

Collection of various Shorthanded Limit Hold'em articles/posts

	Opener				1-2 Limpers				Facing A Raise			Facing 3 Bet	
	UTG	MP	CO	Button	MP	CO	Button	MP	CO	Button	CO	Button	
AA	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	CAP	CAP	
K-K	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	CAP	CAP	
QQ	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	CAP	CAP	
JJ	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	CAP	CAP	
TT	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	F	F	
99	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	F	F	
88	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R/F	R/F	RR	F	F	
77	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R/F	R/F	RR	F	F	
66	F	R	R	R	LA	LA	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
55	F	R	R	R	LA	LA	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
44	F	R	R	R	LA	LA	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
33	F	F	R	R	LA	LA	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
22	F	F	R	R	LA	LA	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
A-Ks	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	CAP	CAP	
A-Qs	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	F	CAP	
A-Js	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	F	F	
A-Ts	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	F	F	
A9s	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	F	F	RR	F	F	
A8s	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
A7s	F	R/F	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
A6s	F	R/F	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
A5s	F	R/F	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
A4s	F	R/F	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
A3s	F	R/F	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
A2s	F	R/F	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
AK	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	CAP	CAP	
AQ	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	F	F	
AJ	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R/F	RR	RR	F	F	
AT	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R/F	R/F	R/F	F	F	
A9	F	R	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
A8	F	F	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
A7	F	F	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
A6	F	F	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
A5	F	F	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
A4	F	F	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
A3	F	F	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
A2	F	F	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
KQs	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RR	RR	RR	F	F	
KJs	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R/F	RR	RR	F	F	
KTs	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	F	F	R/F	F	F	
K9s	F	R	R	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
K8s	F	F	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
KQ	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R/F	RR	RR	F	F	
KJ	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	F	F	R/F	F	F	
KT	F	F	R	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
K9	F	F	R	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
QJs	R	R	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	R/F	F	F	
QTs	R/F	R	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
Q9s	F	F	R	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
Q8s	F	F	F	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
QJ	F	F	R	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
QT	F	F	R	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
Q9	F	F	F	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
JTs	R/F	R	R	R	LA	R	R	F	F	F	F	F	
J9s	F	F	R/F	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
J8s	F	F	F	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
JT	F	F	R	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
J9	F	F	F	R	F	F	L2-3	F	F	F	F	F	
T9s	F	F	F	R	F	F	LA	F	F	F	F	F	
T8s	F	F	F	R	F	F	L2-3	F	F	F	F	F	
T9	F	F	F	R	F	F	L2-3	F	F	F	F	F	
98s	F	F	F	R	F	F	L2-3	F	F	F	F	F	
87s	F	F	F	R	F	F	L2-3	F	F	F	F	F	
76s	F	F	F	R	F	F	L2-3	F	F	F	F	F	

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1 PokerPages articles by Jason Pohl

1.1 Short-Handed Poker: Varying Your Play by Jason Pohl

"Vary your play." Those three words are like a sacred mantra, chanted down by more authors than I care to visualize. Those three words are treated as gospel by thousands of poker players every day. Because it is said so often and practiced even more, the sanctity of the advice often goes unquestioned. But is it really such a sacred concept after all?

The Losing Psychology

Why do losing players continue to lose? There are only a handful of plausible explanations. Maybe the losing player doesn't care about winning, or they aren't willing to put in the time to learn, or they don't know where to learn. Maybe the losing player fails to observe others, lacks necessary patience, or simply tilts at the first sign of bad luck. To each of these players, the instruction "Vary your play" must sound wonderful. After all, it's a simple concept and easy to implement. It requires little patience, since one can play extra hands in the name of 'variety.' It justifies tilting, explaining those bad raises or calls away. "In any case", the tilter thinks, "I'm just mixing up my play." It is some of the most undemanding advice available in the poker world, because everybody can be "unpredictable," and they don't even really need to know how to play.

There have been multiple networks showing celebrities compete in poker tournaments for their favorite charities. An education in solid poker play this is not, but there is some entertainment value, especially if you enjoy poker for the sake of poker. When they were asked about their style, many of the celebrities stated something to the effect of, "Well, I have no clue what I'm doing, so that will make me really unpredictable. I figure that's a huge advantage." Of course, this sort of logic is flawed (and humorous). But it does give an introspective look into the thought process of many beginning players who feel that "unpredictability" is a "huge advantage."

In this article, we will somewhat debunk the "Vary your play" motto. I will argue that it is an idea that only applies intermittently to specific sets of players. In effect, we will change the slogan to "Vary your play IF..." Figuring out when to vary your play will separate the losing players using unpredictability as an excuse from the winning players using unpredictability as a weapon.

Reflecting the Wrong Image

Let's begin with the fundamental assumption that there is a 'correct' way to play. I believe strongly that there is in fact a correct style, and that style is known as tight/aggressive. In order to be tight and aggressive, a winning player will naturally play tighter than most of their competition, and a winning player will bet, raise, or reraise more effectively than their competition. In addition, the tight/aggressive player will regularly show down winning hands. There is **nothing** a winning player can do to change these simple truths. And eventually, somebody will notice. But the reality is that **most** players will in fact never notice. There are several reasons the tight/aggressive player escapes detection.

First, most players are unobservant. Online opponents might play 2 or more tables, read their email, visit their favorite website, or watch TV in the background. There is also a high turnover

on most online games, with players changing tables or limits at a whim. Some players show up to play as little as ten minutes before work, errands, or the new episode of their favorite sitcom. Even at live games, most players only notice hands shown down at the end, and even then they might not pay heed unless they were the one losing the pot. Since most pots are won by a high-quality hand, it may not even register as unusual when one player consistently shows down good hands to take down large pots. In fact, such a trend might be taken as evidence of that player's good fortune. Note: You could encourage this point of view by occasionally 'admitting' that the deck is "running your over."

Second, luck will play a role in mixing up one's play. No matter how tight one plays, they will occasionally get streaks of five or more hands where they start with premium holdings. Raising the pot several times in a row could brand a player as loose/aggressive, because few players would suspect that all those consecutive hands were in fact properly played.

Finally, we come to the other underlying problem with loose calls or raises. To affect your image, you must show down your hand. Consider how often a hand like 96s misses the flop. Is it worth "advertising" your phantom loose tendencies if you must make several bad plays to show your hand? Remember, if you consistently take hands too far and bluff too much in the name of "unpredictability", you are no longer playing tight/aggressive. While trying to deceive people into believing you are a loose/aggressive or loose/passive player, you may in fact become one! Even when you finally show down a poor hand, your opponents must notice your play **and** make a change in how they play against you. Also, if they reason deeply enough to consider that you might play an extra hand to "vary your play," you have lost all advantage. In other words, a player good enough to pay attention could very well be good enough to see through your ruse. A player not good enough to see through your deception may not notice your 'bad play' in the first place.

Earning a Bigger Pot

It is often pointed out that it might be occasionally correct to limp-raise with pocket Aces, or to raise with T9s from an early position, or a myriad of other plays contrary to standard practice. In fact, such advice is correct in specific circumstances. For example, if one or more players was raising every hand preflop (but not reraising), limping Aces with the intention of reraising might earn additional profit. Or, if the game was exceptionally tight, suited connectors might profit immediately because the chance of stealing the blinds is high (turning a marginal call/fold into a profitable raise). However, in these scenarios, the profit earned by playing the hand unconventionally is immediate. All this proves is that one must adjust their play to the game. The "correct" strategy has changed because there are extreme conditions. I have no quarrel with the need to adjust one's play to earn as much money as possible, dependent on game conditions. However, if there is no immediate profit earned from a misleading play, then we are back to depending on our opponents' observation skills to earn extra bets later in the session. If a limp-raise with pocket Aces saves your opponents from making significant mistakes after the flop, the initial profit preflop may not actually increase **overall** profit. If none of your opponents will give you credit for strength when you raise from early position anyways, why raise with a weak hand to fool them?

Limit poker is a game with finite edges. An opponent's gaffe will result in a relatively small, fixed loss. So, the profit earned when hitting a miracle flop with a substandard hand is far outweighed by the losses incurred when the flop misses or gives the substandard hand a second-best hand. For example, if a player gives up a small bet (or more) five times out of six by limping with 74s in early position, they are going to have an impossible struggle to earn

enough when they finally win a pot (while not losing much when second-best). And remember, without trying to make questionable moves, even tight/aggressive players will sometimes lay a bad beat on their opponent or make a play which appears to be incorrect. Most players will not analyze the point of view of the tight/aggressive player, so they will chalk up the bad beat or 'bad reraise' as the play of a flawed but fortunate player.

Two Alternative Forms of Variation

There are alternatives to making inferior moves for the sake of future gains one hopes to earn. One alternative is to adjust to each specific player. I can hear you saying now, "Wait a minute! Wasn't I supposed to be doing that anyways?" The answer is 'Absolutely.' And that is the point. If you play possum (check-call some marginal hands or slowplay big hands) with one opponent because they are repeatedly bluffing, but then you immediately raise against another opponent because they are too tight/passive, then you have just projected two entirely different playing styles to the table. Imagine how confused even an observant opponent must be.

There is another even less complicated option. Change poker rooms, change games, or change limits. In my opinion, one of the greatest assets to a poker player is their anonymity. First of all, most players need zero effort to protect their anonymity. They may not play more than a few hours a week at one or maybe two games at a time. Likely, those players are simply lost in the shuffle. However, if a player competes many hours a week, often at multiple games, then eventually others (especially good, observant players) will recognize them. Their tight/aggressive style will be noted by the better opponents, who will take advantage by avoiding confrontations or making a few extra strong moves saved only for a solid player willing to lay down a good hand.

The solution is simple. Use multiple online sites. There are many online poker rooms that advertise on Poker Pages, including Paradise Poker, Party Poker, Buggy's Club, True Poker, Palace Poker, Poker Room, Planet Poker, InterCasino Poker, Empire Poker, and Pacific Poker. I have not played at some of these sites, but I have also played at others not listed above. The nearly universal similarities among these sites is that they offer deposit bonuses and regularly have Texas Hold'em games available. Why not hold accounts with multiple sites and multiple handles? You can play as LuckyGuy1000 at one room, but RunningDeuces22 at another. Since you can switch back and forth between the accounts regularly, nobody gets too familiar with your playing style. The same thing applies to live games. If you have multiple options, be inclined to travel to different cardrooms. Occasionally play different limits or games altogether. The only things you need to maintain this variety are a healthy bankroll and some extra hard drive space on your computer...a pretty small price to pay to stay unknown and unpredictable.

Vary Your Play IF...

Of course, sometimes it does pay to vary your play. As the limits increase, the chances your competition will be paying attention increases. At low limits, varying your play is almost pointless, since it is rarely noted, and even if it was, it wouldn't make much of a difference due to the texture of the typical low limit game. At middle and high limits, there might be some value to 'false advertising,' but even then it depends on the length of time one spends at the table and the turnover of players. After all, if you or your opponents will not be playing in an hour, why sacrifice any short-term profit? Varying your play may also become important if you don't have choices for where to play. You might have a weekly home game with some solid players or only one casino in a 150-mile radius. If you are frequently returning to see the same

group of players, then projecting a mottled image becomes valuable. Remember, many of the authors who constantly advise to "Vary your play" are in fact facing exactly these two criteria. They play high limits with a relatively small pool of players, and they play a lot. To thrive, they must deceive, confuse, and manipulate their opponents by giving up some short-term loss for the sake of long-term gain. For the rest of us, there is rarely such need.

I leave you with one of the greatest lines in one of the greatest poker movies of all time, **The Cincinnati Kid**. I will not give away the story, so I cannot offer the full context of this passage. Lancey Howard is a famous professional poker player (i.e. the reigning champion) while the Cincinnati Kid is the up-and-coming young professional poker player trying to become "The Man."

Lancey Howard: Gets down to what it's all about, doesn't it? Making the wrong move at the right time.

Cincinnati Kid: Is that what it's all about?

Lancey Howard: Like life, I guess.

1.2 Short-Handed Poker: The Overcard Quandary Part I

by Jason Pohl

Disclaimer: This two-part article includes a lot more mathematics than usual subjects would require. If you are a beginning player, please try your best to follow along. Understanding probabilities and how to calculate the profitability of different outcomes is definitely useful. I have also double-checked all equations, but I cannot promise there are not some minor mistakes since all calculations were completed by hand. If you see an error, please email me at Jason@PokerPages.com, and I will have the math corrected. I hope you enjoy the article.

What Makes a Player Lose?

The main ingredient common to most losing players is a relative looseness. Losing players play too many hands, but more importantly, they will play losing hands too far. Some losing players are loose and aggressive. To some extent, their aggressiveness may help camouflage their vulnerability because they'll buy some pots, but eventually the loose aggressive player will run into a strong hand. When the confrontation occurs, the cost will be high. Loose passive players face a greater dilemma and can really only thrive if their competition bluffs too much. Known affectionately as calling stations, loose passive players will be pummeled by attentive players. Against any player that is too loose, the winning strategy is uncomplicated: wait for a good hand and bet. Bluffs will be consistently unprofitable if the competition calls (or raises) with weak hands. Profit will be earned on big wins with real hands. A winning shorthanded player is aware that the **vast majority** of competition will play too loose, even for a shorthanded game. In fact, many players will justify their flimsy calls with bottom pair or Ace-high by assessing, "This is a shorthanded game. My opponent is far more likely to be bluffing." Against such weak opposition, patience and showing down big hands are required to be victorious at the tables.

This fundamental idea is at the heart of one of the toughest predicaments many tight aggressive players face. If a real hand is required to win because our competition is too loose, how does one play overcards? An absolute answer does not exist, because so much depends on the level and style of competition. But it can be helpful to examine some emblematic circumstances every shorthanded player faces.

Overcards in a Heads-Up Pot.

Scenario 1. Button has $K\heartsuit Q\clubsuit$. Big blind has $9\heartsuit 8\clubsuit$.

Flop is $2\clubsuit 6\heartsuit 8\clubsuit$. Big blind bets out. 5.5 small bets in the pot.

With this sort of flop, the big blind's bet is very straightforward. Top pair is a strong hand shorthanded, but definitely vulnerable, and a bet puts only 5.5 small bets in the pot. The button faces a difficult decision. The button has 6 outs (in this case, all 6 are clean.) If the button knew what the big blind held, he could calculate odds of 6/45 or 6.5 to 1. At first glance, 6.5 to 1 odds appear insufficient to call, but the button can pretty much count on winning at least one more big bet if a King or Queen falls. In other words, the implied odds are sufficient to justify taking a card off.

If we presumed the button would win one extra big bet when a King or Queen falls on the turn, then the EV for a call would be calculated as follows:

- Queen or King on Turn: $(6/45 * 7.5) = +1.0$ Small Bets
- No Queen or King: $(39/45 * -1) = -0.8666$ Small Bets
- Total EV: $1.0 - .8666 = 0.133$ **Small bets/hand profit**

So, the computations concur that a call is profitable. In this ideal scenario, where all 6 outs are clean, the button would make money by continuing to see at least the turn card. But would a raise be superior to a call? It depends. If we assume that the big blind will call a raise on the flop and then check on the turn, the button will be able to take a free card and add even more profit. Let's examine three possible outcomes.

