never folding this hand.

### **Example 9.3**

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds - 5 players

SB: \$7.20, BB: \$25.15, Hero (UTG): \$44.10, CO: \$73.10,  
BTN: \$67.95

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is UTG with 5♦ 2♣ 4♦ 7♠

***Hero calls \$0.50***, 2 folds, SB calls \$0.25, BB checks

This is a hand that has a lot more potential than it seems to have at first glance. It is lacking an ace, but there are three wheel cards and a 7. This gives the possibility of making a wheel with a higher straight, which is terrific for quartering people when it hits. But of course this is not going to happen very often, so the goal is to try to see as cheap of a flop as possible. The other reason why you may not want to raise is that this is an ace dependent hand and we have no idea yet whether any of the aces are out since we are first to act. If we were to open and then get raised, it would be clear that a 3-bettor would have at least one ace in his hand and would likely have two. At this point, we would be out of position in a decent size pot with our hand crippled and would have to fold. A better option is to simply limp and then

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fold to a raise. This way we lose less when there is a stronger hand behind us.

Flop: (\$1.50) 6♦ J♥ J♦

SB checks, BB checks, **Hero bets \$1.45**, SB folds, BB folds

Not only do we not flop an ace but we completely whiff. However we do have a very low flush draw, albeit on a paired board. Generally in PLO8, most players will slow play flopped trips much less often than in other forms in poker since it is so much easier for someone to beat them or for a low to come in and cost them half the pot. When it is checked to us and we have position, we bet out to try to take the pot down. If we get called, we have backdoor low draws and our weak flush draw to provide us some equity, and we will of course still have position. If our bet gets raised, we will give the villain credit for a J and fold.

### Example 9.4

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds - 5 players

SB: \$50.60, Hero (BB): \$50.65, UTG: \$39.15, CO: \$58.30,  
BTN: \$60.10

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is BB with 3♠ 5♦ Q♣ 2♥

3 folds, SB raises to \$1.50, **Hero calls \$1**

Here we have another 3 wheel card hand that is ace dependent. The small blind bets out, which suggests he has at least one ace. But we close the action and have position so calling is ok.

Flop: (\$3.00) Q♦ 5♥ 8♣

SB bets \$2.85, **Hero calls \$2.85**

This is a fairly good flop for us. We have top and bottom 2 pair and the 3<sup>rd</sup> nut low draw. This is the type of flopped hand that we will usually win half the pot with at showdown. If it is checked to us, we will want to bet pot and take advantage of our fold equity. As played, the villain pots into us. Our hand is not strong enough to re-raise and build a big pot at this point, but it is far too strong to fold. Therefore calling is the best option.

Turn: (\$8.70) 4♣

SB bets \$8.30, *Hero calls \$8.30*

Now we have added an open end straight draw to go with our 2 pair and have made the 3<sup>rd</sup> nut low. Again, if it is checked to us, we will want to bet pot into the villain. Likewise once again the villain pots into us and we call because re-raising and folding are not good options. It's possible the villain has made the nut low or perhaps has flopped a set, but it is difficult for him to be scooping us at this point.

River: (\$25.30) T♦

SB checks, *Hero bets \$24.10*, SB folds

The river is a blank and the villain slows down and checks. If the villain had some kind of 9-T-J straight draw he got there, but he is unlikely to have these middle cards since he raised out of the SB preflop. Even if he does, we will still get half the pot. If he has a naked A-2, we will get half the pot. If he had a set, we are very likely to get half the pot. For him to scoop us, he needs to have an A-2 or A-3 low and to beat our 2 pair for the high. This means he must hold A-2-Q-8, A-3-Q-8, A-2-4-4 or something like that to scoop. These hands are a relatively small portion of his overall range of hands, so our best play is to bet out at him and hope he folds half the pot. Unless he is a particularly bad player, he will never call when we scoop him. As played, we bet pot and he folds. Notice that our hand was very marginal in both

directions all along. But with some decent hand reading skills and a willingness to show aggression without the nuts, we were able to take down a nice pot.

## Example 9.5

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds - 6 players

SB: \$84.95, BB: \$61.15, UTG: \$25.30, MP: \$28.45, CO: \$52.65, Hero (BTN): \$47.15

UTG posts a big blind (\$0.50)

Preflop: (\$1.25) Hero is BTN with J♦ J♣ A♦ Q♥

UTG checks, MP calls \$0.50, *I fold*, **Hero calls \$0.50**, SB calls \$0.25, BB checks

This is a high only hand. We know these are typically pretty marginal and need to be played with care postflop since we will tend to get into awkward situations with them. But we do have the button which is very powerful and it is limped to us, so we are definitely playing it. With 2 players in ahead us, there is no point in raising and bloating the pot. We just want to limp behind and see a cheap flop. If we miss the flop, we'll simply fold with a minimal loss. If we hit a piece of the flop, we will be able to use our position to abuse our opponents.

Flop: (\$2.50) 4♣ K♠ J♥

SB checks, BB bets \$2.40, UTG calls \$2.40, MP calls \$2.40, **Hero raises to \$10**, SB folds, BB calls \$7.60, UTG folds, MP folds

We flop gin. We have made our set of jacks and there is no low draw, plus we have a gutshot straight draw. But this doesn't mean

we are looking to slow play. Remember that there are very few times when it makes sense to slow play in PLO8. Also recognize that any turn card that comes will either make a straight or a flush possible, or will bring a low draw. We want to get as much money in on this flop as possible to take advantage of our equity edge and make our opponents pay to draw. If we happen to be up against a set of kings, we are going to get stacked. Our starting stacks need to be at least 150 BB's before we can consider getting away from 2<sup>nd</sup> set on a board with no flush or low draws at this low limit. As played, the BB bets pot and we re-pot and get the hand heads up going into the turn.

Turn: (\$27.30) K♣

BB bets \$5, *Hero calls \$5*

The good news is we now have a full house, but this is a very scary turn card. Two pair K's and 4's were a decent portion of the villain's flop range. Or if he has a K which is extremely likely, he will have outs to make a higher full house on the river. But we have about \$36 in our stack and there is \$27 in the pot, so we are right on the threshold of being committed. It will be very difficult to fold at this point, although if the opponent is very tight and passive, folding to a large bet or a re-raise can be an acceptable play. The villain makes a tiny \$5 bet into the \$27 pot. This can mean one of two things. It is either a blocking bet made with a weak hand, or he has made K's full and is worried we will fold if he bets more. The best play here is to call and see what he does on the river. If he checks the river, he is likely weak and we can bet out; if he comes out firing it suggests he does have K's full and we may need to lay down our hand depending on the size of his bet.