- **Outcome 1:** Button Does Not Improve: $(39/45) * (38/44) = 1482/1980 = 74.85\%$
The button does not improve when any of the 39 of 45 cards not a King or Queen fall on the turn **and** any of the 38 of 44 cards not a King or Queen fall on the river.
- **Outcome 2:** Both Hands Improve: $\{(6/45) * (5/44) + (5/45) * (6/44)\} = 60/1980 = 3.03\%$
Both hands improve when either a King or Queen (6 of 45) falls on the turn, followed by a Nine or Eight (5 of 44) on the river **or** when a Nine or Eight (5 of 45) falls on the turn, followed by a King or Queen (6 of 44) on the river.
- **Outcome 3:** Only Button Improves: $\{(6/45) * (39/44) + (34/45) * (6/44)\} = 438/1980 = 22.12\%$
-Only the button improves when either a King or Queen (6 of 45) falls on the turn, followed by anything but a Nine or Eight (39 of 44) **or** when a blank (34 of 45) falls on the turn, followed by a King or Queen (6 of 44) on the river. A blank means any card NOT a King, Queen, Nine, or Eight. For those who are wondering, the blank card in the second half of the equation can not include a King or Queen because the first part of the equation already includes the times that a King or Queen falls on both the turn and the river.

Finally, we guess how much the button would earn or lose in each scenario. In possibility 1, that's easy. The button would lose 2 small bets since it raises the flop. In possibility 2, we can assume the button will lose the 2 small bets plus either 2 or 3 big bets (we'll average and say 2.5.) In possibility 3, the button will gain the 6.5 small bets in the flop plus an average of 1.5 big bets (2 big bets when the King or Queen falls on the turn, 1 big bet when the King or Queen falls on the river.) I know there are a lot of assumptions involved. But we're not trying to come up with a perfect answer, just an approximation.

$$EV = (.7485 * -2) + (.0303 * -7) + (.2212 * 9.5) = -1.497 - .2121 + 2.1014 = \mathbf{0.3923 \text{ small bets/hand profit}}$$

Whew. Hope that math isn't too confusing. The ability to take a free card makes the button's hand three times more profitable than a call alone. But there's a real problem. Most shorthanded players beyond the lowest limits are quite familiar with semibluff or free card raises, and they will not let them work so often. If the big blind bets out again on the turn (even if they only bet when a nine or less falls), then the button's raise on the flop becomes a

significant loser. A nine or less would fall 27 of 45 times on the turn. In other words, the button will now only improve (when the big blind doesn't improve) about $\{(6/45) * (39/44) + (12/45) * (6/44)\} = 306/1980 = 15.45\%$ of the time. Instead of **.3923 small bets/hand profit**, a raise would now result in approximately a **.2 small bets/hand loss**, even when we factor the times when a Nine or Eight falls on the turn and the big blind's bet prevents the button from improving (and losing additional money.) A call remains superior to a raise unless the button can be very sure to gain a free card.

Scenario 2. Button has $K \heartsuit Q \clubsuit$. Big blind has $9 \clubsuit 8 \heartsuit$.

Flop is $2 \clubsuit 6 \heartsuit 8 \clubsuit$. Button bets. Big blind checkraises. 7.5 small bets in the pot.

Let's compare the EV for a call (since we have already concluded that a raise is less profitable than a call against all but the most passive players.) If we again presumed the button would win one extra big bet when a King or Queen falls on the turn, then the EV for a call would be calculated as follows:

- Queen or King on Turn: $(6/45 * 9.5) = +1.2666$ Small Bets
 - No Queen or King: $(39/45 * -1) = -0.8666$ Small Bets
- Total EV: $1.266 - .8666 = 0.4$ **Small bets/hand profit**

The calculations are fairly straightforward. With a larger pot, a call with overcards will be more profitable. Although the profit for a call after the big blind's checkraise is higher than after the big blind's bet out, this does not mean the big blind made a mistake by checkraising. The button will earn back .4 small bets profit on average, but that figure is **after** the 1 small bet already lost on the flop. If the button knew he was about to be checkraised, the best play would have been to check and take the free card. As they say, hindsight is 20/20.

Scenario 3. Button has $K \heartsuit Q \clubsuit$. Big blind has $Q \heartsuit 8 \clubsuit$

Flop is $2 \clubsuit 6 \heartsuit 8 \clubsuit$. Button bets. Big blind checkraises. 7.5 small bets in pot.

Both Scenarios 1 and 2 were near ideal situations for the big blind since all its overcard outs were clean. The reality is that this will often not be the case. If one was to presume that the big blind's checkraise meant it had a real hand, we could limit the possible holdings somewhat. Possible holdings that leave the Queen and King clean include A2, A6, A8, J8, T8, 98, 77, 99, and TT. Other holdings that counterfeit one of the button's outs are K2s, K6s, K8, or Q8. In other words, the button will be thwarted even when a King or Queen falls, because it will make two pair for the big blind. How bad does this counterfeiting hurt? Let's look again at the specific hands in Scenario 3. The button earns an extra big bet when a King falls and loses two big bets when a Queen falls.

- **Outcome 1.** King on the Turn $(3/45 * 9.5) = +.6333$ Small Bets
 - **Outcome 2.** Queen on the Turn $(2/45 * -5) = -.2222$ Small Bets
 - **Outcome 3.** No Queen or King $(40/45 * -1) = -.8888$ Small Bets
- Total EV: $.6333 - .2222 - .8888 = 0.4777$ **Small bets/hand loss**

Although it took a while to get to it, we have reached the first major point of this article. On an average flop, a player with a legitimate hand will have a kicker matching one of the button's overcards some portion of the time. And there is one last possibility. If the big blind holds a big hand such as 22, 66, 88, 86, KK, or AA, the button is drawing dead or nearly dead. By adding these holdings to the mix, calling with overcards against a legitimate hand becomes unprofitable. There are now 22 combinations which reduce the button to 3 outs, 22 combinations which reduce the button to virtually zero outs, and 88 combinations where a King or Queen are clean outs.

The overall EV of calling is calculated by figuring when all 6 overcard outs are clean (2/3 of the time), one of them is counterfeited (1/6th of the time), and when the button is drawing nearly dead (1/6th of the time). I have taken the liberty of doing two additional formulas to plug into our final EV formula. First, I calculated Scenario 3 as if the big blind had only bet out. Second, I calculated Scenario 3 as if the King on the turn led to a 5 small bet loss.

- EV when big blind bets out:
 $(2/3 * .133) - (1/6 * .611) - (1/6 * 1.444) = .0887 - .1018 - .241 = \mathbf{.2541 \text{ small bets/hand loss}}$
- EV when big blind checkraises:
 $(2/3 * .4) - (1/6 * .4777) - (1/6 * 1.444) = .2666 - .0796 - .241 = \mathbf{.054 \text{ small bets/hand loss}}$

And so, we reach the foremost thrust of the overcard quandary. At first glance, drawing to two overcards appears profitable, but it is frequently a losing play. Even if the loss is 1/4th a small bet on average, the impact in the long run is significant. Until a player becomes very good at identifying their opponent's possible holdings, they may not be able to recognize when their overcard outs are safe. Without that skill, the proper play is often a simple fold. In part II of this article, we will examine overcards in a multi-way pot and overcards against a habitual bluffer. We will also counter a worry of many advanced players: will folding overcards lead to more bluffs?

1.3 Short-Handed Poker: The Overcard Quandary Part II

by Jason Pohl

In part 1 of this article, I used some fairly dense calculations to demonstrate that the best play with overcards is very often a simple fold. In the second section, we will follow-up by gauging the odds with a larger pot and multiple opponents. Then, we will answer an important question. Will folding overcards cause our opposition to run us over with bluffs?

Overcards in a Multi-Way Pot.

Scenario 4. Button has A♣ K♥. Big blind has T♥ 9♣. Limper has 6♥ 5♥
 Flop is 2♥ 5♠ T♠. Big blind bets out and Limper calls. 8.5 small bets in the pot.

- **Outcome 1.** Ace or King on the Turn $(6/43 * 10.5) = +1.465$ small bets
 - **Outcome 2.** No Ace or King $(37/43 * -1) = -.861$ small bets
- Total EV: **.604 small bets/hand profit**

The button's best hope is that all overcard outs are clean. If they are, then calling earns a considerable profit. This should be fairly obvious, since we showed a gain calling with 6 outs, one challenger, and a smaller pot size. Next, we will examine the numbers if one limper holds a kicker common to the button's overcards.

Scenario 5. Button has A♣ K♥. Big blind has T♥ 9♣. Limper has A♦ 5♥.
 Flop is 2♥ 5♠ T♠. Big blind bets out and Limper calls. 8.5 small bets in the pot.

- **Outcome 1.** King on the Turn $(3/43 * 10.5) = +.733$ small bets
 - **Outcome 2.** Ace on the Turn $(2/43 * -5) = -.222$ small bets
 - **Outcome 3.** No Ace or King $(38/43 * -1) = -.884$ small bets
- Total EV: **.373 small bets/hand loss**

The pot size is healthier with three opponents than only two, but having one overcard cut off still represents a swing of one small bet and a significant loss. However, like the heads-up

examples in Part I, the real danger is when both of the button's outs are cut off. Scenario 6 analyzes the loss when the button needs two perfect cards.

Scenario 6. Button has A♣ K♥. Big blind has K♦ T♥. Limper has A♦ 2♦.
Flop is 2♥ 5♠ T♣.

- **Outcome 1.** Running Ace/King $(.0288 * 18.5) = +.5328$ small bets
The button will only win if exactly an Ace **and** King falls OR exactly a Jack **and** Queen falls. One of these combinations will transpire 2.88% of the time. To simplify, I will assume there are 4 extra big bets won if the button gets lucky enough to win.
- **Outcome 2.** Ace or King on Turn, Blank on River $(4/43 * 38/42 * -5) = -760/1806 = -.421$ small bets
- **Outcome 3.** Jack or Queen on Turn, Blank on River $(6/43 * 34/42 * -3) = -612/1806 = -.339$ small bets
This scenario occurs because the button picks up an inside straight draw. When a complete blank falls, the button spends one extra big bet.
- **Outcome 4.** Jack or Queen on Turn, Ace or King on River $(6/43 * 4/42 * -5) = -120/1806 = -.067$ small bets
After a Jack or Queen, if an Ace or King falls, the button will likely call down on the river, sacrificing a total of 2 big bets after the flop.
- **Outcome 5.** No Ace, King, Jack, or Queen on Turn $(33/43 * -1) = -.767$ small bets
Total EV: $(.5328 - .421 - .339 - .067 - .767) = 1.06$ **small bets/hand loss**

Four of the five possible outcomes are quite disastrous, and even the best outcome occurs only 2.88% of the time. A similar misfortune would transpire if either opponent held a very powerful hand such as a set of 5s or 2s. Against a set, the button is drawing dead to a running Queen/Jack.

But how often can the button expect to have all 6 outs, 3 outs, or nearly zero outs? If we presume that our opposition called preflop with at least a reasonable hand, then the risk that each player holds an Ace or King to go with their pair is very significant. For example, if we assumed 22, 55, TT, AA, A2, A5, AT, K2s, K5s, KT, KK, QQ, JJ, T8, T9, JT, QT, 54s, 65s, 75s, 99, 88, 77, and 66 were **all** possible hands, then 25% (34 of the 136) of possible holdings would counterfeit the button's AK. If we believed for whatever reason that our bettor or limper could be holding overcards such as QJ, KQ, AQ, AJ, or weaker pairs such as 32s, 53s, T7s, 44, or 33, then the percentage of feared hands goes down to 15.2% (34 of 223). The principal sense is that each player who has called a bet increases the probability the button has 3 or fewer outs.

How often is the button drawing dead or nearly dead? On a flop like the one in Scenario 6, maybe not that often. Only a 22, 55, TT, and AA are likely dominating hands. There are only 15 combinations of these pocket pairs. Combining those deadly hands with the possibility both the Ace and King are held by an opponent, the AK is drawing nearly dead 15-20% of the time. It gets worse. A flop like {2♥ 5♠ T♣} is abnormally non-threatening. On the other hand, a dangerous flop such as T♦ 9♦ 8♣ is prone to generate a ruinous outcome such two pair, a set, or a made straight.

Against a fairly non-threatening flop, we can estimate that the button has all 6 outs about 40% of the time, only 3 outs 40% of the time, and virtually no outs 20% of the time:

Overall EV: $(.604 * .4) - (.373 * .4) - (1.06 * .2) = .2416 - .1492 - .212 = 0.12$ **small bets/hand loss**

If we measured a more dangerous flop, our numbers might look closer to the following:

Overall EV: $(.604 * .2) - (.373 * .5) - (1.06 * .3) = .1208 - .1865 - .318 = 0.297$ **small bets/hand loss**

The lesson here is that the bigger pot goes a long way towards adding profitability to a call with overcards, but as the chance for a catastrophe increases (due to a dangerous flop or a high number of players), the profit with overcards turns into a definite loss. For that reason, solid play of overcards is so often associated with excellent or world class players. Remember, the rewards earned by calling at the correct times with overcards are relatively marginal. The losses faced when misplaying overcards can be huge. So, stick with a conservative approach. Call with overcards only against one opponent (and not even then if the pot is small) unless you have a very strong understanding of your opponent's play and their possible holdings.

Overcards against a Habitual Bluffer.

There are two last situations I'd like to briefly examine. Occasionally, a shorthanded player will find himself against a habitual bluffer or semibluffer. A habitual bluffer will consistently bet the whole way with no pair, sometimes with overcards or ace-high but also with far less. It frequently makes sense to call with the intention of showing down ace-high. Other times, taking a card off is the best play, if implied odds are good or it sets up future plays (slowplaying a big hand.)

Scenario 7. Button has A♥ Q♣. Big blind has K♦ J.

Flop is 2♥ 5♣ T♦. Big blind bets out. 5.5 small bets in pot.

With a hand like AQ, I will call the entire way against a known bluffer. Here's why.

If the bluffer has no pair (e.g. KJ), the AQ will win about 75% of the time.

If the bluffer actually has a pair (e.g. T9), the AQ will still win about 25% of the time.

Even with only 5.5 small bets in the pot, the button can call down and remain a winner if the big blind is semibluffing with no pair 20% of the time or more. The combined potential of the AQ as a bluff-catcher and 6-out draw makes a calldown profitable. If the big blind will only bluff on the flop, the button should call even more often. In such a case, the big blind's check on the turn could indicate weakness, and the button has the option to take a free card or to semibluff back at the big blind.

In my experience, facing habitual bluffers is the exception rather than the rule. Most players in the big blind do not bet out as a bluff, and most players would not stop betting until at least the river. If you find yourself against either type of bluffer, your calling standards (and in fact, the whole way you would play a legitimate hand) should be adjusted to overcome their style.

Won't My Opponents Begin Bluffing More?

With no pair against all but the most aggressive competition, overcards are a loser. It is better to dump them quickly and move on to the next hand. But good players will be quick to point out one possible impact of such a strategy. If a preflop raiser plays fairly tight and will fold on the flop without a made hand, doesn't this leave a huge gap that good players can exploit? Namely, wouldn't a bluff on the flop from the big blind become incredibly profitable? The answer is 'yes.' However, there are two reasons that we shouldn't worry so much about it. First, most players are unobservant, especially at lower limits. Online I have found lack of observation skills to be further in the norm, since many players try to compete at two or more tables simultaneously. To have one's tightness countered effectively, a player must observe the button folding multiple times in similar situations, and then they must be advanced enough to know how to use this information. While I would not always expect your opponents to be oblivious to your folds, it is far worse to expect your opponents to "guess" your cards. Don't sweat it until you find yourself the victim of excessive aggression from one player. When you do, switch gears and adjust your play to punish their bluffing.