River: (\$37.30) 9♣

BB checks, *Hero bets \$9*, BB calls \$9

The river is a meaningless 9 and the BB checks. This means his small turn bet was likely just a blocking bet and he doesn't like his hand. He would almost never bet small on the turn and then check the river if he had K's full, so can safely assume we are ahead. If he has laid some elaborate trap, it's bad luck for us because we are willing to get it all in at this point. The question is: what can he have and how much of a bet will he call? A bare K is a huge part of his range, 4's full is a smaller possibility, as is a straight or AA. His betting says he really doesn't like his hand so we don't want to make too large of a bet. As played, we bet \$9 into a \$37 pot and get called. This is probably way too small of a bet. We had just about a pot sized bet left but that would have been too large and the villain would have folded most times with the rare exception where he has us beat. A slightly over half pot sized bet of around \$20-25 would have been much better, even if the villain calls only half as often as he does for the \$9 bet.

Final Pot: \$55.30

Hero shows J♦ J♣ A♦ Q♥ (HI: a full house, Jacks full of Kings)

BB mucks 4♦ Q♦ 7♣ T♥

Hero wins \$52.65

As it turns out the villain had an open end straight which he made on the river; he felt obligated to call our small bet. He may have folded to a larger bet given the board was paired, but in the long run the larger bet still would have been better given the villain's range of likely hands. This hand shows just how weak and dangerous a bare open end straight draw is in this game.

## Example 9.6

\$5.00/\$10.00 Blinds - 5 players

SB: \$1195.00, BB: \$1414.00, Hero (UTG): \$849.00, CO:  
\$808.00, BTN: \$975.00

Preflop: (\$15.00) Hero is UTG with A♣ 3♣ A♦ 2♦

**Hero raises to \$20**, CO raises to \$40, *1 fold*, SB calls \$35.00,  
BB calls \$35.00, **Hero raises to \$200**, CO calls \$160, *2 folds*

AA23 double suited is the best starting hand you can possibly have in PLO8. It is the only hand that is really comparable to AA in NLHE. We open with a min-raise hoping to get action. This is ok but you could easily end up in some tough spots postflop if everyone calls. If you have been min-raising then you should go ahead and min-raise this hand. But if you've been opening for 3.5 times the BB then you should continue to do so here. You don't want to suddenly change your bet size and alert an opponent that something may be up.

We open for a min-raise and the CO makes a very small raise. When it comes back to us there are a few more callers and there is \$140 in the pot and it is \$20 to call. If we 4-bet the size of the pot we can make it \$200 total. This will get almost 25% percent of our stack in the pot. It is fairly safe to assume that the 3-better in the CO is not going to fold. This should encourage the blinds to call as well. If everyone calls there will be \$800 in the pot and \$640 left in our stack. We can just shove the rest in on any flop. If the only the CO calls, then there will be \$400 in the pot and \$640 in our stack, which will allow us to still get our money in on all but the most dangerous flops. This would be a flop like 2-3-4 rainbow where we get double counterfeited, there is a straight draw, and we only have back door flush draws. But this will be fairly rare. Re-potting is the best play here. We are way ahead and want to get as much value as we can.

Flop: (\$480.00) K♠ J♥ 4♣

**Hero bets \$456.00**, CO raises to \$608.00 all in, **Hero calls \$152.00**

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This is a decent flop for our hand. We have an over-pair of aces and a backdoor low draw. The CO's range for 3-betting consists mainly of A-A-x-x and A-2-x-x hands. Since we have two aces in our hand, this weights the villain's range much more heavily to A2 and hands with lots of wheel cards. We can go ahead and get our money in here.

Turn: (\$1696.00) Q♦

River: (\$1696.00) 8♣

Final Pot: \$1696.00

Hero shows A♣ 3♣ A♦ 2♦ (HI: a pair of Aces)

CO shows 4♦ K♦ K♥ 6♠ (HI: three of a kind, Kings)

CO wins \$1696.00

Unfortunately the villain showed up with a pair of kings and grossly overplayed them. In the long run he will get killed playing big pairs like this, but he got away with it this time. Notice that our equity edge preflop was 75.9% to 24.1%. This is similar to AA versus KK in Hold'em. After the flop, the equities changed to 24.9% to 75.1%. But consider that when we decide to play for stacks on the flop we effectively only need 35% equity to make this ok from an EV standpoint. Then consider that the villain had the absolute worst case scenario hand for us, and he will have this hand a very small portion of the time. The rest of the time we will be crushing his A2 hands and occasionally we'll be free-rolling with AA versus AA but we'll have our backdoor low and backdoor flush draw. Overall we played this hand very well but got unlucky this time. It's very important (but not always easy) to avoid becoming results oriented.

### Example 9.7

\$2.00/\$4.00 Blinds - 5 players



SB: \$762.40, BB: \$164.40, UTG: \$108.00, Hero (CO):  
\$394.40, BTN: \$252.00

Preflop: (\$6.00) Hero is CO with 3♦ 2♠ 7♦ A♦

UTG calls \$4.00, **Hero raises to \$18.00**, BTN calls \$18.00, 2  
*folds*, UTG calls \$12.00

This is another super strong hand and we make our standard pot sized raise. We want to punish the limper and hopefully get the button to fold so we will have position throughout the hand. This is the type of hand we can open raise from any position, and will be willing to get our stack in preflop if possible even with 200BB's. Unfortunately the button calls and then the limper comes along.

Flop: (\$60.00) J♥ 7♥ 3♥

UTG checks, **Hero bets \$57.20**, BTN folds, UTG raises to  
\$90.00 all in, **Hero calls \$32.80**

The flop gives us two pair and a nut low draw. We have a good but not great hand in both directions. This is the type of hand we want to be very aggressive with and try to get heads up so we can blast away at the remaining player in a situation where we may be free-rolling. The limp-caller checks and we fire out a pot sized bet. We get the button to fold and then the UTG player goes all in with his relatively short stack. Not a great result since now we have to go to showdown, but we should have very good equity versus the UTG player's range.