Second, you will still have a hand often enough to camouflage how tight you are playing. Realize that in all seven scenarios in this article, the highest card on the flop is a Ten. Such flops are atypical. A hand like AKo will flop a pair or better 1/3rd of the time. AKo will also flop a decent draw (and overcards) somewhat regularly. On the other hand, the solid preflop raiser is more vulnerable when the flop contains three small cards. When the button doesn't hold a pocket pair, a bluff from the big blind will likely be profitable. For this reason, it is important to carefully observe the frequency of bets on those ragged flops (and flops such as QQx or AA4), since those are the types of flops that bluffers target. All in all, my suggestion to fold quickly on the flop without a pair is dangerous **if** the bluffer faces no consequences. So, it's your job to remain vigilant, identify a player's attempts to steal pots, and effectively counter.

Let me reiterate one last time. Losing players almost always lose because they **call** too much. Until you reach middle limit and high limit games (and very often then too), a winning strategy entails abandoning fancy plays, big bluffs, and even some semibluffs. Straightforward play takes the money, and showing down a strong hand is required. Overcards don't qualify as a "strong hand." Instead, they are a weak draw not playable except as a semibluff or in exceptional circumstances against exceptional players.

I hope you are enjoying the new year. If you would like to email me with a question or comment, you can reach me at Jason@PokerPages.com. Until next article, good luck!!!

1.4 Poker 'Stocking Stuffers'

by Jason Pohl

It's holiday time here in the United States. Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday of the year. Every year I look forward to good food, my family's reunion, and my favorite football teams playing Thursday and Friday. As fate would have it, my dream Thanksgiving was spoiled this year by an untimely virus. Rather than good food and good company, I spent the entire holiday watching TV and going through two boxes of Kleenex. My head was so stuffed I couldn't even play poker.

Missing the festivities did give me time to panic a bit about Christmas shopping, since I had not purchased a single gift. Trying to puzzle out what gifts I would buy for my friends and family, I realized was that when I was younger, the gifts I enjoyed the most were the stocking stuffers, those small trinkets and toys placed in a large knit sock on my family's fireplace. There were times when I would pour over the number of small gifts in that sock; the value of those presents far outweighed their monetary cost. So how does this tie in with an article about poker? Well, I realized that poker advice is often like those small gifts at Christmas time; the amount of words required to write an article does not reflect the value of the guidance. In this article, I am going to write about several smaller items. While each subject is relatively straightforward, their lack of complexity does not make them less valuable. In fact, I think most of the ideas in this article are far more valuable than some whole books I've read. But like poker in general, while understanding each idea is relatively simple, mastery of the concepts is very difficult.

Pot Size

In order of emphasis, pot size might be the most important factor in any discussion of limit poker. The fundamental strategy of tight play (starting with strong hands and strong flops) is just another way of saying, "When the pot is still small, don't play marginal hands."

There are simple ideas relative to pot size that will make your game much more profitable.

- Check-raising on small pots is far superior to check-raising on big pots.
- Slowplaying on small pots is far superior to slowplaying on big pots.
- Semibluffing on big pots is far superior to semibluffing on small pots.
- Calling with marginal draws on big pots is far superior to calling with marginal draws on small pots.
- Folding on small pots is much safer than folding on big pots.

This advice might be considered elementary. After all, the premise is straightforward: "One should accept more risks when the rewards are high." Check-raising and slowplaying risk free cards, semibluffing and marginal draws risk the loss of extra money when the bluff or draw fails, and folding risks giving up a pot to an inferior hand. But the truth is that pot size is *overlooked* by many players. The first thing (beyond poker fundamentals) a beginning player *should* learn is the ability to count the pot quickly. Then, that player *should* make decisions based on the size of the pot. Limit poker is mostly a game of mathematics, with the pot size representing a huge variable in each equation (decision) that faces a player.

Tilt

I cannot emphasize enough, from first-hand familiarity, how tilt can ruin long-term results. No matter how much knowledge, skill, and intelligence you possess, you will not win until you control your emotions. Discipline, patience, and emotional resoluteness are the stuff of real champions, not brains and knowledge. Every player loses sometimes, and every player wins sometimes. The best players surely increase how much they win. However, the difference between winners and losers is far more often measured in the losing sessions. If a player can reduce their losses on a regular basis by maintaining their composure in the face of bad luck and/or their own bad play, there will be a huge reward in the long run.

Nobody can claim to own a cure-all for tilt. For some players, leaving the game is best. For others, counting to ten or sitting out just one hand might be sufficient. It is also probable that many players will never be able to defeat tilt until they make changes in the rest of their life. But whatever the cause, the cost of tilt is undeniably significant. It is an area that requires every good player's attention and effort.

The Cost of Rake

Casinos and online poker rooms make money by charging a rake or seat charge. When I first began to play poker, I purchased Wilson's Turbo Texas Hold'em and ran a simulation of ten players sitting in my local casino's game, a \$3/6 table with \$5 max rate and \$1 average toke. I purposely included one tight/aggressive player and nine loose/passive opponents in the simulation. After 100,000 hands simulated, the results I saw were fairly terrifying. Nobody was winning. The tight/aggressive player was only down a small amount, but the loose/passive players had lost a huge sum. Later, I saw David Sklansky write an article about what it took for one player to win a living wage at poker. Let's assume the following:

- Ten players contribute \$10/hour average in rake and tokes.
- The average player plays 40 hours a week, 4 weeks in the month.
- For one player to make \$3000 in a month, the other nine players must lose a total of \$19,000 combined. Of that amount \$16,000 will go to the dealers and the 'house'.

It should be incredibly clear from the calculations above that the rake one pays will play a huge role in their chances for success. So, consider carefully when choosing your game and your limit.

Poker Books

The most common request I receive by email is my recommendation for good poker books. I have not read every book, so I cannot claim to be the world's foremost authority. But I have read about 50 poker books. Here's a list of my top recommendations.

For Beginners:

Hold'em Poker by David Sklansky
Winning Low Limit Hold'em by Lee Jones

For the Next Step:

Theory of Poker by David Sklansky
Hold'em for Advanced Players by David Sklansky and Mason Malmuth
Seven Card Stud for Advanced Players by Sklansky, Malmuth, and Ray Zee
Super System by Doyle Brunson and others

Wild Card Picks:

Real Poker by Roy Cooke
Zen and the Art of Poker by Larry W. Phillips
Caro's Book of Tells by Mike Caro
Pot Limit and No Limit Poker by Bob Ciaffone and Stewart Reuben

Very Entertaining:

The Biggest Game in Town by A. Alvarez
The Man with the \$100,000 Breasts by Michael Konik
Bringing Down the House: The Inside Story of Six MIT Students Who Took Vegas for Millions by Ben Mezrich

There are a lot of good books I don't mention on this list, but if I recommended every good book I've read, it would not be very helpful to the beginner. It should also be noted that much of the material in new poker books or articles is incredibly repetitive. After all, the mathematics and fundamental concepts of poker have been the same for decades. Repetition is not always a bad thing. Often, the best way to understand the important concepts is to note their appearance in almost every author's advice.

The Tuition of Poker

Every poker player must start as a beginner, and beginning players will make mistakes. Experience, knowledge, and emotional control are not won overnight, nor can they be obtained without effort and cost. But what cost? Usually, the beginning player loses money to other more experienced, knowledgeable, or disciplined players until that beginning player learns some of the intricacies poker. This price is often referred to as the "tuition" that players must pay to improve their game. And to some extent, "tuition" is unavoidable.

A beginning player should do whatever is possible to reduce their "tuition." Reading articles at this website is one excellent way to do just that, since the knowledge spread through these articles is free but nowhere near worthless. The [Poker School](#) is another excellent option, because it gives the opportunities not only to learn from some of the world's best poker teachers, but also to play against other improving players in tournaments. For a small fixed price, a player can spend as much time as they want learning, experiencing the game, and improving their play. Compared to the beginner whose education consist of sitting down in a Las Vegas casino to buy into a \$3/6 game with a 10% rake, the Poker School is an amazing

bargain. Last, but not least, are the bulletin boards provided online for free. I'm often asked questions about specific hands or situations. These questions and scenarios are perfect fodder for bulletin boards where multiple players can express their opinion. Most bulletin boards are frequented by players who want to give back to the community that helped transform them from a beginner to a winner.

Last, but certainly not least, remember that poker is a game, and it is supposed to be fun. If you're not having fun when you're playing poker, then why play at all? I hope you enjoy happy holidays, good health, and good fortune at the poker tables!

1.5 Shorthanded Poker: Flop Play Part I

by Jason Pohl

We already know there are a lot of preflop steal attempts in short-handed poker. Inevitably, the big blind will frequently face a preflop raiser in a heads-up confrontation after every other player has folded. The big blind must defend a reasonable amount of the time or else is giving up some of his own profit. But what happens after the flop? Most preflop raisers will bet automatically on the flop heads-up (as they should). Some of the time, the big blind will hit nothing, believe the raiser has at least a piece of the flop, and can safely check-and-fold. Other times, the big blind may have little or nothing but may also infer that the raiser cannot have a quality hand either. And often, the big blind will hit the flop. Checking and folding the weakest hands is easy. Knowing what to do in other circumstances is not so clear. Should the big blind bet out, check-and-fold, check-raise the flop, or slowplay? In this article, we examine a few common settings a big blind will be forced to face in short-handed poker on the flop.

Scenario 1. The Strong Hand

When the big blind has flopped top two pair, a set, or trips, the main consideration is how to win the most money possible. The three examples below illustrate different "monster" flops, but with varying degrees of vulnerability.

Example 1. Big blind holds 5c 5h.

Flop is 8d 5d 2c.

Example 2. Big blind holds Tc 9s.

Flop is 9d 9c 2c.

Example 3. Big blind holds Td 8d.

Flop is Th 8s 4c.

In a full ring game, any of these flops would be excellent, but not necessarily invulnerable. In a short-handed game, these hands are so powerful that a lone opponent is likely drawing dead or very, very thin. While it is possible the steal raiser has a higher set or a very good draw, supposing as much every time would be paranoia and unprofitable. On the other hand, even a strong hand has potential susceptibility.

I generally assume the preflop raiser will bet the flop after the big blind checks. With this assumption, the big blind must consider two important matters. First, should the big blind risk a free card by check-calling the flop and checking again on the turn? Second, if a slowplay is not in order, should the big blind bet out or check-raise the flop? By answering these two questions, we can expose the core arguments for any scenario where the big blind has flopped something worth playing to see the turn and/or river.

Free Cards

In short-handed poker, the difference between numerous winners and losers can be measured in damaging free cards. In any of the three scenarios above, there is a small chance the preflop raiser has outs. Flush or straight draws are possible, as well as overpairs or one pair holdings with overcard kickers; if the preflop raiser holds a good drawing hand, there is ample chance they will take a free card on the turn if available. In fact, one of the big blind's main concerns should be determining how their opponent reacts in exactly this situation: do they continue betting with a draw on the turn, or do they take the free card? Do they bet with nothing but overcards on the turn or give up the hand? Finally, will they bet if a scare card arrives on the turn but they still hold a decent hand (such as middle pair)? Against a fast opponent who constantly attacks on the flop and continues on the turn, it may be worthy to penalize their aggression with a turn check-raise. The big blind can earn as much as an extra big bet by slowplaying. However, most opponents will not be so excessively aggressive, especially on a dangerous flop like #2 or if a scare card hits on the turn. Every time the preflop raiser would have called bets on the turn and river but was able to check the turn and take a free card, the big blind loses three small bets.

Example 2a. Big blind holds Tc 9s. Button holds 8d 8c.

Flop is 9d 9c 2c.

In a scenario such as the one in Example 2a, it is completely reasonable that the button might decide to call down to the river, but may also check the turn to take a "free card." In other words, the 8d 8c may decide to try to induce a bluff on the river by checking the turn. This is a disastrous situation for the big blind. If the big blind check-raised on the flop, and the button called on the turn and river, the big blind earns 3 big bets post-flop. If the big blind bet out on the flop, and the button called down the whole way, the big blind earns 2.5 big bets. If the big blind check-called the flop, missed the turn bet, but earned a bet on the river, the big blind would earn only 1.5 big bets after the flop. By slowplaying trips, the big blind loses up to 1.5 big bets and allows the button to take a free card at a two-outer.

Based on all of the above factors, I advocate making a move on the flop against all but the most aggressive opposition. Most adversaries will not automatically give credit to the big blind for a strong hand, even when check-raised, especially if the big blind is check-raising a wide range of hands. The issue of free cards also becomes moot because the big blind has taken control of the hand on the flop. Finally, by making a move on the flop with a strong hand, other opportunities for semibluffs and bets with weaker hands become available without telegraphing a hand's relative strength. So, our conclusion is that even with the strongest hands, it is usually best not to slowplay. Next, we need to decide how the big blind should make its move. Is a check-raise best or should the big blind bet out on the flop? We shall see that the answer to this second question is far from simple.

Bet Out or Check-Raise?

Assuming the preflop raiser will automatically bet out on the flop when the big blind checks, there are two main considerations when holding a strong hand. First, will betting out earn more profit overall than check-raising on the flop? Second, how will betting out or check-raising fit into an overall strategy?

We can measure the most advantageous play by analyzing the results against different types of hands. By check-raising, the big blind earns at least one extra small bet anytime the preflop raiser has nothing. In other words, if the preflop raiser would fold to a bet or a check-raise, then we want them to make that bluff on the flop. The check-raise earns an extra bet.

Example 1a. Big blind holds 5c 5h. Button holds Kh 7h.

Flop is 8d 5d 2c.

Let's give the button some credit and assume they are prepared to fold, considering their lack of outs.

- Betting out wins 4.5 small bets.
- Check-raising wins 5.5 small bets.

But what if the button would fold to a check-raise, but not a single bet, or vice versa? First, it should be clear that with virtually no outs, the big blind wants a call. So, if the big blind would call a check-raise but not a bet out, then the check-raise is even better than we evaluated before. In that case, the check-raise would earn 2 extra small bets on the flop and might result in a larger gain if the turn brings a K, 7, 6, or maybe even a 9 or 4.

If the button would fold to a check-raise but not a single bet, the advantage is not as huge, but still exists. The button's call on the flop earns no additional bets, but it is the potential that the button might call down on the turn and/or river that earns extra profit. The extra profit is offset a small bit because the button will actually win the pot about 3% of the time, but the call is still obviously a huge mistake. In conclusion, the big blind would need very strong assurances a check-raise would result in a fold (but not a bet out) to make betting out superior. Otherwise, it is unreasonable to risk the 5.5 small bets earned on the flop.

How do the results change if the preflop raiser has a playable hand that is still inferior to the big blind? If the preflop raiser has a weak draw, such as a gut straight, pair of overcards, or even small pair, then a check-raise remains the better play because it may give adequate odds to the opponent to call a second flop bet.

Example 1b. Big blind holds 5c 5h. Button holds Ad 2h.

Flop is 8d 5d 2c.

A check-raise puts 7.5 small bets in the pot. The Ad 2h must feel vulnerable, but probably believes any Ace, 2, or running diamonds will be good for a win. Counting five outs (not including runner-runner backdoor draws), the preflop raiser is a 42:5 underdog, or about 8.4 to 1. A check-raise can actually marry the Ad 2h to the pot because the size appears to be large enough to attempt a suckout with implied odds. Of course, the button does not really have five outs in this instance. If aware of the big blind's strength, the button would fold quickly.

Example 1c. Big blind holds 5c 5h. Button holds Ah Kh.

Flop is 8d 5d 2c.

Once more, many opponents will count all six of their outs, figuring they are only a 41:6 ~ 7:1 underdog. With 7.5 small bets in the pot, the check-raise may actually help pull the opponent into the pot for a bad call.

Betting out does secure extra profit against a particular type of opponent. Specifically, there are some aggressive players who believe any player who would bet out rather than check-raise must have a weak hand or draw. They will match their assumption by raising hastily with as little as ace-high when they would have folded to a check-raise. These players are making a powerful raise if against opposition that does only bet out with weak hands or draws.

However, when facing a solid hand, the raiser is throwing away money; our job is to make sure they are throwing away their money to us.

There is one final consideration. If we bet out with a strong hand, when will we check-raise on the flop? In other words, the big blind should not only check-raise with strong hands; it is too predictable. Yet, the big blind must make check-raising a tool in their game. If the big blind were to only check with the intention of folding, then the preflop raiser would have an easy

bluffing opportunity and no fear of reprisal. More importantly, such predictability would only increase the preflop raiser's positional advantage.

The only real disaster occurs when the preflop raiser sniffs out the big blind's strength and lays down a strong holding such as top or middle pair because they were able to make a good read. It is for that reason that we must disguise our big hands and not play them uniquely from other holdings. Likewise, marginal hands that want the preflop raiser to fold cannot be played radically different.

Scenario 2. Vulnerable Pairs

There is a fundamental truth in short-handed poker. When only two opponents see a flop, there is a good chance neither player will make a hand (i.e. pair or better). If the big blind does make a pair, especially top pair, then it should be assumed that the big blind holds the best hand. However, even top pair is vulnerable. Let's look at a couple possibilities to illustrate whether the check-raise or bet out is preferable.

Example 4a. Big blind holds Jc Th. Button holds Jd 9d.

Flop is Td 8c 3c.

In this scenario, the button has a good draw. There is going to be action against a check-raise or a bet out on the flop. Many opponents would semibluff raise with the open-ended straight draw and position to gain a free card (I certainly would), and some opponents would also 3-bet on the flop to attempt to gain a free card (again, I would.) Either way, let's assume as the big blind, we would not reraise with our mediocre pair. Instead, we'd like to see the turn, where we can bet out again to put the button to the test.

- Betting out adds 4 small bets, for a total of 8.5 bets in the pot.
- Betting out wins an average of $(.67 * 8.5 = 5.695)$ small bets/hand for a profit of 3.695 small bets/hand.
- Check-raising adds 6 small bets, for a total of 10.5 bets in the pot.
- Check-raising wins an average of $(.67 * 10.5 = 7.035)$ small bets/hand for a profit of 4.035 small bets/hand.

In other words, check-raising earns extra profit because the big blind is still a favorite. Similar results would occur if the button only called, rather than raised. In fact, if the button held a lesser draw, the check-raise would yield still healthier profits.

Example 4b. Big blind holds Jc Th. Button holds Ad Kc.

Flop is Td 8c 3c.

Assuming the button would call either a bet or a check-raise, the big blind wants to check-raise, as the statistics indicate below.

- Betting out adds 2 small bets, for a total of 6.5 in the pot.
- Betting out wins an average of $(.782 * 6.5 = 5.083)$ small bets/hand for a profit of 4.083 small bets/hand.
- Check-raising adds 4 small bets, for a total of 8.5 in the pot.
- Check-raising wins an average of $(.782 * 8.5 = 6.647)$ small bets/hand for a profit of 4.647 small bets/hand.

So, when the big blind has a pair or better, the check-raise is superior against competition that will automatically bet on the flop, with a couple rare, but notable exceptions. But what if the big blind has a draw, medium pair, or just overcards? Does the strategy change when the big blind holds a more marginal hand? And what about bluffing? In Part II of this article, we answer those questions. Until then, let me know if you have any questions or comments for me.

1.6 Shorthanded Poker: Flop Play Part II

by Jason Pohl

In Part I, we set the foundation for a flop strategy against a single preflop raiser. With top pair or better, we were able to definitively demonstrate the superiority of a check-raise on the flop against almost all opponents. To most educated players, this should come as little surprise.

David Sklansky wrote in Hold'em Poker:

"It is frequently correct to check raise if:

1. You think you have the best hand (though not a slowplaying hand) and
2. You are quite sure someone will bet behind you if you check."

But is check-raising also a viable strategy when semi-bluffing or holding a marginal pair?

Heads-up after the flop, the big blind will confront times when he has a draw, a medium pair, or suspects the button missed the flop and cannot call a bet. Against all but the most inattentive players, you cannot simply bet out with weak (but playable) hands and check-raise with strong hands. Such a pattern is too noticeable. Check-calling is also a weak, losing approach, as many authors have proven repeatedly. The alternative is to play strong and weak hands similarly (with some exceptions). We know that check-raising is advantageous with very strong hands. Now we will examine how disadvantageous check-raising might be with marginal holdings.

Scenario 1. Drawing Hands

Example 1. The Normal Draw.

Big blind holds Jc Th. Button holds Ad Qc.

Flop is Qh 9d 4s.

It is probable the button will not fold and will not check the turn, no matter what card comes.

It is also probable the button will raise or 3-bet the flop.

- Betting out costs the big blind 2 small bets on the flop after the button's raise.
- Check-raising costs the big blind 3 bets on the flop after the button's 3-bet.

Either way, the big blind is going to check-raise the turn if a K or 8 hits while check-calling otherwise. Therefore, the amount won/loss is the same on the turn and river.

- Betting out adds 4 small bets, for a total of 8.5 bets in the pot.
- Betting out wins an average of $(.342 * 8.5) = 2.907$ small bets/hand for a **profit** of **.907** small bets.
- Check-raising adds 6 small bets, for a total of 10.5 bets in the pot.
- Check-raising wins an average of $(.342 * 10.5) = 3.591$ small bets/hand for a **profit** of only **.591** small bets.

In other words, check-raising loses about 1/3rd a small bet against a legitimate hand when the big blind has only 8 outs. However, the news is not nearly so grim with better draws.

Example 1b. Draw with Overcard

Big blind holds Ah 3h. Button holds Kd Qc.

Flop is Qh 9d 4h.

In this case, the button will again raise on the flop, but the big blind will hold 12 outs (nine hearts and three Aces.)

- Betting out wins an average of $(.459 * 8.5) = 3.902$ small bets/hand (**1.902 profit.**)

- Check-raising wins an average of $(.459 * 10.5) = 4.82$ small bets/hand (**1.82 profit.**)

There is virtually no difference between check-raising and betting out with 12 outs. With 13+ outs, check-raising will actually become profitable over betting out.

Example 1c. The Big Draw

Big blind holds Jc Tc. Button holds Ad Qs.

Flop is Qh 9c 4c.

- Betting out wins an average of $(.563 * 8.5) = 4.786$ small bets/hand (**2.786 profit.**)
- Check-raising wins an average of $(.563 * 10.5) = 6.615$ small bets/hand (**3.615 profit.**)

In this case, the big blind wants more money to go into the pot, and should strongly consider re-raising on the flop. It should be noted that even if the button held the Ace or Queen of clubs (but not both), the big blind would still be a favorite with two cards to come.

We need to look at one final example of a drawing hand. In this case, the button is ahead but will likely not 3-bet the flop and may fold the turn or river. Due to all the uncertainty of how the button will react, analyzing this final example can be a bit complicated.

Example 1d. Drawing Hand Against Drawing Hand

Big blind holds Jc Th. Button holds Ad Ks.

Flop is 9d 8h 4s.

The situation above is practically a coin flip (49.4% vs 50.6%). Therefore, the number of bets on the flop is effectively irrelevant. The only pertinent question is how the big blind's actions on the flop affect the turn and river play. Simply put, if a check-raise on the flop is more likely to cause the button to lay down its hand on the turn, then the big blind should unquestionably check-raise the flop and bet again on the turn.

If an Ace or King does fall on the turn, then the button might raise and cost the big blind an extra big bet. Figuring in the odds of sucking out on the river (Queen or Seven), the true price would be .818 big bets. Meanwhile, when the button fails to improve on the turn (on the 39 cards that are not an Ace or King), the big blind may well win the whole pot. Based on earlier assumptions, that pot would include 5.25 big bets.

It is important to realize that the big blind's flop play does not make a difference if an Ace or King falls on the turn. Either way (check-raising or betting out), the big blind will have control of the hand. The big blind will lose the same amount if an Ace or King hits or if the button refuses to lay down against two blanks. Again, the key is the likelihood the button will drop its hand when a blank hits. ****Note: The big blind is a significant underdog on the turn if a blank hits, so the big blind *wants* the button to lay down the AKo.**** If the chance of a fold is increased even 1% by a check-raise, then a check-raise should be employed.

But what if the button raises the flop with overcards and takes control of the hand? It should be obvious that allowing the button to take a free card or bet the turn to check the river would be very bad for our hero, the big blind. In both cases, the button has increased its chances of improving and/or seeing a showdown. At showdown, the button wins EVERY single time the big blind does not improve (and some times when both hands make a pair). Therefore, if a check-raise on the flop is more likely to take control of the hand, it is again a superior play since it vastly increases the odds the big blind will win the money already in the pot. This "control" factor strongly supports the case to check-raise with drawing hands.

I cannot emphasize enough that the only time the check-raise is disadvantageous is when the button holds a legitimate, strong hand. Even then, the check-raise only costs a fraction of a small bet. Meanwhile, the check-raise increases the likelihood of winning pots without making a hand.

Scenario 2. Middle Pair

Holding middle pair in a heads-up confrontation is certainly tricky. It is beyond the scope of this article to suggest all the proper ways to handle this delicate situation, but we can begin to consider the impact of our two main options.

Example 2a. 5-out Middle Pair

Big blind holds Tc 9c. Button holds As 4s.

Flop is Ah 9s 6c.

This is a good example of how a middle pair can be dangerous. The big blind is behind, and the button will likely raise a bet or (maybe) even a check-raise on the flop. An argument could be made that this is one of the exceptional cases where a bet out is superior since most opponents would not raise the flop without an Ace.

Let's assume the button will raise or re-raise with top pair on the flop. Let's also assume that the big blind will call a raise on the flop to try for a suck-out on the turn.

- Betting out wins an average of $(.232 * 8.5) = 1.972$ small bets/hand (**-.028 loss.**)
- Check-raising wins an average of $(.232 * 10.5) = 2.436$ small bets/hand (**-.564 loss.**)

This is a situation where the check-raise is clearly an inferior play. The big blind is a significant underdog, with 5 outs for two pair or runner-runner clubs for the flush. It should also be noted that the calculations above assume all the outs are clean. If the button held As Ts or As 6s, then the big blind would be drawing to only two outs. In those cases, the loss is even worse.

Example 2b. Middle Pair with Counterfeit Outs

Big blind holds Tc9c. Button holds AsTs.

Flop is Ah 9s 3d.

- Betting out wins an average of $(.136 * 8.5) = 1.156$ small bets/hand (-.844 loss.)
- Check-raising wins an average of $(.136 * 10.5) = 1.428$ small bets/hand (-1.572 loss.)

Knowing that sometimes we will face a losing proposition with second pair or worse, should we still regularly check-raise with middle pair rather than bet out? The answer continues to lie in our assumption of the opponent's holdings. In each example above, the button has a legitimate hand, often with a significant piece of the flop. The real profit of a check-raise occurs when the button did not connect with the flop and will lay down against action from the big blind.

Example 2c. Middle Pair vs. No Pair

Big blind holds Tc9c. Button holds Ad Jd.

Flop is Qd 9s 3h.

The button holds a legitimate raising hand preflop, but failed to connect with the flop. The button has six outs, along with a backdoor flush and/or straight draw (but only the Ace appears to be clean from the button's perspective). If we assumed the button would fold to

either a flop bet or flop check-raise, a check-raise is preferred because it earns an immediate additional small bet. Even if the button calls on the flop, they will probably not call past the flop unless a good turn card falls. In that case, the check-raise only earns an extra bet when a blank falls (any card except a diamond, Ace, Jack, or Ten--24 out of 45 cards.) Even if the button might also call with a King or Eight, there are still 18 blank cards for a profit of .4 small bets resulting from a check-raise.

In truth, the big blind would prefer if the button kept calling. With only six outs, every extra bet makes money for the big blind. Even if a non-diamond King or Eight fell, the button would not add any outs since a Jack would now give the big blind a straight. While the middle pair might be anxious to see a fold, a button calling station is giving away money.

Scenario 3: Button Misses Flop

The ultimate difference-maker in our bet out/check-raise debate is this scenario. When the button will not give further action after the flop, it is best to get money into the pot as quickly as possible, so that the payload is larger when the button does fold. This critical concept makes check-raising the superior play almost all the time when heads-up against a preflop raiser. Not only is there an enormous profit to be made from taking down the pot uncontested, but the reward is even higher when taking down the pot after a check-raise.

Example 3. Big blind holds Ac 5h. Button holds Kh 7h.

Flop is 8d 5d 2c.

Let's give the button some credit and assume they are prepared to fold, considering their apparent lack of outs.

- Betting out wins 4.5 small bets.
- Check-raising wins 5.5 small bets.

It is clear that this is the kind of scenario where the big blind is very concerned to make sure no free cards are given, so my advice is different if the button will check the flop. But our basic assumption is that the button will not check the flop, but will come out attacking every time. Unless the button will call a check-raise significantly more often than a bet out, the choice is clear. A check-raise earns an extra bet.

So, how often does the button miss the flop? Let's pick a hand with a high likelihood of hitting the flop (all percentages are inexact): JTs. JTs will flop:

2%: Straight or Flush

20%: Flush Draw or 8-out Straight Draw

33%: Jack or Ten

20%: 4-out Straight Draw

Calculating for redundant flops (e.g. pair with a draw, simultaneous flush and straight draws), JTs, the most prolific preflop holding, will still miss the flop completely well over 1/3rd of the time.

In other words, over one-third of the time, the JTs is likely to fold to either a bet out or a check-raise. During that one-third of the time, a check-raise earns an extra small bet. That's an average extra profit of over .333 small bets/hand, if our base strategy utilizes the check-raise.

Wrapping It All Up

I am not suggesting that check-raising on the flop is an infallible solution to our heads-up

dilemma. After all, there are ways for the button to use its positional advantage to assign a penalty on every strategy, and that is no different against the player who check-raises instead of betting out. Many things could go wrong. The button might check the flop, slowplay for an extra bet on the turn, or use aggression to wrest back "control." For those reasons and many more, I cannot emphasize enough the need to mix up one's plays. The big blind must bet out sometimes, slowplay other times, and even check-call on occasion, all in the name of variation. But all things being equal, I believe it is apparent that check-raising is most often the 'correct' strategy against the average preflop raiser who automatically bets the flop.

1.7 **Shorthanded Poker: A Secret about Winning** by Jason Pohl

I have a secret for you. All those poker books and articles, as helpful as they may be, don't tell you everything you need to know to become a winning poker player. The pros know this secret. You don't hear Ted Forrest or Daniel Negreanu or Layne Flack (or just about any professional poker player for that matter) berating authors for giving away the secret formula to success. I didn't see an uproar in the poker community when Phil Hellmuth recently told us how to Play Poker Like the Pros. Why wouldn't they complain? Their whole livelihoods would appear to be at risk.

But that's not *the* secret. It might be *a* secret, unspoken by many players because they want you to believe their books will help you make millions of dollars and leave the boredom of your current paper pushing or burger flipping job behind. But it's not the secret I have for you. If it was, this would be a very short article indeed.

I've read over 40 poker books. Mathematics, strategy, and psychology are all covered. Tournaments, Low Limit Hold'em, Middle Limit Hold'em, No Limit and Pot Limit Hold'em, 7-card Stud, Omaha, Omaha Hi-Lo Split, Zen (or Tao) Poker. I kid you not. I've read them all, many of them more than once. My favorite book, Theory of Poker, I've read over 25 times. Most of them helped; a few of them hindered. But none of them told me what I really needed to know to become a winner. It took me years of playing and struggling and reading and discussing...thousands of message board posts, hundreds of articles, and more money spent on my "tuition" than I care to imagine.