Turn: (\$240.00) J♦

River: (\$240.00) 7♣

Final Pot: \$240.00

UTG shows A♥ 8♥ Q♥ 3♠ (HI: a flush, Ace high)

Hero shows 3♦ 2♠ 7♦ A♦ (HI: a full house, Sevens full of Threes)  
Hero wins \$228.40

The low fails to come in and we boat up on the end. Our equity when the money went in on the flop was 39.4%, and this is despite the villain having flopped the nuts! This hand helps illustrate how vulnerable the nuts are in this game. If the villain had a larger stack size, he may have waited for a safe turn card before getting his money in. But given the size of his stack, he really had no choice other to play it as he did.

When someone flops the nuts and loses his stack you should take note of it, assuming he re-buys. This sort of thing happens all the time in this game and is a frequent way for people to go on major tilt. If he does continue to play, he will be much more likely than normal to spew off his chips for awhile.

## Example 9.8

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds - 6 players

SB: \$51.90, BB: \$60.30, UTG: \$64.35, MP: \$14.50, Hero (CO): \$42.45, BTN: \$33.35

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is CO with 8♣ 8♠ K♦ K♣  
*2 folds, **Hero raises to \$1**, 1 fold, SB calls \$0.75, 1 fold*

By now hopefully you have learned to hate these big pair hands. This one has a little more going for it than most since one of the kings is suited and there is a second pair that gives us a better chance of flopping a set. We also have pretty good position in the CO seat. When it folds to us a raise is reasonable assuming that the button and the blinds are fairly tight. If they are calling stations then a fold is in order. The problem here is

not that we raised; it is the raise size. With this type of hand, you really would like to just pick up the blinds. But the min-raise makes this very unlikely, and tells us almost nothing about the range of our opponents' hands when they do call us. A 3.5x open would have been much better.

Flop: (\$2.50) 6♥ 9♥ Q♣

SB checks, *Hero bets \$2.40*, SB calls \$2.40

This is a good flop because we have an over-pair and there is no low draw. There are straight and flush draws, but they shouldn't be too much of a concern since the pot is heads up and not multi-way. The SB shows weakness by checking to us and we attack him by betting pot. When the SB calls it suggests he has something, but it is difficult to narrow down what he may have since his calling range from the SB when facing a min-bet is wide. A flush draw with maybe some kind of backdoor low draw seems most likely. A straight draw is a lesser possibility. Notice there are almost no turn cards that we are going to be happy with here. The K♥ is no good since that completes the flush. The only really good card is the K♠, and even then that makes a straight possible. We're pretty much done with the hand at this point.

Turn: (\$7.30) 3♣

SB checks, *Hero checks*

A low draw is now out there and we have made a K high flush draw. This is one of the better cards we could have hoped for. We are checking it back and we would have folded if the SB had made a large bet, but may have called a smaller bet.

River: (\$7.30) 2♣

SB checks, *Hero bets \$6.95*, SB calls \$6.95

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Now the backdoor low and backdoor flush draws have come in and the SB checks yet again. We have made our K high flush and there is a good chance we are good for at least half the pot. The villain would almost never check the nut flush draw on the turn and then check again when he made it on the river after we just checked the turn, so we are pretty safe here. It is most likely that the villain was on a heart draw when he peeled the turn. We make a pot sized bet hoping to fold out a weak made low. The SB calls and we expect to chop.

Final Pot: \$21.20

Hero shows  $8\clubsuit 8\spadesuit K\diamond K\clubsuit$  (HI: a flush, King high)

SB mucks  $2\diamond 5\diamond 6\spadesuit K\heartsuit$

Hero wins \$20.20

It turns out the villain make two pair on the river and made a crying call with no low, so we scoop a nice pot. The villain's call on the flop is very puzzling. He had a pair of sixes and a backdoor 2-5 low draw. His call on the river was also very bad. He could only expect to chop the pot, so he was effectively calling \$7 to win about \$3.50. And this was with only two pair on a board that had possible straights and flushes. It just goes to show some of the truly terrible players you can run into in this game, particularly at the lower limits. We were betting on the end to try to take advantage of fold equity and ended up with a pot sized value bet.

### Example 9.9

\$2.00/\$4.00 Blinds - 6 players

SB: \$152.00, BB: \$138.40, Hero (UTG): \$512.80, MP:  
\$100.40, CO: \$218.00, BTN: \$742.40

Preflop: (\$6.00) Hero is UTG with A♥ 3♣ J♥ A♠

**Hero raises to \$14.00**, 2 folds, BTN raises to \$48, 2 folds,  
**Hero calls \$34.00**

This is a monster hand and we can make a raise from any position. The 3.5x open is pretty standard. The button 3-bets and the SB folds to us. We are going to be out of position for the rest of the hand and we are starting out with ~120BB stacks, so we are a little deeper than normal. For most 3-bettors, we can usually assume a range of A-A-x-x or A-2-x-x. We hold two of the aces so his range is going to be more heavily tilted to the A2 hands. If we re-raise, we'll be making it \$102.00 total. If we do that and the villain calls there will be ~\$200 in the pot and there will be ~\$416 in our stack, so we will have 2x the pot going to the flop. This will make it relatively easy to commit, but there are lots of flops that could come that would put us in some awkward spots. If the villain re-raises then we could just get all in now, which would be an excellent result. But we can't be sure this will happen. We decide to just flat call and see a flop; there is no need to bloat the pot when we are out of position.

Flop: (\$102) T♥ 3♦ 7♥

**Hero checks**, BTN bets \$68.00, **Hero raises to \$152**, BTN raises to \$553.20, Hero calls \$312.80 all in

This is quite an interesting flop. We make the nut flush draw and a pair of 3's. There is a low draw and we have no credible hope of making a low. If the villain does have A-2-x-x then he has the nut flush draw and is unlikely to be folding. Our equity versus A-2-x-x is 56.7%, so we stand to be ahead. If the villain has A-A-x-x, our equity is 54.2%. So with the exception of some rare scenarios, we are ahead here. We want to put as much pressure on the villain as we can to try to get him to fold, which would be our best result. If he gets it in with us, then we are still ahead of his range.

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As it turns out, we go for a min check raise and get it all in. Not a bad result since we were able to get all in, but a pot sized check raise would have applied much more pressure and maximized our fold equity.

Turn: (\$1031.60) 8♣

River: (\$1031.60) K♦

Final Pot: \$1031.60

BTN shows T♣ 2♣ A♣ K♥ (HI: two pair, Kings and Tens; LO: 8,7,3,2,A)

Hero shows A♥ 3♣ J♥ A♠ (HI: a pair of Aces)

BTN wins \$504

BTN wins \$503.60

The villain did in fact have A2, and our equity versus his exact hand on the flop was 53.1%. We made money in the long run by getting it in here. Unfortunately the villain made the nut low on the turn and then rivered two pair to scoop us. This was a bad break but we got our money in good which is all we can do. We didn't maximize our fold equity on the flop, but in this case the villain likely was never going to fold anyway.

### Example 9.10

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds - 6 players

SB: \$47.75, BB: \$247.30, UTG: \$72.75, MP: \$50.00, CO: \$134.05, Hero (BTN): \$50.30

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is BTN with A♥ Q♠ J♣ 5♥  
*3 folds, **Hero raises to \$1.75**, 1 fold*, BB calls \$1.25

This is a very strong starting hand, and we can certainly open for a raise when it is folded to us on the button. Had there been some limpers in front we also would have made a raise; and if it was opened by someone, we could consider a 3-bet depending on the specific player.

Flop: (\$3.75) 4♥ 2♥ 3♣

BB checks, ***Hero bets \$3.60***, BB calls \$3.60

We flop a nut flush draw with a wheel. At this point, we are pot committed, considering the starting effective stack size of 100 BB's. This is an excellent situation where we may be free-rolling another wheel with our flush draw. A higher straight is possible, but we're not worried about that since we have a made nut low and the nut flush draw.

Turn: (\$10.95) 5♣

BB bets \$10.45, ***Hero calls \$10.45***

This card makes more straights possible and now the villain is showing aggression after having checked the flop. This suggests that the turn card helped him. Remember that most players are straightforward, so it is unlikely this is some kind of bluff. We call to see to see what he does on the river.

River: (\$31.85) Q♣

BB bets \$30.30, ***Hero calls \$30.30***

The river completes the flush draw and the villain bets out again for the size of the pot. He's representing a flush, which is likely what he has considering the way the hand has played out. We are now faced with a very marginal situation. There is a good likelihood that we will get quartered, and it is likely we are calling to only win half the pot. We are basically calling about \$30 to win about \$15. The decision comes down to how

aggressively the villain plays. The more passive he is, the more we should lean towards a fold. The more maniacal he is, the more we should tend to call.

If we assume that we will either win half the pot or get quartered, then we will need to win half the pot 60% of the time to justify the call. This is because when we call and win half, we make \$15. When we call and get quartered, we lose \$22.50. To quarter us, the villain needs a flush or higher straight, along with an A and any wheel card. Given the way the hand has played out, we should probably fold against most opponents, although it is very close.

As played we get quartered, which should not be a surprise.

Final Pot: \$92.45

Hero shows A♥ Q♠ J♣ 5♥ (HI: a straight, Ace to Five; LO: 5,4,3,2,A)

BB shows 4♣ 8♣ 6♠ A♣ (HI: a flush, Ace high; LO: 5,4,3,2,A)

BB wins \$44.75

BB wins \$22.35

Hero wins \$22.35

(Rake: \$3.00)

## Example 9.11

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds - 6 players

SB: \$56.45, Hero (BB): \$27.10, UTG: \$80.95, MP: 50.35, CO: \$63.80, BTN: \$42.30

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is BB with A♣ K♦ 3♣ 2♦

1 fold, MP calls .50, 1 fold, BTN raises to \$2.25, 1 *fold*, **Hero calls \$2.25**, MP calls \$2.25

This is a monster starting hand and the effective stack sizes are



54 BB's. We have the nut low draw with counterfeited protection, an ace high flush draw and a king high flush draw. This provides an excellent chance to make the nuts in both directions. We want to get some money in preflop to begin building a pot. But there is one major problem here. We are out of position and will be for the remainder of the hand. The stacks are not shallow enough that we can re-raise and be committed to the pot. They are also not so deep that we can re-raise and still have good implied odds. It is important to control the pot size here, so we flat call. If the situation was different and we were in position then we could throw in a raise. Given that the opponent has bet the size of the pot preflop, it is very likely he has an A-2-x-x, A-A-x-x, or A-A-2-x type of hand. Most players hate to lay down these types of hands, so if we hit a flop we stand a good chance to get all of the money in the middle anyway.

Flop: (\$7.00) 5♥ K♠ 2♣

We've flopped 2 pair, a back door flush draw, and a nut low draw. There are 50 BB's left in our stack and we can get all in with only 2 bets. Given the stack sizes and the strength of our hand, we can commit to this pot. It is likely that the preflop raiser made a continuation bet either with a naked AA or as a bluff with a counterfeited A-2 hand. The check-raise will allow us to get all of the money in on the flop.

***Hero checks***, MP checks, BTN bets \$5.00, ***Hero raises to \$21.65***, MP folds, BTN calls \$16.65

Mission accomplished on the flop! We flopped a big hand and managed to get effectively all of the money in (not actually all of the money because the button flat called the re-raise with 6 BB's behind.) But we are effectively all in since there is almost zero chance anyone is folding at this point. We'll put the rest of the money in on the turn regardless of what comes.

Turn: (\$50.30) K♣

We turn the second nuts. Now we're hoping for a high card on the river so we can scoop in case the button also has A-3 or our low gets counterfeited.

***Hero bets \$3.20***, BTN calls \$3.20

River: (\$56.70) 7♠

Final Pot: \$56.70

Hero shows A♣ K♦ 3♣ 2♦ (HI: Kings full of deuces, LO: 7,5,3,2,A)

BTN shows A♥ 8♦ 5♦ 2♥ (HI: two pair Kings and Fives, LO: 8,7,5,2,A)

Hero wins \$56.70

We scoop a nice pot. It turns out the button continuation bet the flop with only bottom 2-pair and a terrible low draw. This is basically a pure bluff; if he gets called or check-raised, he is almost always going to be way, way behind. His call of the check-raise was absolutely horrible. It's impossible to tell if he was tilting, didn't understand what we was doing, or was under the influence of a substance. These types of plays are fortunately quite common at these limits and are where the bulk of your profit will come from.