But I'm going to give you a secret that will help take you down the path to success without all the heartache, pain, and tribulations. And it's a heck of a lot cheaper too. So, without further ado, here it is.

You don't need to know why you are winning in order to win.

Oh my, did I just say that? After all, I have spent the last year and a half demonstrating some strategies for short-handed play, and I focused on how important it is to understand why those strategies worked. But let's forget that for a moment.

A Recent Tournament

I played in a No Limit Hold'em tournament with about 25 friends last month, and it was a juicy field indeed. No Limit Hold'em is definitely not my best game, but I still couldn't help feeling like I was taking candy from a baby. Holding over 1/3 of the chips going to the final 8 man table, I could not have been more confident. But then, Lak sat down. Lak is a twenty-something years old Asian male, with no poker experience before 6 months ago. (And he's a great guy too.) He's never read a poker book or an article, and he is completely self-taught.

And he may be the best No Limit player I've faced.

I focused on pot odds, the Gap Concept (see Sklansky's Tournament Poker), blinds as a percentage of my total stack, payout structure, and more. Lak just played poker. He attacked. He bluffed. He changed gears. He showed monsters. He struck fear into the entire table. I did not realize the whole truth until it was too late. Lak outplayed everyone...but he didn't know why what he was doing was so powerful. And you know, it didn't matter at the end of the night. He still took the money home.

You would think that with all the knowledge contained in poker books, every winning player would have a library of texts, bookmarks on all the poker sites so they could keep up with the articles, and an active life on at least one major message board. But I know this is not true. In fact, I have often heard it said by some of my closest friends that they fared worse after reading strategy books. How can it be that 'instinct players' and those with years of experience win without taking advantage of all that knowledge and strategy help? And why do so many new players struggle under mountains of literature and fail to attain success?

The reason, best that I can guess, is that they think "too much." And more importantly, it's too difficult to get it all right, at least at first. Poker is so complex, and so rich with information, that only a genuinely excellent player can hope to contemplate it all and reach the best conclusion. Sure, I hope to achieve that degree of aptitude in every facet of my game... eventually. I hope everyone reading my articles seeks the same expertise.

But, most people try to realize that high degree of proficiency first, and then try winning second. The order of learning should be opposite. Learn how to win *first*. Learn why you are winning over the *long run*. It may seem a subtle distinction, but it is not.

The EASIEST Path

Ah wait, I have another secret. Or, maybe it's really a secret within a secret. See, I've told you that you don't need to know why you are winning. And you know that the books aren't necessarily the easiest way to learn how to win (but they are immeasurably helpful learning why.) But I have not really told you the secret that trumps those two. It's been hinted by other authors. They tell of their early success and it very often includes one factor in common: a mentor.

A mentor is somebody who teaches you how to win. Or, maybe it would be better to say a mentor is somebody you learn how to win from. I make the distinction because the mentor doesn't even need to know they are teaching. Confused?

With even a fair amount of time, you will likely know who the "winner" at the table is. When I say the "winner," I of course am not referring to the winner of a specific session. I'm talking about the player everyone respects and fears, the player who brings home the chips in the long run. Now, keep that player in mind.

Next, stop trying to practice all those observation skills mentioned in the books. Reading each player's tells, interpreting the betting of every player every hand, counting the pot at all times, classifying the type of action (loose, aggressive, tight, passive), and predicting each opponent's holdings: forget about it. Trying to watch everything at once and think about what you are doing is just too difficult (at first). Instead, focus all that observation in only one direction now, instead of ten. Watch the "winning" player. Count the pot odds and observe how the

"winning" player adjusts. Watch the winning player's actions each hand. And copy their play. Their playing style is not copyrighted, trademarked, or in some way patented. And you can steal every last checkraise, bluff, and value bet. Make them your own. Do everything you can to become just like that player. Oh sure, the "winning" player in your local game probably has some flaws. Maybe they're a bit loose or don't bluff enough or one of a million other things. But I'll bet that 95% of those "winning" players do the fundamental things the same, because at limit poker, the options are...well...limited. And that's another secret too. Winning players utilize the same style at limit poker. If you see differences, they're either a) small or b) based on adjustments to the table. But all those players are fundamentally tight aggressive. Period. Bottom line. End of story.

Here's the great news. If you play in different places, or at different limits, you will see many winning players. You will be able to see the differences in their play, but more importantly, you can identify the similarities. Copying their play will give you a style of your own. All you have to do is figure out how to be tight *and* aggressive, and there is no better way to learn that balance than matching the actions of a winning player who has already done the legwork for you. Only then, after you have figured out how to win, do you really need to put the effort into learning why. Eventually, you will have to put in that effort. And when you get to that point, I've got about 40 books I can tell you about. Maybe you can pay for them with your winnings.

1.8 Shorthanded Poker: The Powerful Turn Raise

by Jason Pohl

So far, I have spent nearly ten articles showing that even something as simple as preflop decision making is still an area where a huge divergence in play separates winning and losing players. However, preflop strategy is not what most divides winners and losers. Instead, winners take advantage of two skills above all else: reading hands and taking advantage of position.

It's very hard to teach somebody to read hands well. Playing experience, not study, will help in the pursuit of this skill. In shorthanded poker, there is a wide range of hands that even an expert must believe an opponent is holding. On the other hand, there are a finite number of "expert plays" that take advantage of position. The winning player employs these tools at the correct times with the correct frequency to maximize profit. Today, we'll look at one commonly used gambit employed by winning shorthanded players: raising the turn with the intention of checking the river, a tactic I dub simply the "Turn Raise."

In shorthanded poker especially, a player will hold a medium strength hand after the flop and be faced with some awkward judgments. Against an opponent holding a wide range of possible hands, a medium strength hand is often too powerful to fold. The base play would be to simply call to the river.

However, there are four ambitions that underscore a more aggressive approach on the turn: to avoid giving free cards, to maximize winnings, to minimize losses, and to win pots with inferior cards. Let's start by taking a look at what happens with the typical "call down" approach.

The Call Down approach

Example 1. \$10/20. \$45 in pot. Button holds JhTh.

BB checkraises the flop. The Button calls.

Board: 5d Td 8c Qd. \$85 in pot

Often, you will find yourself in a position similar to the one above. On the flop, your opponent shows strength by checkraising, but they could be making a move with as little as a straight draw, smaller pair, or even a pair of tens with no kicker. On the other hand, the big blind might be holding two diamonds, AT, KT, QT, T8, or a set. The big blind may even have been semibluffing with a hand such as AQ or Q8, and now they will be in the lead. So the button is in a predicament. Clearly, there is enough chance that the pair of tens is winning for this hand to see a showdown. Also, against many of the above hands, the JhTh has outs even if it behind on the turn. Let's examine what happens if the button only calls the turn.

Example 1A. \$10/20. \$85 in pot. Button holds JhTh.

The BB bets the turn. The Button **calls**. \$125 in pot.

Board: 5d Td 8c Qd Ah.

First, let's assume the big blind checks on the river. Now, the button has a tough decision. Bet or check? Will the big blind call an additional bet with a smaller pair? A bet here on the river is thin value at best, and so the button is forced to make a decision that could easily be wrong. Let's assume the big blind bets the river. The button is in no better shape. After all, most good players in the big blind would realize that the button has to hold some sort of hand, and besides, what could the big blind be betting as a bluff? So, the question becomes, "What are the odds the big blind bets out with lower than a pair of tens?" It's a tough decision that the button would probably be happy to avoid.

Example 1B. \$10/20. \$85 in pot. Button holds JhTh.

The BB bets the turn. The Button calls. \$125 in pot.

Board: 5d Td 8c Qd 2d.

What a horrible river card! The 4th diamond on the river has created lots of problems for the button's pair of tens. After all, the BB might just bluff on the river with a busted straight draw or smaller pair, even without a diamond. Or, the BB might check-call with any hand beating the button but not containing a diamond. Either way, the JhTh is paralyzed.

Example 1C. \$10/20. \$85 in pot. Button holds JhTh.

The BB bets the turn. The Button **calls**. \$125 in pot.

Board: 5d Td 8c Qd 6h.

Is that river card a brick, or did it make a straight for the opponent's 97? Or maybe two pair: sixes and fives or eights and sixes? So, now there are two problems. The button still has to make a tough decision on the river, bet or check, call or fold. But also, we see how the big blind has been given the opportunity to catch a winning second pair or straight, often when it would have folded if pressure had been applied.

The Turn Raise Approach

Example 2. \$10/20. \$85 in pot. Button holds JhTh.

The BB bets the turn. The Button **raises**. \$145 in pot (BB must call \$20)

Board 5d Td 8c Qd.

We have a different scenario in Example 2 than any of the examples above because initiative is now in the hands of the button, not the big blind. The button's raise screams "I have a big hand." Despite the big blind's flop checkraise (which I grant doesn't mean as much as it does in a full game) the button is demonstrating strength.

And the truth is that the button does have strength. A pair of tens with jack kicker is not bad at

all, especially heads-up, and a nine offers three or four extra straight outs against many holdings. But the real value of this play is that the turn card is scary to almost everything the big blind could hold. The queen is top card so any pair of tens, eights, or fives has to be worried. And the third diamond is going to be scary to anybody not holding the completed flush. So, the turn raise by the button freezes the big blind and forces a tricky choice.

- 3-bet with T8?
- Call with KT?
- Call with T9?
- Call with 87?

The big blind is going to make some mistakes in this precarious position. Frequently, a player will fold a hand such as T9, figuring the (3) Jack outs are no good. Some will even fold KT without a diamond. With hands such as the 87 or 65, the odds of improving to two pair or three of a kind is 5:39, about 1:8. With 1:7.25 odds, it would not be much of a mistake for the 87 or 65 to call, if they knew the two pair would be good. So, the button wouldn't mind those hands folding either.

If the big blind holds a small diamond and knew the flush would be good if a fourth diamond fell, it would always have sufficient odds to call. So, hands such as 8d6c have more than enough odds to call; yet, many big blind players will fold that 8d6c against a turn raise because the turn raise shows strength and the big blind **cannot** know the flush would be good. The turn raise solves our button's problem on the river as well. If any kind of scare card arrives, the button can simply check down on the end, which was our intention from the beginning. If another ten or a non-diamond nine falls on the river, the JT might bet again, earning an extra bet with trips or a straight. So, let's do a quick summary:

- Better hands may often fold to a turn raise, especially if the turn card is scary.
- Smaller pairs will often make bad folds when there were sufficient odds to call.
- Drawing hands will pay the maximum on the turn and lose a big bet whenever the draw fails to hit.
- Hands that were ahead on the turn (such as KT in the example above) will win no extra money when the JT fails to improve (JT loses 1 big bet on the turn and the river if it just calls; it loses 2 big bets on the turn when employing the turn raise. No gain/loss.)
- Hands that were ahead on the turn often lose an extra bet when the JT improves on the river.

Combined, that makes the turn raise a very powerful play. Against most opponents, it's a no-lose proposition. But there are some weaknesses to the play, just like any other.

Weaknesses and Defense of the Turn Raise

First of all, to set up the play I am describing, it is assumed that the button is already raising on the turn with their most powerful hands. Raising the turn is fairly normal with strong hands due to the double bets on fourth street. But if you're the type of player who always waits to the river or goes to war on the flop, then the "turn raise" will become transparent to observant players.

Secondly, the "turn raise" can be defended by a strong, aggressive player who will 3-bet the turn. Let's look at our example below to illustrate the button's dilemma against a 3-bet.

Example 3. \$10/20. \$85 in pot. Button holds JhTh.

The BB bets the turn. The Button raises and the BB reraises. \$205 in pot.

Board 5d Td 8c Qd.

What could a reraise mean? Usually, it means a superior hand such as a completed flush, straight, or set. The button has an easy fold. After all, JhTh likely has between 3 and 0 outs. With 10.25:1 odds, a call would require at least 4 clean outs. But what if the big blind is a hyperaggressive maniac who is just as likely to have Ad9h, AhQh, 9d9h, or even less? Suddenly the button with JhTh will often have more than 4 outs or may even be ahead. The "turn raise" is not as effective against a hyperaggressive player. Instead, the simple calldown approach may be best, especially if the hyperaggressive big blind will continue all bluffs. Also, the turn card must be dangerous in some way for the "turn raise" to be effective against a good opponent.

Example 4. \$10/20. \$85 in pot. Button holds JhTh.

The BB bets the turn. The Button raises. \$145 in pot (BB must call \$20)

Board 5d Td 8c 2h.

With a complete blank on the turn, many of the natural advantages of the "turn raise" are lost. Most players in the big blind will know the turn card did not assist anybody. So, good players will look at their T8, 55, AT, KT, QT, AA, KK, or QQ, and they will reraise, easily reading the button's raise on the turn for what it is. The 3-bet on the turn is a pretty clear indicator that the button is behind, and the number of outs afforded to the JhTh is questionable, so probably the button will fold (correctly). Therefore, the JhTh will have lost opportunities to win the whole pot when a Jack or Ten do give the button a winning hand versus one pair or a smaller two pair.

It should be noted that the JhTh has few or zero outs against these strong holdings, and therefore the proper play (if the button knew how formidable the big blind's hand was) would be to simply fold the turn, but we're assuming that folding with top pair was never seriously considered (because the button *does not know* how strong the big blind is). Instead, our options are: Call 2 big bets with the "calldown" approach or Raise to 2 big bets immediately on the turn. The button does not save money either way when losing. In other words, the weak turn card has several impacts.

- Hands such as KT will not fold and may even reraise.
- Smaller pairs and draws are far less likely to fold improperly, since their outs will all appear clean.
- The JT will lose some opportunities to suckout and win the whole pot.

Obviously, not all turn cards are created equal, especially when we must consider the best time to utilize the "turn raise." A raise might still be correct on the turn with a blank turn card, but much more rarely and for different reasons than we are discussing today.

A final defense to the "turn raise" that can be employed by solid players in the big blind is to call the raise on the turn and immediately follow with a bet on the river. In fact, against a player who uses the "turn raise" strategy too much, it can be profitable for the big blind to bluff on the river when any scare card falls. If the button is against such a solid opponent capable of making this sort of bluff or value bet on the river, I have two bits of advice. First, don't use the "turn raise" nearly as often. Second, reconsider the table you're playing and look for greener pastures.

The Turn Raise vs. The Semibluff Raise

Let's look at one final example, to contrast a semibluff raise with the "turn raise" maneuver I have been describing.

Example 5. \$10/20. \$85 in pot. Button holds KdJh.

The BB bets the turn. The Button raises. \$145 in pot (BB must call \$20)

Board 5d Td 8c Qd.

If the button raises here, it is for a wholly different reason than before. It's important to realize that this example is not the same as the ones above because the straight draw and flush draw combined does not make this a medium strength hand on the turn. It is King-high. With the 2nd nut flush draw and a straight draw to boot, the button holds a powerful semibluffing hand. Against almost all opponents, a raise would be in order. However, there are two opponents where it would not be correct: hyperaggressive maniacs and loose callers. The hyperaggressive opponent creates the same problem we discussed above. The loose caller will not fold on the turn to make the bluff profitable but will still 3-bet with a made flush (and maybe other hands such as a set or top two pair). Why risk putting in another 2 big bets before the river? Even with 15 outs, the KJ will still only win 34% of the time.

I hope you find the "turn raise" useful. It's a powerful ploy that can be managed in more than just shorthanded games. Against the appropriate opponents, this "expert play" can be lethal.