## **Example 9.12**

\$1.00/\$2.00 Blinds - 6 players

SB: \$164.80, BB: \$510.80, UTG: \$108.60, MP: \$285.00, Hero (CO): \$190.00, BTN: \$164.80

Preflop: (\$3.00) Hero is CO with A♥ 2♣ T♥ 5♦  
 UTG calls 2.00, 1 fold, **Hero raises to \$4.00**, BTN calls \$4.00,  
 2 folds, UTG raises to \$12.00, **Hero calls \$8.00**, BTN calls  
 \$8.00

Here we have a good but not great starting hand. We have a suited ace, and an A-2 with a 5 for some meager counterfeits protection. The 10 does pretty much nothing except provide a suit for this ace, so this is really a 3 card hand. But it is still fairly strong so we want to begin building a pot. We throw in a min raise to: increase the pot size, encourage the blinds to call with junky hands, and prevent the button from simply limping into the pot. A 3 or 3.5 BB open is ok as well because it improves the chance of the button folding and us having position throughout the hand. But it decreases the chance of the blinds calling with inferior hands. Most of the profit in PLO8 comes from players making mistakes postflop. By letting the blinds in relatively cheaply, we give them the opportunity to make these mistakes and we take advantage of our implied odds.

The button calls, which is disappointing, but not as much as had he re-raised. But then we get surprised when UTG limp re-raises. This almost always signals AA, A2, or both. At this point we can be fairly confident we're behind the UTG player, but we have a huge advantage in knowing what our opponent holds. We're not really worried about what the button has because if he had a premium hand, he would have likely raised instead of limping. We flat call here knowing what we need to beat on the flop; plus when players have these premium hands, they have difficulty laying them down when they're beat. When we make the \$8 call, the pot size will be \$29.00 and the effective stacks are \$96.60, so our implied odds are over 12:1 (\$96.60 remaining in UTG's stack divided by \$8 to call) and are plenty good enough to justify the call. If the BTN comes along as well, the implied odds will be even greater. The button also calls behind, which doesn't really tell us much about his hand because he could

either be trying to wait and hit a flop with a good hand, or have limped with a weak hand and felt justified to call because the pot is getting big and we haven't seen the flop yet. The BTN's range is likely to be very wide but not consisting of many premium hands.

Flop: (\$39.00) 2♠ K♥ 7♥

UTG bets \$37.20, **Hero raises to \$148.80**, BTN calls \$121.20, UTG calls \$59.40

We flop the nut flush draw and have a weak low draw. The reasons for the re-raise are we have good equity against either a counterfeited A2, or a naked AA. Ignoring the button, our equities versus the limp re-raiser are:

54.97% versus A-A-x-x

57.00% versus A-2-x-x

The preflop limp re-raiser bets out nearly the pot. This seems to scream AA or a counterfeited A-2 bluffing to try to take the pot down. Given our decent equity, we re-raise effectively all-in in an attempt to get the button to fold. When the button calls it is obvious that we are in huge trouble. The button has top set and UTG has a nut low draw. Our only hope is to hit the flush without the board pairing, or have a 3 fall that counterfeits the nut low draw. Here are the actual hands and equities:

UTG, A♣ K♦ 3♣ 2♦, 30.07%

Hero (CO), A♥ T♥ 5♦ 2♣, 24.74%

BTN, A♦ K♣ K♠ Q♥, 45.20%

Turn: (\$405.60) 9♠

River (\$405.60) 7♦

Final Pot: \$405.60

UTG shows A♣ K♦ 3♣ 2♦ (HI: two pair Kings and Deuces)

Hero shows A♥ T♥ 5♦ 2♣ (HI: pair of Deuces)

BTN shows A♦ K♣ K♠ Q♥ (HI: a full house, Kings full of Sevens)

BTN wins \$405.60

The button scoops a huge pot with a full house.

Conclusion:

We were unfortunate to run into the nut high and nut low draw at the same time. Despite running into the worst case scenario, we still almost had enough equity in the hand to make this a good play. If the BTN had not held top set, we would have had a lot of fold equity against him, and been able to get our money in very good against the UTG player's range of hands.

### Example 9.13

\$0.25/\$0.50 Blinds - 6 players

SB: \$34.50, BB: \$52.15, UTG: \$51.35, Hero (MP): \$46.50, CO: \$16.80, BTN: \$50.55

Preflop: (\$0.75) Hero is MP with A♣ 2♣ 6♠ 4♦

UTG calls .50, Hero raises to \$2.00, CU calls \$2.00, BTN calls \$2.00, 2 *folds*, UTG calls \$1.50

We have another big starting hand, this time in middle position. UTG limps, so we make a 4x BB raise to try to get the CU and BTN to fold so we will have position throughout the remainder of the hand. Instead we get 3 callers, so our plan didn't quite work out. Our hand is very good but not great, we are out of position versus two of the players and the pot is relatively big.

Caution is the word to keep in mind in this situation. We need to get a good flop to commit significant chips to this pot.

Flop: (\$8.75) 2♠ T♣ 5♦

UTG checks, **Hero checks**, CO checks, BTN checks

We are holding the 2<sup>nd</sup> nut low draw, a gutshot straight draw, and a backdoor nut flush draw. We hold something but not much. Given our lousy position and the number of players, we can't make a bet or call much of a bet. We have to check and will call up to a half pot-sized bet and hope to hit the turn.

Turn: (\$8.75) 9♣

UTG bets \$5.00, **Hero calls \$5.00**, 1 fold, BTN calls \$5.00

Fortunately it checks around on the flop and we hit a good turn card. We now have a draw to the nut flush and still have our second nut low draw. It is interesting that there is no card we can hit to make the mortal nuts and ensure scooping the pot. The J♣, Q♣, and K♣ all put a possible straight flush on the board, but there is no reason to worry about this unless we are at 300 BB's deep or more. With our stack, we will be committed to the pot if we river our ace high flush.

If things were 2 or 3 handed and we had position, we could consider semi-bluffing our 2-way draw. But 4-handed, we can be assured of someone calling if we bet; and out of position, we are still not looking to build a pot.

We call 5.00 on the turn with 13.75 in the pot. Given the size of the pot and the strength of our hand, flat calling is ok. There is still a player to act behind, and if he had made a big re-raise, we would have been forced to fold. For this reason folding is ok but not as good as calling given our equity in the hand.

River: (\$23.75) Q♠

UTG bets \$15.00, **Hero folds**, 1 fold

The river is a complete miss and we are finished with the hand. We have only a pair of deuces, and in a 3-way pot bluffing is not an option.

Overall, our good starting hand met poor cards on the board. Unfortunately we never had the hand strength to be able to inflate the pot, but were just strong enough to call off some chips. But we played it well and lost the minimum while giving ourselves a chance to win a big pot if our hand had hit.

### Example 9.14

This is an example of the insanity you can find at PLO8 tables. I did not play this hand myself, but picked it up data-mining. Watch how willing these players are to get 400 BB's in. Also take into account that at \$1/\$2 this is a decent size game, we're not talking .05/.10 here....

\$1.00/\$2.00 Blinds - 5 players

SB: \$835, BB: \$796.25, UTG: \$147.80, CO: \$228.90, BTN: \$196.00

SB's Hand: Q♠ 5♥ 5♦ 2♠

BB's Hand: A♠ 8♠ 6♥ 4♣

UTG's Hand: A♣ 8♣ 7♠ 3♣

Preflop: (\$3.00)

UTG calls \$2.00, 2 folds, SB calls \$2.00, BB raises to \$4.00, UTG calls \$2.00, SB raises to \$8.00, BB calls \$4.00, UTG calls \$4.00

It's difficult to get into the minds of these players and figure out their thought processes on this hand. The first suspect play is the min raise from out of the BB. Generally this would signal a big hand, because the player has to know that the others are

going to call, and he'll be out of position versus the initial limper. His hand is a suited A with an A-4 low. This is an ok hand but is not strong by any means. But then the SB, which had originally completed the big blind, min-raises the BB's min-raise with a very poor hand. This play is even more puzzling. The normal read would be that he has a premium hand like A-A-2-x and was slowing playing by just completing. But even if this was the case, it would be a mistake because the BB will be likely to check and see a flop. It would take a soul read to have put him on a pair of 5's and a suited Q!! The re-min raise by the BB is equally puzzling, and the UTG player must really wonder what is going on. UTG is in bad shape because he needs a 2 to flop to make a nut low when at least 1 other deuce is likely to be out, and he has 3 clubs partially blocking his nut club flush draw. Puzzling play all around.

Flop: (\$24.00) 5♠ 7♣ 3♥

SB flopped a set, pretty much his best case scenario. But he has no low draw and there is a possible straight on the board. Even his best case scenario is not good at all, which illustrates why his preflop play was so poor.

BB flopped a straight with a rainbow board, a 9 still gives him the nuts, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> nut low. Best case scenario for him as well. He should be looking to get all of his money in.

UTG flopped top and bottom 2 pair, and an A-8 low, not very good at all.

SB bets \$24.00, BB raises to \$96.00, UTG raises to \$139.80, SB raises to \$539.40, BB raises to \$788.25, SB calls \$248.85

Wow... The SB figured he had his best case flop, so he bet pot. Given he had no low draw and with the straight on the board, to say this is awful is being nice. The BB re-pots which is the first good play we've seen in this hand.

The UTG shove is an extreme example of mistakes NLHE players commonly make in PLO8. He has 2 pair and figures



that is good enough to get it in. Given the preceding action, this would be a bad play even in NLHE. With no credible low draw or straight draw, he just flushed his stack down the drain.

When it comes back to the SB, he has to fold here. He is likely up against a made straight draw and a low. Even if he boats up, there could easily be a set of 7's out there. But the main thing to pay attention to is how deep he and the BB are. The effective starting stack sizes are 400BB's. If you are going to play a big pot with these stack sizes, you had better have a big hand. The SB proceeds to re-pot which has to be one of the worst plays possible in PLO8.

The BB shoves which is the correct play and the SB calls.

The blinds just got 400BB's in and no one has a nut low. In how many NLHE games will you see a player all in for 75BB's and two other players in for 400BB's and no one has the nuts?

Pot Size: \$1737.30 (868 BB's)

Turn: (\$1737.50) K♥

River: (\$1737.30) 4♠

SB shows Q♠ 5♥ 5♦ 2♠ (HI: three of a kind Fives)

BB shows A♥ T♥ 5♦ 2♣ (HI: straight Ace to Five,

LO:5,4,3,2,A)

UTG shows A♦ K♥ K♠ Q♥ (HI: three of a kind Kings)

BB wins \$1737.30

The BB scoops a massive 868BB pot. This hand is highly unusual, but illustrates how juicy PLO8 can be. You will be hard pressed to find players this deep in a 1/2 NLHE game making mistakes that are this dramatic.

## Example 9.15

\$0.50/\$1.00 Blinds - 6 players

SB: \$79.90, BB: \$28.55, UTG: \$67.60, MP: \$175.85, Hero (CO): \$182.30, BTN: \$157.55

Preflop: (\$1.50) Hero is CO with  $2\clubsuit A\heartsuit 7\diamonds 9\heartsuit$

1 fold, MP raises to \$3, Hero calls \$3, BTN calls \$3, SB raises to \$16.50, 2 folds, Hero calls \$13.50, 1 fold

Flop: (\$40.00)  $T\diamonds A\clubsuit 8\spadesuit$  (2 players)

SB bets \$38.50, Hero ?????

The effective stack sizes are now \$63.40, or about 1.6x the pot on the flop (before the villain bets out). Let's see if we are committed. Given the stack to pot ratio of 1.6, we need about 38% equity in the hand to be EV neutral if we get it in and are called. The villain has bet pot; he now has 69% of his stack in, so calling is out of the question. The decision is to push or fold because we are committed anyway. We are never going to call this flop and fold the turn. By pushing now we take advantage of whatever fold equity we have, although in this case it is probably zero anyway.