1.9 Short-Handed Poker: Adjusting to Real Players

by Jason Pohl

I love poker theory. But theory and reality are not the same. We know by analyzing reasonable assumptions and different scenarios that a tighter strategy coupled with an aggressive defense is the most profitable preflop strategy for defending the blinds. But how much would our strategy change as the tightness of the big blind changed? Would it be linear (i.e. if the button raised only 50% of the time, should we call half as often as we would against a blind stealer who raised 100% of the time?) The answer is 'no.' Effective big blind strategy considers post-flop profitability more than preflop percentages. In other words, implied odds are more important than preflop pot odds.

The Blind Stealer

Every single theory we have discussed so far has assumed a preflop raiser attacking the blinds 100% of the time. While it is true that some players are super-aggressive blind stealers, it is still very rare to find somebody who truly does raise every single time. But what about the aggressive button raising with 75% of hands? That's still a lot of raises, and it eliminates only the worst possible holdings from an opponent's arsenal. The following hands make up about one-fourth of all possible holdings: {32, 42, 52, 62, 72, 73, 82, 83, 84, 92, 93, 94, 95, T2, T3, T4, T5, T60, J20, J30, J40}.

As I mentioned in the intro, the answer does not lie strictly with pot odds. If it did, you could say "Hmmm...I call 45% of the time against a button who raises 100% of the time, so I'll call three-fourths as often against this type of blind stealer. Three-fourths of 45% means I only call 33.75% of the time." But such a strategy would reduce profit significantly, because it fails to consider the profitability of hands after the flop. When we measured what hands to play against a preflop maniac, our primary concern was the ability to showdown successfully, especially since the blinds have inferior position. In other words, we avoided small cards and hands with little potential.

We've already demonstrated a few ways a smaller hand can be in trouble. Middle or bottom pair continuously must make a best estimate of whether the opposition has a better hand or a bluffing hand, and a good player with position takes advantage to save or make extra bets (not to mention extra pots).

Example 1: \$10/20 3-handed. Button raised, small blind folded, and big blind called.

- \$45 in pot. Flop 6h 8c Jd
- Big Blind has 7s 6s.

Let's assume the button would call or raise the flop with a pair or better, overcards, or a straight draw. Against an aggressive bettor, many also call with Ace-high or hands with backdoor potential such as KdTd. Clearly, the big blind is in trouble if there is any action after the flop. Most solid players with the button will exploit position to attack the pot at some point in the hand, with a higher pair or with a semibluff.

- If the big blind gives up too often, it could be costly.
- If the big blind passively checks and calls, the price is valuable free cards and lost pots to a hand that would have folded on the turn.
- If the big blind decides to stick it out but competes against a better hand, it will be charged the maximum.

The goal of the big blind is to **avoid** these decisions by maximizing the likelihood of being ahead after the flop. Hands such as 76s remain playable for three reasons: variance of play, straight potential, and flush potential. But 76s is still marginal, especially out of position, because the low rank is such a significant disadvantage.

So, what adjustments do you make to a player raising 75% of the time? You begin by folding the most marginal hands you would have called before. Again, I'd fold these hands specifically because I want to avoid making a pair against a higher made hand, and if my opponent has dropped the lowest quarter of hands, the chances of a small pair winning has decreased markedly.

Should the big blind not reraise as often? After all, the button is now about 1/4 more likely to be raising a legitimate monster. While the big blind should make an adjustment, it should not be substantial. The rationale for reraising is to affect future play, both postflop and on future hands. A reraise shifts the initiative to the big blind, and it increases the chance the button will fold after the flop. By taking initiative, bluffs and semibluffs are more profitable, and since the majority of flops will miss even two big cards, the ability to take down pots without a fight is a clear advantage.

So, stay tight and stay aggressive. Drop the most marginal holdings (e.g. call with 5% fewer holdings) and adjust to the opponent's skill; but don't adjust drastically. Postflop play is more important.

The Non-Stealing Button (or Small Blind)

Another common and difficult opponent is the seemingly more reasonable player who raises with a significant range of hands, but does not attempt steals with less favorable holdings such as J7o, QXs, KXo, etc. In my experience, it is very common to find players who will raise with pocket pairs, any Ace, any suited King, any two cards over Eight, suited connectors down to 43s, as well as a hodgepodge of other hands such as 97s, 86s, 75s, and J7s. In other words, they raise with about the same types of hands that we are suggesting should be played from the big blind against a blind stealer (plus maybe a few more). This isn't really a coincidence; the whole reason the top 40-50% of hands are playable in the big blind is that they fare well postflop. Of course, the same reasoning would apply from the button.

I believe it is clear that the button is giving up some solid preflop profit by limiting his raising to only 40-50% of hands, but it does provide a dilemma to a player defending his blinds. On one extreme, we know how to handle a habitual blind stealer. On the other hand, it is easy to counter somebody raising with only the top 20% of hands (i.e. fold all but the best hands.) But against an opponent raising 40-50% of the time, the choices are not so clear.

To best examine the problem, we consider two factors, neither of which is purely based on mathematics. First, the button is far more likely to have a premium hand. Reraising with KT or QT is not such a good idea, unless the button plays significantly tight after the flop against a reraise. So, it is a good idea to reraise with a more reasonable range such as the top 10% of hands (AA-99, AK-AT, KQ, KJs, KTs, QJs, JTs)-the adjustment is more significant because the button is far more likely to have a hand that he cannot be persuaded to fold.

Second, reducing play of marginal hands is common sense. Playing bad cards in bad position is simply unprofitable. How much you cut is still contingent on postflop play. If the button is a tight, passive player after the flop (regularly checks when missing the flop, folds too often, and/or fails to earn extra value bets regularly), the big blind can call quite often. It is my opinion that if you are lucky enough to find such an opponent, you can continue to call with up to 45% of hands. The marginal cards will become profitable due to successful bluffs and semibluffs' profits, as well as saved big bets when the button fails to maximize. However, such tight, passive players don't last long in shorthanded play. Typically, you'll find an opponent putting the hand to the test on the flop and/or turn. To combat the regular bluffing and semibluffing, the big blind needs better starting hands that are more likely to hold up to win a showdown.

What are "better starting hands" in shorthanded play? Big cards--suited connectors and small pocket pairs are still inherently vulnerable to bluffs and semibluffs. Smaller cards remain profitable against other vulnerable hands (or many opponents of course), but they are marginal at best against a more legitimate preflop raiser. In my opinion, a good list of hands to play against an opponent raising 40-50% of the time is listed below.

- AA-55
- AK-A3, A2s
- KQ-K9, K8s-K7s
- QJ-Q9, Q8s
- JT-J9, J8s
- T9, 98, 87s-54s

The hands above add up to 444 hand combinations out of a possible 1326, so the big blind would still call with around 33% of hands. Even though the button has changed from raising 100% of the time to 50% of the time, the big blind has adjusted from calling 45% to 33%, a much smaller dropoff. There are two conclusions that can be drawn from the smaller difference in proper big blind strategy.

1. Proper big blind defense relies on **postflop** expectations to determine its success.
2. In a heads-up match, the button should raise as much as 75-80% of the time to optimize profit (all things being equal).

And so, our preflop strategy is complete. While it demanded a multifaceted examination to formulate our plan, the implementation is fairly simple. Tight and aggressive, the big blind should attack back with strong hands and try to reduce the button's positional advantage. If

you have any questions, comments, or ideas for another topic, please email me at Jason@PokerPages.com. Until the next article, good luck!

1.10 Short Handed Poker: The Scary Small Blind (Part I)

By Jason Pohl

In this article, we will begin to tackle the dangerous decisions one has to make in the small blind, specifically when facing a habitual blind stealer. Playing a small blind combines all the critical factors of big blind play: frequency of the opposing player's raises, pot odds offered, skill of the opposing player, value of position, and need for aggression preflop. The small blind also faces one unique obstacle: the precarious arrangement between the button and big blind.

Frequency of Raises and Skill of Opponent (Button)

In all our past examples, we have assumed the button raises 100% of the time. We will continue that assumption in this article for the sake of simplicity. In addition, we will assume an equal and average opponent on the button. The main interests of this article will be pot odds and the effect of being squeezed between the button and big blind.

Pot Odds

Of course, a dramatic and critical difference between small and big blind defense surrounds the amount required to call.

3-handed \$3/6 game. Blinds \$1/\$3

*Big Blind: \$10 in pot. \$3 to call. **10:3 odds = 3.33:1***

*Small Blind: \$10 in pot. \$5 to call. **10:5 odds = 2:1***

3-handed \$5/10 game. Blinds \$2/5

*Big Blind: \$17 in pot. \$5 to call. **17:5 odds = 3.4:1***

*Small Blind \$17 in pot. \$8 to call. **17:8 odds = 2.125:1***

3-handed \$10/20 game. Blinds \$5/10

*Big Blind: \$35 in pot. \$10 to call. **35:10 odds = 3.5:1***

*Small Blind: \$35 in pot. \$15 to call. **35:15 odds = 2.33:1***

If pot odds were our only consideration, we could look at these numbers alone to determine what fraction of hands to play in the small blind. For example, we showed in the past article that ~45% of hands could be called in the big blind after the small blind folded if the button was a habitual blind stealer raising 100% of the time. By comparing the ratios, we could determine the correct number of calling hands in the small blind. Here's one way of crunching the numbers.

Small Blind Pot Odds/Big Blind Pot Odds

\$3/6-- 2:1 odds / 3.33:1 odds = 60%

\$5/10-- 2.125:1 odds/ 3.4:1 odds = 62.5%

\$10/20-- 2.33:1 odds/ 3.5:1 odds = 66.6%

In other words, if playing a \$3/6 game, assuming all other things equal, the pot odds indicate calling only 60% what you would normally call in the big blind. If you would call or reraise with 45% of your hands in the big blind against a given opponent, you should call or reraise only the best 27% of hands from the small blind.

Fearing the Unknown: The Live Big Blind

If we knew the big blind would fold, the play of the small blind would not be all that complicated after all. We could calculate pot odds and come up with a simple list of the best

hands to play. However, the looming big blind complicates matters. First, the big blind may reraise, affecting the odds for a marginal small blind hand. Second, if the big blind plays, the game shifts from heads-up on the flop to multiway, forcing the small blind to hold stronger hands to continue on the flop.

The disadvantage of multiway action for an out-of-position player is increased for all scenarios. To really examine the small blind effectively, we must compare heads-up to multiway games in three separate circumstances: when the small blind is leading after the flop, when the small blind has a drawing hand after the flop, and when the small blind has a bluffing hand.

It is easiest to begin with bluffs, since the math is straightforward. Let's compare heads-up and 3-handed games on the flop.

Scenario 1: Bluffing

Example 1.

\$10/20 game. Button raises and Small Blind calls. Big Blind *folds*.

\$50 in pot. Bluff of \$10 on flop.

With \$50 in the pot, the small blind very often has sufficient odds to bluff or semibluff. It will be hard for the big blind to call with no pair/no draw. Even a checkraise bluff against a flop bettor would only need to be successful one in four times. Therefore, the bluff is a strong and valuable play against one opponent.

A. *Button calls 33% of time.*

(1 in 3 bluffs failed = -\$10) (2 in 3 bluffs successful = +\$50);

+\$90/3 hands; **EV = +\$30/bluff**

B. *Button calls 50% of time.*

(1 in 2 bluffs failed = -\$10) (1 in 2 bluffs successful = +\$50);

+\$40/2 hands; **EV = +\$20/bluff**

C. *Button call 75% of time.*

(3 in 4 bluffs failed = -\$10) (1 in 4 bluffs successful = +\$50);

+\$20/4 hands; **EV = +\$5/bluff** *Button calls 90% of time.*

D. (9 in 10 bluffs failed = -\$10) (1 in 10 bluffs successful = +\$50);

-\$40/10 hands; **EV = -\$4/bluff**

Example 2.

\$10/20 game. Button raises and Small Blind calls. Big Blind *calls*.

\$60 in pot. **Bluff of \$10 on flop.**

It might seem that the extra money in the pot would be good for the small blind's bluff potential, but this is not the case. The problem is that a bluff must knock out both players to earn an immediate profit. The odds of stealing a pot against two opponents is significantly decreased, reducing the overall EV of a bluff play. The odds of each player calling is not quite cumulative. For example, if each opponent called 1 out of 2 times, that does not mean there would be a call 100% of the time with two opponents. Instead, 25% of the time both opponents will call, 25% of the time neither opponents will call, and 50% of the time only one opponent would call.

A. *Each player calls 33% of time.*

(5 in 9 bluffs failed = -\$10) (4 in 9 bluffs successful = +\$60);

+\$190/9 hands; **EV = +\$21.11/bluff**

B. *Each player calls 50% of time.*

(3 in 4 bluffs failed = -\$10) (1 in 4 bluffs successful = +\$60);
+\$30/4 hands; EV = **+\$7.5/bluff**

C. *Each player call 75% of time.*

(15 in 16 bluffs failed = -\$10) (1 in 16 bluffs successful = +\$60);
-\$90/16 hands; EV = **-\$5.62/bluff**

D. *Each player calls 90% of time.*

(99 in 100 bluffs failed = -\$10) (1 in 100 bluffs successful = +\$60);
-\$930/100 hands; EV = **-\$9.30/bluff**

Without the ability to bluff profitably, the small blind has lost an important weapon.

Scenario 2: Drawing Hand/Semibluffing

Semibluffing faces similar concerns. In each example above, we assumed that the small blind had no chance of winning if called. If that bluff was converted to a semibluff with a 20% chance of winning even if called, the EV would be considerably increased, but the heads-up scenario will still be superior to a multiway contest. (In the calculations below, I have assumed a 2 BB earn on the turn/river if a suckout is successful.)

Example 3.

\$10/20 game. Button raises and Small Blind calls. Big Blind folds.

\$50 in pot. Semibluff of \$10 on flop with 10% chance of suckout.

Button calls 50% of time.

(9 in 20 failed = -\$10) (10 in 20 successful = +\$50) (1 in 20 suckout = +90);
+\$500/20 hands; EV = **+\$25/semibluff** (compared to EV of \$20/pure bluff)

Example 4.

\$10/20 game. Button raises and Small Blind calls. Big Blind calls.

\$60 in pot. Semibluff of \$10 on flop with 20% chance of suckout.

B. *Each player calls 50% of time.*

(27 in 40 failed = -\$10) (10 in 40 successful = +\$60); (3 in 40 suckout = +\$100)
+\$630/40 hands; EV = **+\$15.75/bluff** (compared to EV of \$7.5/pure bluff)

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that bluffs and semibluffs are far more successful against only one opponent. In fact, the increased EV from bluffs and semibluffs is worth as much as the cost of a reraise preflop if the opponent is relatively tight post-flop. So far, the evidence seems to suggest reraising rather than calling in the small blind. But, there is more information to consider.

Ultimately, the question we must examine is: "Will the increase in success be worth the \$10 increase before seeing the flop?" In the next article, we'll try to answer this question by reviewing the advantage/disadvantage of heads-up/multiway action when the small blind holds a strong hand. Then, we can simply compare the scenarios (bluffs, drawing hands, and made hands) to try to calculate the best play.

1.11 Short Handed Poker: The Scary Small Blind (Part II)

By Jason Pohl

In the last article, we addressed some of the issues the small blind must consider in short-

handed play. By examining pot odds, it was easy to come to a reasonable conclusion as to the number of hands to play in the small blind. Then, we began examining the reasons to reraise preflop to knock out the big blind. In this article, we examine heads-up versus multiway when the small blind flops a good hand. We will consider both when the small blind is leading after the flop and when the small blind is behind after the flop. Then, we can undertake the arduous yet valuable task of comparing our options and deciding the crucial question: **reraise or call**. First, let's make some important assumptions, for the purpose of facilitating our discussion. We assume that each opponent will make the decision to play based on their connection with the flop and their relative looseness-so we assign a percentage chance each opponent will call on the flop (e.g. 75%). When we considered pure bluffs, it was enough to check if *either* opponent would call. If the small blind instead has a good hand, it is necessary to break down what happens when *both* opponents call versus when one opponent calls. This is a simple question of probabilities.