We have top pair with 9 kicker, a non nut open end straight draw and a back door draw to a 7 low. Overall this is a pretty weak hand. Given that the villain 3-bet preflop, potted the flop, and there is an ace on the board, he's not folding unless he misclicks. What range of hands do we put the villain on, assuming we have no prior history with this player? For the vast majority of players the range will be less than the top 5% of hands. If he turns out to be a lunatic, a tilting drunk, or someone just messing around, it could be as high as 20%, but that is fairly unlikely. A-A-x-x is a big part of this range, and A-A-2-x should be expected a decent portion of the time if he is a typical loose-passive player.

Range = 5%, equity = 45.1%

Range = 20%, equity = 50.8%

Range = 239J (low draw + better open end straight draw), equity = 49.6%

Range = AA-low-low, equity = 35.6%

Range = AA2x, equity = 36.1%

Range = AA3Q, equity = 43.1%

Range = AAxx, equity = 41.5%

Given the villain's likely range, the decision to push or fold is a toss up. Neither decision is really good or bad from an EV standpoint. The decision comes down to factors like the amount of variance you are seeking. If you are playing on a short bankroll, you should tend to fold. If bankroll is not an issue, gambling here can be good for your image. It lets the other players at the table know that you are willing to get it in and gamble with them. This may encourage the fish to play a few more hands with you in the future, and the tight players to play a little tighter.

The point of this example is that there are many postflop scenarios where you can have what looks to be a very weak hand that is far from the nuts and still be able to profitably get your money in. We were looking to flop a nut low draw and nut flush but got neither. Despite this, we were still able to commit.

### Example 9.16

\$1.00/\$1.00 Blinds – 5 players

SB: \$124.35, BB: \$27.10, UTG: \$80.95, CO: \$91.70, Hero (BTN): \$335.50

Pre-Flop: (\$2.00) Hero is on the BTN with J♠ 8♦ J♣ K♥  
 UTG folds, MP folds, **Hero bets \$3**, SB calls \$2, BB folds.

We attempt to steal from the button. Considering our hand strength, this is a marginal play at best. It becomes justified only if the players in the blinds are very tight and very bad postflop.

Flop: (\$7.00) J♦ 9♥ 4♦

SB checks, **Hero bets \$5**, SB bets \$16, **Hero bets \$50**, SB folds.

3-betting here is a no brainer. We have the current nuts, some straight blockers, and 1 flush blocker. The opponent's check raise screams under-set. Most players aren't folding under-sets (although they should). We want to get the money in right now and not give him the opportunity to bluff a scare card on the turn. If the effective stacks were super deep (like 200 BB's), then we could consider flat calling and waiting for a safe turn.

### Example 9.17

In the preflop section we discussed the danger of playing big pairs. Here we have an example of getting trapped in a hand with 2 big pairs.

\$.50 / \$1.00 blinds – 5 players

SB: \$111.05, BB: \$91.80, UTG: \$255.30, Hero (CO): \$47.85, BTN: \$104.55

Preflop: (\$1.50) Hero is CO with J♦ J♠ K♣ K♠

UTG calls \$1, Hero calls \$1, BTN raises to \$5.50, *2 folds*, UTG calls \$4.50, Hero calls \$4.50

Although we almost never want to play big pairs, the initial limp is fine. There is already one limper ahead, and this is a double paired hand which will make a set about 1 time in 4, and

will block some straight draws when it does make a set. But calling the raise was a mistake. It is basically never ok to get 10% of our stack in with a hand like this (noticed we started with only a 50BB stack), especially when we are out of position.

Flop: (\$18.00) 8♦ J♥ 3♦

UTG bets \$17.10, Hero raises to \$42.35 all in, BTN calls \$42.35, UTG calls \$25.25

We flop gin, but we're not out of the woods yet. There is a low draw, a flush draw, and a straight draw on the board. The plan should be to try to keep the pot as small as possible here on the flop and 'draw' for a safe turn card. Then we can blast away on the turn if a good card comes. Any A, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 (24 cards) puts a low out there. If a diamond comes off, it will kill our hand. A 9, 10 or Q will also complete a straight draw. The only cards we are happy to see on the turn are the remaining J, two K's, two 8's or two 3's.

Unfortunately the UTG player prevents us from keeping the pot small by betting out full pot. Given that there is \$35 in the pot at this point and only about \$42 in our stack, the correct play is just to shove all-in, which we do. However, had the stacks been deeper, this would have been an awful play. What if we had a 150BB stack? Do you call the pot sized bet or fold the nuts? If we call the flop and a 7 comes off on the turn and he pots again, will we call? Are we going to put another 150BB's in trying to just get our money back? Rather than try to work out these problems, I think it's easier and cheaper to just stay out of trouble with these big pair hands.

Turn: (\$145.05) T♥

UTG bets \$143.05, BTN calls \$56.70 all in

River: (\$258.45) 9♣

Final Pot: \$258.45

UTG shows 5♠ 3♥ 3♠ 7♠ (HI: three of a kind, Threes)

Hero mucks J♦ J♠ K♣ K♠

BTN shows Q♦ K♦ 2♥ A♦ (HI: a straight, Nine to King)

BTN wins \$113.40

BTN wins \$143.05

Turns out we were up against a nut low draw and a nut flush draw, which should not be a surprise. Losing to a runner-runner straight instead doesn't change the fact that we were behind all the way.

### Example 9.18

When no low is possible and the pot is multi-way, you can be assured that there are some strong high hands out there. Make sure that if you are going to get your stack in that you have not only good absolute hand strength, your hand must be strong relative to what your opponents are likely to hold.

\$0.50/\$1.00 Blinds – 6 players

SB: \$72.80, BB: \$74.55, Hero (UTG): \$162.95, MP: \$100.00,  
CO: \$100.15, BTN: \$111.85

Preflop: (\$1.50) Hero is UTG with 3♣ K♠ 4♥ A♣

**Hero calls \$1**, MP calls \$1, *2 folds*, SB calls \$0.50, BB checks

I'm not a big fan of the limp preflop, but limping in PLO8 is not generally a very big mistake. Our hand is strong enough that we can open for a raise even being UTG.

Flop: (\$4.00) 8♣ J♣ K♦

SB bets \$3.80, BB calls \$3.80, **Hero calls \$3.80**, MP folds

We flop top pair top kicker, the nut flush draw, and a back

door second nut low draw. With the pot sized bet and call in front, calling is appropriate here. We're not looking to jam and go to war yet because we are still drawing and aren't trying to protect anything. We are likely against straight draws, smaller flush draws, 2 pair, or possibly a set.

Turn: (\$15.40) K♣

SB checks, BB checks, **Hero bets \$14.65**, SB calls \$14.65, BB calls \$14.65

The turn is a good card and we make the nut flush with trips. The villains both check indicating weakness. A bet is appropriate here, but there is no reason for it to be the full size of the pot. If they are truly afraid of the K, they are going to fold anyway. If one of them boated up and is slow playing, we are going to be jumping into a trap. A bet of about 1/2 to 2/3 the size of the pot is more appropriate. As played, we bet full pot and get flat called by both villains. This should be setting off alarm bells! What kind of hands would they do this with? An under-full house is certainly in their range. They could possibly have lower flushes if they are complete idiots, although the BB is much less likely to hold this than the SB. We should be looking to make a full house on the river and crush a smaller full house.

River: (\$59.35) 6♠

SB checks, BB checks, **Hero bets \$56.45**, SB folds, BB calls \$55.10 all in

We miss the river and it is checked to us. At this point we are not getting called by worse, so betting for value doesn't seem like a good idea. We could possibly make a small bet and try to extract a little value from a smaller flush, but that seems unlikely. If we bet to try to fold out a better hand are there any better hands we can actually get to fold? Here the only better hands are full houses. Although it is often entirely appropriate

in Omaha to fold under-full houses, in practice at low limits it rarely happens. Trying to get anyone to fold even the worst of full houses is usually suicidal, so checking behind seems best.

As played, we bet the pot. Any worse hand is going to fold, and any better hand is going to call. This is the worst thing we could have done. If this was a super tough higher limit game with seasoned players that were capable of folding an under-full, then this play might have had some merit.

Final Pot: \$169.55

BB shows 9♥ J♠ 4♣ J♦ (HI: a full house, Jacks full of Kings)

Hero shows 3♣ K♠ 4♥ A♣ (HI: a flush, Ace high)

BB wins \$166.55

The second point is that it shows how questionable it was to call the 3-bet preflop. Although it was ok on the flop to get it in with 40% equity, these really aren't the situations we are trying to create to get our money in. We don't want to be taking the wrong side of 60/40 flips more often than we have to. If our preflop hand strength was better, we would have had many more flops where we also would have been correct to commit, but would have had the best of it. Having another wheel card, or another flush draw, and not having a 9 in our hand means we will hit many more flops and tend to hit them harder. This will go a long ways to getting us back on the right side of the 60/40's and 55/45's.



## Conclusion

You can attain higher win rates playing PLO8 than you can in PLO and NLHE. This book gave you the knowledge you need to transition to PLO8 and go out and crush these games. Very few players actually know how to play PLO8, but if you have read and studied this book, you should now be one of them.

The future of PLO8 is bright. The opportunities to win money in both cash games and tournaments will only increase. This is because cash games are beginning to be spread more often in some areas and have been increasing in popularity as players get tired of NLHE. And PLO8 has now been included in many of the most popular live and online tournament series. I expect this book to contribute to the growth of PLO8, and to make more games available so the serious players will have more games to choose from.

I wish you the best of luck. Now go out there and win a lot of money.



## Glossary

**Big card:** An A, K, Q or J

**Blockers:** When you hold cards in your hand that help prevent other players from completing likely draws

**Blocking bet:** A small bet made when out of position, intended to prevent opponents from betting

**Broadway:** An ace high straight (A-K-Q-J-T)

**BTN:** Button

**BB:** Big blind

**CO:** Cutoff

**Counterfeit:** A card that comes that duplicates one of the cards in your hand and lowers the value of your hand

**Counterfeit protection:** Having an additional low card in your hand, so that if your made low is counterfeited, you will still have a good made low hand

**Dangler:** A fourth card in your hand that does not coordinate with the other three cards in your hand.

**Dry board:** A board that does not contain many possible draws

**Effective stack size:** Of the players in a given hand, the smallest stack size

**Equity:** The percentage of the pot that you can expect to win over a large sample size

**Fear equity:** The advantage you have from being able to threaten your opponents' entire stack at any given time

**Free-roll:** A situation where you can either scoop or win at least half the pot, but will never lose money in the hand

**Full ring:** A 9-handed game

**Gin:** Hitting the best possible flop or card for your hand

**Gutshot:** A straight draw that can only be completed by 4 cards, also known as an inside straight draw

**Hijack:** The seat 2 off of the button

**Implied odds:** Pot odds adjusted for the potential for future bets which may be made in the hand

**Middle card:** A 7, 8, 9 or 10

**MP:** Middle position

**MP+1:** The position one to the left of the middle position player

**MTT:** Multi-table tournament

**Naked A-2:** A hand with an ace and a 2 in it but with no other high or low hand potential

**NLHE:** No-limit hold'em

**Nut:** The best possible flush, straight, or low possible for a given board

**Nuts:** The best possible hand for a given board

**Nut peddling:** Playing very tight and trying to make the nuts before putting significant money in the pot

**Outs:** The number of cards that you believe will give you the winning hand

**Peel:** Calling a bet to see another card

**Playability:** How easy or difficult it is to play a particular hand. This is primarily a function of whether or not the hand will tend to make the nuts so that we will know the hand is good when it hits, or bad if it misses

**PLO:** Pot-limit Omaha

**PLO8:** Pot-limit Omaha 8

**Position:** The seat that you hold at the table

**Pot-committed:** When the size of the pot and the size of your stack are such that you will be getting the proper pot odds to commit the rest of your stack no matter what the betting action is or what cards come out on the board

**Quarter:** To win one half of the pot outright and tie for the other half

**Reverse implied odds:** The money you may lose on future betting rounds if you make a second best hand

**SB:** Small blind

**Scoop:** To win both the high and low halves of the pot

**Six max:** A 6-handed game

**SNG:** Sit and Go

**Timebank:** In online poker, to use the extra time you are given

**Three-quarter:** To quarter

**ROI:** Return on investment

**UTG:** Under the gun, the first player to act in the hand after the blinds

**UTG+1:** The next player to act after the under the gun play

**Variance:** A mathematical measure of volatility

**Wet board:** A board with many possible draws

**Wheel:** A straight A through 5

**Wheel card:** Any card A, 2, 3, 4, or 5

**Wrap:** A straight draw which can be completed by more than eight cards