If each opponent calls 75% of the time, then...

- BOTH opponents will call 9/16 times ($3/4 * 3/4$)
- ONE opponent will call 6/16 times ($\{3/4 * 1/4\} + \{1/4 * 3/4\}$)
- NEITHER opponent will call 1/16 times ($1/4 * 1/4$)

For the purpose of bluffing, we assumed either the bluff worked and the small blind won the pot, or it didn't work and the small blind lost the pot. For semibluffs (aka drawing hands), we assumed the small blind would earn an average of 2BB each time the suckout was successful, plus the small bet on the flop. Of course, this is a massive oversimplification, but for our purposes, we just need something to help make the math a little closer to reality-not to reflect reality perfectly. Therefore, we can assume after the flop the small blind will win/lose 2.5 BB on average.

Example 1. \$10/20 game. 3-handed. \$60 in pot.

Small blind has best hand. Each opponent has an average of 5 outs. We'll presuppose the 5 outs are not the same, so there are essentially 10 bad cards that will cause the small blind to lose the pot and 2.5 big bets.

Scenario 1. Both the big blind and button continue past the flop.

The small blind wins when none of the opponents' outs falls...

$(33/43 * 32/42) = 1056/1806 = 58.5\%$ of the time.

Therefore, the small blind loses $(100\% - 58.5\%) = 41.5\%$ of the time.

Note: I calculated when the outs would not hit rather than when the outs would hit. This method is easier because you do not need to account for when both opponents hit their outs or the same opponent hits two outs.}

Scenario 2. Only one opponent continues past the flop.

The small blind wins when the button's outs do not fall...

$(40/45 * 39/44) = 1560/1980 = 78.8\%$ of the time.

Therefore, the small blind loses $(100\% - 78.8\%) = 21.2\%$ of the time.

Example 2. \$10/20 game. 2-handed. \$70 in pot.

Small blind has best hand. The lone opponent has 5 outs.

Scenario 1. Button continues past the flop.

The small blind wins when the button's outs do not fall...

$(40/45 * 39/44) = 1560/1980 = 78.8\%$ of the time.

Therefore, the small blind loses $(100\% - 78.8\%) = 21.2\%$ of the time.
We compare how much the small blind wins in each of the scenarios above.

Example 1: 3-handed

Scenario 1. $(+\$160 * 58.5\%) + (-\$50 * 41.5\%) = (93.6 - 20.8) = +\72.8

Scenario 2. $(+\$110 * 78.8\%) + (-\$50 * 21.2\%) = (86.7 - 10.6) = +\76.1

Example 2: Heads-Up

Scenario 1. $(\$120 * 78.8\%) + (-\$50 * 21.2\%) = (94.6 - 10.6) = \84

Examining the numbers so far, it appears that calling is the superior play. Even though the EV on examples above show that the heads-up situations earn more profit, they do not show \$10 more profit. This is crucial because we assumed a reraise was necessary from the small blind to make the pot heads-up.

But the analysis is incomplete, because there is one final difference between multiway and heads-up play. We must finally analyze the number of times the small blind has an inferior hand that will play to the river. When I say "inferior hand," I mean specifically any hand that the small blind feels is strong enough to play beyond the flop, but is behind another opponent's hand.

The small blind has already narrowed its selection of starting hands to some relatively potent holdings. A good selection of hands such as the following: {AA-22, AK-AT, KQ-KT, QJ-QT, JT, A9s-A2s, K9s, Q9s, J9s, T8s, T9s-76s} constitutes only 302 of the 1326 possible starting hand combinations: 22.8% of all starting hands. Article 1 showed us that pot odds are still sufficient for the small blind to call or reraise more than even 25% of the time. But these strong hands are still vulnerable. Hands such as T9s, K9s, or A4s will miss the flop entirely nearly 50% of the time, making any bet a bluff or semibluff with few outs. Even if many of these hands hit the flop, they could still be losing. J9s may flop a Jack or Nine but start behind, maybe even drawing dead to a runner-runner. The example below can help illustrate this concept:

Example 3: Heads-Up

Small blind has Jh 9h.

Flop is 2d 9d Qc.

Notice that the opponent is currently winning with 22, 99-AA, 92, K9, A9, or any hand with a Queen. Even if you assumed the button played 100% of all hands preflop, they are still winning 15.5% of the time $\{\text{Total Winning Hands (168)}/\text{Total Possible Hands (47*46/2)}\}$. This may not seem like a lot, but consider that many of the hands the small blind will play are weaker.

Hands such as 22 will always be bottom pair unless a 2 is on the flop. Any pair higher in an opponent's hand will leave the 22 with two outs or less. Let's see how much more likely such a problem would be.

Example 4: Heads-Up

Small blind has 2c 2h.

Flop is 3h 5d Jc.

The button is winning with 44, 66-TT, QQ-AA, and any hand that contains a 3, 5, or J. $\{\text{Total Winning Hands (450)}/\text{Total Possible Hands (47*46/2)}\} = 41.6\%$. We're not even considering flopped straights or flushes.

A strong preflop hand can become a vulnerable or losing hand on the flop very quickly. But the key is that the small blind will do far less guessing against one opponent than two. Against a single random hand, that J9 is still ahead approximately 85% of the time. We've seen how profitable it can be when the small blind is ahead of one or two opponents on the flop, losing only 41.5% against two drawing opponents. But the EV is much worse when the small blind starts the hand behind.

Example 5: Small blind is behind on the flop, but has 5 outs.

The small blind loses when it misses its 5 outs on both streets.

$$(38/43 * 37/42) = 1406/1806 = 77.8\% \text{ of the time.}$$

Therefore, the small blind wins $(100\% - 77.8\%) = 22.2\%$ of the time

Scenario 1.

Both the big blind and button continue past the flop. (\$60 pot)

$$EV = (\$160 * 22.2\%) + (-\$50 * 77.8\%) = (35.5 - 38.9) = -\$3.4$$

Scenario 2.

Only one opponent continues past the flop. (\$60 pot)

$$EV = (\$110 * 22.2\%) + (-\$50 * 77.8\%) = (24.4 - 38.9) = -\$14.5$$

Scenario 3. The button continues past the flop after small blind reraise preflop. (\$70 pot)

$$EV = (\$120 * 22.2\%) + (-\$50 * 77.8\%) = (26.6 - 38.9) = -\$12.3$$

Notice that in all three cases, if the small blind is behind on the flop, there is a negative expectation for the rest of the hand. Of course, the small blind has also lost any money put in preflop in all the scenarios we've examined in the past two articles. That fact leads us to the final analysis we need. If we put it all together and compare the advantages and disadvantages, we can mathematically estimate when a reraise in the small blind is better than a call.

Putting it All Together

And here's the problem...even after making assumption after assumption on the number of outs, you still have one massive assumption left to make. How often will the opponents call? In the last article, it was easy to examine the EV if an opponent called 50 or 75% of the time, because we assumed either the bluff worked or it didn't... the small blind either took down the pot or didn't.

Now, we must compare how often the small blind will make a hand against two active opponents, one active opponent, or when both opponents fold on the flop. What we will find is the key to this whole debate. No matter how loose the opponents, the same number of scenarios exist where the small blind is losing. If we average them all out, we can make some estimates. The small blind will likely have one pair or better or a solid draw 50% of the time on the flop. Against a single opponent with a random starting hand, we can estimate that the small blind will be losing 25% of the time it holds a legitimate hand.

Therefore, against a single opponent {who will call with 75% of hands on the flop},

· 1/2 of the time, the small blind is bluffing or (at best) semibluffing.

$$\text{Bluff EV} = \$5$$

$$\text{Semibluff EV} = \$20$$

· 3/8 of the time, the small blind is winning.

$(3/4 * \$84) + (1/4 * \$60) = \$78$ after the flop

· 1/8 of the time, the small blind is losing.

-\$12.30 EV after the flop

Against two opponents {who call 75% of hands on the flop},

· 1/2 of the time, the small blind is bluffing or (at best) semibluffing.

Bluff EV = -\$5.62

Semibluff EV = \$17.71

· 1/4 of the time, the small blind is winning. (both opponents fold 1/16 of the time)

$\{(9/16) * \$72.8\} + \{(6/16) * \$76.1\} + \{(1/16) * \$60\} = \73.28 after the flop

· 1/16 of the time, the small blind is losing, and one opponent folds.

-\$14.5 after the flop

· 3/16 of the time, the small blind is losing, and both opponents continue past the flop.

-\$3.4 after the flop

And that is all the information we need to come to a final analysis. With all the assumptions we made, we can compare the final postflop EV in a 3-handed versus heads-up match. We know the reraise costs \$10 more preflop, but will it make \$10 more in postflop EV by knocking out one opponent?

Final Comparison:

Multiway:

$(1/4 * -\$5.62) + (1/4 * \$17.71) + (1/4 * \$73.28) + (1/16 * -\$14.5) + (3/16 * \$-3.4) = \19.8 EV

Heads-Up:

$(1/4 * \$5) + (1/4 * \$20) + (3/8 * \$78) + (1/8 * -\$12.30) = \$33.96$ EV

As you can see, the expectation earned by knocking out the big blind is worth more than \$10 postflop. There are settings where this will not be the case. If the opponents' skill is sufficiently higher, the big blind is very loose (and will call a reraise cold), or the big blind is very tight (and will fold to a single bet very often), the value of a reraise is diminished. However, these conditions are rare enough to make a reraise in the small blind profitable in most circumstances in my opinion, and I believe our arithmetic above confirms my advice.

Finally, there is one last factor that we did not address. Reraising shows strength. Against most opposition, this display of strength preflop increases the likelihood of the button folding on the flop. Thus, the small blind earns further profit from extra successful bluffs, and the small blind is more likely to know where it stands if the button continues to play, because the small blind has indicated strength early.

All in all, the last two articles were rough, complex, and assumptive. But they help illustrate how an understanding of simple probabilities can allow any player with a pad, pen, and a calculator to ascertain the superior of two alternatives. This preparation gives credibility to a strategy-far improved from a writer simply stating "Reraising from the small blind is usually more profitable." And it can hopefully help prepare you to analyze other authors' arguments to come to your own conclusions. Until next month, good luck!

1.12 Short Handed Poker: Defending the Blinds

By Jason Pohl

I received an email early in January regarding heads-up strategy. Tom asked, "How much is being in position worth? Or to put it another way, how often should you be defending your blinds?" In the last article, I examined reraises from the big blind. In this article, I will focus on how often you should be calling from the big blind.

Before I begin, let's repeat Sklansky and Malmuth's recommendations in *Hold'Em Poker for Advanced Players*. They suggest calling at least 40% of the time, reraising with the top quarter of these holdings. They include "Any pair, any ace, any other two cards that are both nine or higher, any other straight flush combination with no gaps or just one gap, and any king little suited. (You might add in a few more hands such as J8s, 98, or 97.)"

As I noted in the last article, I firmly trust the guidances in *Hold'Em Poker for Advanced Players* along with *Theory of Poker*. I believe Sklansky and Malmuth are brilliant teachers and excellent poker authors who take their material very seriously. However, I believe they use unsound logic to determine the number of playable hands in a short-handed game, and I don't feel our differences in opinion are insignificant. Sklansky and Malmuth have an irrefutable reputation that is well deserved. Therefore, I am not questioning their character, skill, brilliance, or credibility. It is only my intention to prove that in this one exceptional case, Sklansky and Malmuth's advice is flawed.

Could Sklansky and Malmuth be wrong?

The analysis used by Sklansky and Malmuth to find 40% does not quite make sense, and it can help indicate why current theory on short-handed play sometimes fails to designate the best strategy. Sklansky and Malmuth point out that in a \$10/20 game, with the preflop raiser risking \$15 to win \$15, the raiser must steal the blinds only 50% of the time to make an immediate profit (assuming no reraises).

On one hand, they point out correctly that "{the small blind} is entitled to a profit because he has position on you and because you have a larger blind than he does." On the other hand, they follow up by suggesting, "The idea is to keep his profit to a minimum. This means that when the player on the button raises a lot you must call (or reraise) a lot." Herein lies the fallacy. Sklansky and Malmuth are saying that you should call because your opponent will make money if you don't call. Makes sense, right? If your opponent makes money (maximizes his profit), you must be losing too much, right? Let's recall an example from last week.

Example 1:

\$10/20 heads-up game. Blinds \$5/10.

You have AhAc.

Your opponent flips over 7c2s and raises preflop.

There are 3 small bets (\$15 total) in the pot. But there's a catch. It will cost you \$20,000 to play your hand due to some vicious house rules. Should you call? Of course not. It **does not matter** that your opponent makes \$5 stealing your blind. Even though the opponent would lose money if you played your pair of Aces (and thus maximizes profit when you fold), it is still correct for you to fold because the only relevant point is that you lose much, much less (minimizing your losses) by folding.

Conclusion: Don't worry about the odds of the preflop raiser. Your only concern is whether a call or raise has positive expectation. We'll use some more examples to crystallize this argument.

Example 2:

\$3/6 heads-up game. Blinds \$1/\$3.

To steal, the small blind raises \$5 to win \$4.

Using simple arithmetic, we calculate that the preflop raiser needs to steal the blinds 55% of

the time to make an immediate profit, a considerable increase over the 50% needed in the \$10/20 game. If your goal was only to counter your opponent's strategy, you could call less since you would only need to defend 45% of the time. Should you therefore play differently? No. As a big blind, you're facing the exact same situation in both games.

In the \$10/20 game, there is \$30 in the pot, and you must call \$10.

3:1 ratio.

In the \$3/6 game, there is \$9 in the pot, and you must call \$3.

3:1 ratio.

Also note that the small blind is still raising 100% of the time, so his potential holdings have not changed in frequency.

Example 3:

\$10/20 3-handed game.

Blinds \$5/10.

Again, we assume no reraising. Our assumptions are helpful to keep the playing field even in our comparisons of heads-up and 3-handed games. The button is raising 100% of the time, attempting to steal the blinds (\$20 to win \$15). Small blind folds. There is \$35 in the pot, and you must call \$10. **3.5:1 ratio.**

Sklansky and Malmuth suggest that since the small blind is also defending, the big blind needs to call 70% as often as it would in a heads-up game. This advice is where I differ the most. As big blind in a 3-handed game, you have better odds to call than you would in a heads-up game, and with the small blind's cards in the muck, the proper play should clearly include more calling, not less. Remember, the button is still raising 100% of the time, and even if you assume the small blind is more likely to fold small cards, the distribution of cards that the button is raising does not change much.

Calling from the Big Blind

So, how often should you be defending your blinds? To figure that out, we only need to consider which hands are profitable to call. A reraise will affect how much profit will be won, not whether the hand should be played. In other words, both raising and calling will have +EV, but one play makes more profit than the alternative. After a certain point, raising becomes less profitable than calling. At another point, calling will incur a loss, and the hand should be folded. Last article, I argued for reraising with approximately the top 17% of all hands, although that number depends on certain factors. Now, we will examine how many hands should be called, again assuming that your big blind is raised 100% of the time. We will examine three circumstances: heads-up, 3-handed, and heads-up when the big blind has position.

Heads-up (Small blind has position.)

The irony of Sklansky and Malmuth's analysis is that even though the reasoning behind the recommendation is imperfect, playing 40% of hands in the big blind is close to correct against an opponent of equal skill. The exact number is impossible to discern, because it depends on the skill of both you and your opponent. If you are a complete novice, but your opponent is a novice also, the disadvantage of being out of position is lessened. If you are an expert, but your opponent is also an expert, the disadvantage of being out of position is magnified.

My recommendation is to tend towards a tighter strategy for several reasons. First, the 40%+ strategy includes many marginal hands such as J8s, 97, 64s, and K3s. While these hands appear to have sufficient pot odds, they also have two fundamental problems. They will not hit any of the flop approximately 40-50% of the time and will give up on the flop. Also, when they

hit the flop with a pair, it will often be a very exposed position, susceptible to a well-timed bluff or semibluff. Since so much of today's opposition relies heavily on bluffs and semibluffs, hands that are exposed to these moves will pay a significant penalty after the flop.

Finally, these marginal hands are more likely to hit and still finish behind, either because the opponent has flopped a higher pair, or because the opponent draws out on the turn or river. The vulnerability of these hands can be reduced to some degree with strong play, especially in position where free card plays are available. Out of position, they will lead to some of the toughest decisions to be made in short-handed games, and these tough decisions will cause even experts to make mistakes.

The other reason to lean towards a tighter strategy involves the overall aggression you will want to incorporate into your post-flop style. You should be reraising preflop 17+% of the time. Coupled with postflop aggression, consistently revealing strong cards will likely lead to successful bluffs and semibluffs, as well as having the general effect of slowing down your competition (which is rarely a bad thing). While it seems that an opponent could thwart your strategy by simply giving up on the flop without a big hand, the reality is that you will either get action with your big hands or win with your bluffs/semibluffs more than your fair share, depending on how your opposition adjusts.

3-handed

We should assume the small blind has folded to be able to compare fairly. In *Hold'Em for Advanced Players*, Sklansky and Malmuth state, "you need to realize that the little blind should be aware that the big blind may also call. Consequently he should only play his better hands. Thus the little blind should play about half as often as the big blind, and their combined playing frequency should be only a little more than it was for the big blind when the game was heads-up. In other words the big blind should play approximately 70 percent as often as before, and the little blind should play approximately 40 percent as often as the big blind played in the previous case." We will discuss the small blind's quandary another time, but the key for now is that this advice is incorrect for the big blind.

As a big blind, you do not care what "should" happen. Nor should it concern you that the small blind did not have a playable hand. The only important items are (a) the skill of the button player, (b) the likely raising hands from the button, and (c) the pot odds you are receiving. In both (a) and (b), there is no difference from the heads-up example. However, the pot odds have increased. It is straightforward that you should play more hands out of your big blind since the pot size has increased for your call. I would recommend calling with 40-45% of hands in this situation.

Remember, your real concern is not how much your opponent is winning or losing. It is only how much you are winning or losing. The two matters are not necessarily equivalent.

Heads-up (Big blind has position.)

This position is unique and should only occur when everyone has folded to the small blind in a 3-handed or larger game. If the small blind raises 100% of the time, how much should you call? In this scenario, we continue to assume an average player raising 100% of the time, as well as the same 3:1 pot odds. However, now the big blind will have position post-flop. Obviously, position makes a tremendous difference, with the advantage yielding dividends immediately on the flop since you will be able to gain information about your opponent. If your position will earn an edge, and you have 3:1 pot odds, it should seem obvious that you can defend very liberally against an opponent who raises 100% of the time.

Personally, I would play about two-thirds of all hands (sometimes more since I tend to make good use of position), as you should find a significant profit in several ways, such as earning extra bets when you hit your hand, picking up pots when your opponent misses, buying free cards, and many more. You wouldn't mind winning $\frac{1}{2}$ a small bet (and saving your big blind) when your opponent folds, but if he is raising 100% of the time, you will turn a tidy profit by taking advantage of position. Some hands I would call include: QXs, JXs, T7s, T6s, 96s, 85s, 74s, J8o, T8o, T7o, K8o-K4o, Q8o-Q5o, 87o, 76o, and 65o. Of course, this assumes my opponent is raising 100% of the time preflop. In reality, I don't see players make that mistake from the small blind above the \$3/6 limit (and even then it is fairly rare).

Learning to Think for Yourself

In conclusion, this has been a very difficult article for me to write. When I began, I re-examined correct big blind play and compared it to Sklansky and Malmuth's recommendations. I found some similarities, but ultimately concluded that the advice I read in *Hold'Em for Advanced Players* was based in part on faulty premises. The concept of playing to reduce the opponent's profit can go too far. But even the best strategists and theoreticians can be wrong sometimes, and so each idea should be examined on its merits, even when it is the advice of authors who are "correct" 99.9% of the time. After all, whether you win or lose does not depend on what you've read as much as it depends on what you learned and how much it helps you think.

1.13 Short-handed Hold'Em: Preflop Play (Part I)

By Jason Pohl

Mainstream poker literature often includes popular charts or groupings for hand rankings, created to measure the relative value of hands in a full ring game. Unfortunately, these helpful tools cannot be used effectively in short-handed hold'em, because they were not written to assume a short-handed structure.

The two main differences between full and 5-person games are known to most advanced players, even if they are not fully understood. First, the relative value of big offsuited cards goes up, and the relative value of drawing hands go down. Second, the blind structure forces more action. Blinds come too often, and a good player cannot just wait for a premium holding. In Part I of this article, we will focus on the first distinction.

There are three main reasons that hand rankings change so drastically when the number of players drops.

Implied Odds are reduced.

Drawing hands are often overvalued by many novices of short-handed games. For example, suitedness earns a considerable payoff by hitting a flush, but that only occurs about 3% of the time. A hand like Kx suited will flop a four flush or flush about $\frac{1}{8}$ th of the time. With a four flush on the flop, the player will only end with a flush $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of the time.

These improbable odds mean the suited hand needs to get in cheap and have multiway action to earn profit. Shorthanded poker fits neither requirement. Preflop play in 5-handed games very often involves a raise, meaning a player must pay two bets to even see the flop. On the flop, the contest is often heads-up, and the four flush loses money on every additional bet to

the pot. Hence, suitedness is worth considerably less in a short-handed game. The same logic can be applied to all drawing hands. The probability of hitting a very strong hand (such as a set, straight, or flush) stays the same in both a shorthanded and a ring game, but the compensation in a short-handed pot is often inadequate.

Big cards win small pots.

It has been stated in many mainstream books that a hand like AKo has value because it can win unimproved in a heads-up match. But this concept is not just limited to hands like 'Big Slick'. There will be many hands that feature two drawing hands, and the big cards will take down the pot when both miss.

Example 1:

- Player 1: A♥ 5♣ {small blind}
- Player 2: J♥ T♥ {big blind}
- Flop: 4♥ 3♣ K♥. {4 small bets in the pot.}

Player 1 bets, Player 2 raises. Player 1 calls.

Turn: 6♦.

Player 1 checks. Player 2 bets. Player 1 calls.

River: Q♣.

Both check, and the A5o takes down the pot.

Neither player makes a mistake in the scenario above. With 7 bets in the pot already, Player 1 was correct to call on the flop with at least 6 known outs and a backdoor flush draw. Player 2 might have checked the turn, but it's not particularly pertinent to this scenario. Also, a bluff might work on the end here, but it depends on the skills of both competitors.

The bottom line is that the bigger card took down a pot unexpectedly, and Player 1 is several bets richer. It is hard to overvalue the extra small pots earned by the high card; it happens far too often in heads-up and shorthanded play to ignore.

The other advantage of big cards is that they upgrade guesswork into value bets and semibluffs. The following scenarios better illustrate the advantages allowed by high cards.

Example 2:

- Player 1 has K♥ 9♥. {small blind}
- Player 2 has 6♠ 5♠. {big blind}
- Flop: J♥ 3♦ 8♣. {4 small bets in the pot}

If you are Player 1, you cannot be sure what you are up against. A bet here is a percentage play, but it's still a guess, because you cannot be sure the King-high is currently winning. Player 2 is forced to fold.

Example 3:

- Player 1 has 6♠ 5♠. {small blind}
- Player 2 has K♥ 9♥. {big blind}
- Flop: J♥ 3♦ 8♣. {4 small bets in the pot}

Player 1 bets. It's a complete bluff. If Player 2 plays back, Player 1 is in trouble and will likely muck. If there is even a 25% chance of an immediate fold, Player 2 would be correct to raise. (Note: This is true regardless of what Player 2 holds, but the next scenario will illustrate why holding big cards makes this raise even more profitable.)

Example 4:

- Player 1 has 6♠ 5♠. {small blind}
- Player 2 has K♥ 9♥. {big blind}
- Flop: J♥ 5♦ 8♣. {4 small bets in the pot}

Player 1 bets. It's a value bet with 3rd pair. If Player 2 plays back, they're making a mistake. But it's not much of a blunder, because Player 2 still has 6 immediate outs if a King or Nine hits, and there are several cards (Ten or any heart) that give Player 2 a strong draw on the turn.

It's easy to dismiss the choice of Player 2 because it is a -EV play, but that's an error. In short-handed poker, you will misstep sometimes. Yet, there is tremendous value in big cards because they minimize the impact of inaccuracies.

Example 5/6:

- Player 1 has 6♠ 5♠. {small blind}
- Player 2 has K♥ 9♥. {big blind}
- Flop: J♥ 5♦ T♥. {4 small bets in the pot} OR
Flop: J♥ 5♦ 9♣. {4 small bets in the pot}

Player 1 bets, again believing it's a value bet with 3rd pair. However, Player 2 is the favorite on both flops. In both scenarios, Player 2 will win approximately 80% of the time. Obviously, Player 1 is in trouble.

K♥ 9♥ is plainly a superior hand to 6♠ 5♠ heads-up. But reality shows that many losing short-handed players leak money heavily by overplaying small cards. 6♠ 5♠ is a group 5 hand in Sklansky's Hold'Em hand rankings. K♥ 9♥ is a group 6 hand. But the examples above clearly demonstrate the original hypothesis: Hand rankings for full ring games do not work for short-handed strategy because they were not intended as short-handed strategy.

Hand domination is a much smaller factor.

Hand domination occurs when one starting hand causes apparent outs to be counterfeited in another starting hand, resulting in a very powerful advantage for the superior holding.

Examples include (AA vs. AK), (AK vs. AQ), (A♥ 5♥ vs. K♥ 4♥), or even (KQ vs. Q9).

In a ring game, a hand such as K9 has a fairly significant chance of being dominated, even if the flop includes a King. With nine opponents (and a King on the flop), there is a 10% chance an opponent holds a KT, KJ, KQ, or AK. Against any of these combinations, K9 is drawing very slim or virtually dead. More importantly, there are no Kx hands that a normal player would hold in a full ring game, so the K9 will not earn good pots with top pair. Overall, it is a clear loser.

In a short-handed game, K9 becomes profitable in many cases. Players will often not give you credit for top pair, so top pair with any kicker goes up in value. In addition, many players will play Kx suited or will play King with a small kicker fast from the blinds when a King hits. Moreover, the chances that an opponent holds KT, KJ, KQ, or AK is greatly reduced (less than 5%), further mitigated by examining if the opponent raised or reraised preflop.

The Role of Deception

Everything up to this point has indicated that hands like 65♠ are highly overrated in short-

handed poker. However, there are two good reasons to demonstrate strength with small cards. First, stealing pots is a necessity in many short-handed contests, and waiting around for big cards means missing a lot of excellent stealing opportunities. If you know an opponent folds too often, it is profitable to challenge them with a wider range of hands. If you raise with 65♣, your opponent will typically fail to comprehend that your real motivation for raising was to steal the pot. On the other hand, if you raised and eventually showed down a hand like J2, your opponent would likely begin calling or reraising more often, neutralizing your advantage by correcting their play.

Second, it is important to not be too predictable. If you only raise with big cards, your opponents will begin bluffing at you when rags hit the flop. Or, they will simply fold marginal hands since they know you would not raise without a strong holding. So, mixing up your play is critical. Raising with small suited connectors becomes a semibluff. You wouldn't mind if your opponent folded, but you would be just fine winning the pot with a surprising straight or two pair, which can rake in a larger pot because the flop appears harmless. In addition, mixing your play will slow down the opposition in the long run and force them to pay off your big cards more often, since they must give you credit for a wider range of potential starting hands.

1.14 Short-handed Hold'Em: Preflop Play (Part II)

By Jason Pohl

In the last article, we examined the relative value of starting hands in full and shorthanded games. To summarize, in shorthanded games implied odds are reduced, big cards take down pots unimproved, and hand domination is infrequent. Part II of this topic revolves around the blind structure. Blinds orbit quickly in a shorthanded game. At its most extreme is heads-up hold'em, where both players post a blind. In this article, we will examine heads-up preflop play so that we can review fundamental concepts before moving to larger shorthanded games.

Heads-Up Play

Heads-up play is analyzed by Sklansky and Malmuth in *Hold'Em Poker for Advanced Players*. If you do not own this book (and study it religiously), then you are placing yourself at a great disadvantage. The first concept offered by Sklansky and Malmuth concerns the preflop play required by the blind structure.

In a \$10/20 game, the small blind has anted \$5 and the big blind has anted \$10. If the small blind raises, he is betting \$15 to win \$15. So, he must steal the blinds only 50% of the time to earn immediate profit (assuming no raising and all things are equal postflop). If the big blind folds too often, the small blind would earn a significant profit by raising 100% of the time preflop. In fact, since the small blind would also win some hands after the flop, the fold percentage required for profit is far less. In other words, *blind stealing works incredibly well!*

It Gets Worse...

Furthermore, the small blind has a positional advantage after the flop. Position will allow the small blind to bluff more successfully, earn extra bets with big hands, or save bets in many situations. Not only do heads-up games feature a large volume of hands, but plays such as bluffs and semibluffs hold more consequence. Consider the following examples.

Example 1.

It is a normal \$2/4 heads-up game, with one exception. You must pay your opponent \$20,000

if you play a hand preflop. Clearly, to keep your losses at a minimum, you would never play a hand.

Example 2.

It is the same normal \$2/4 heads-up game, except you must only pay \$1 if you play a hand preflop. Many holdings such as AA are still clearly profitable, but you would think twice before playing most hands, since there is a hefty fee to overcome each time you compete.

Defending the big blind is similar to example 2 above. The exact amount lost by not having position differs with the competition, but the disadvantage always exists. For each hand that goes to the flop, the player with position will benefit because they will have an enhanced ability to profitably bluff, earn an extra bet on good hands, or save a bet with bad ones. How can a big blind out of position minimize its losses or even earn a profit against such obstacles?

Defending the Big Blind

Sklansky and Malmuth suggest defending with 40% of all hands, and reraising with the top quarter of those, based on the idea that this calling/raising strategy neutralizes the preflop advantage of raising 100% of the time from the small blind. I propose that this advice is too passive. Furthermore, the percentage of hands played should be fluid, based on the competition's play **after** the flop as well as preflop.

Before going any further, let's repeat the authors definition of playable hands, counting up to 40%. "Any pair, any ace, any other two cards that are both nine or higher, any other straight flush combination with no gaps or just one gap (except for 42s and 32s), and any king little suited. (You might add in a few more hands such as J8s, 98, or 97.)"

Many beginning players might wonder how to figure out that these holdings represent 40% of all possible hands. It is possible to double-check the authors' work by reviewing the number of combinations of each holding. Since there are 1326 possible 2-card combinations, a hand like AA, which can be made six different ways, represents (6/1326) of all possible starting hands. In percentages, this equates to ~0.45% of all hands, or about 220:1. Two cards of unknown suits can be combined sixteen different ways, while a suited hand is only formed with four possibilities (e.g. A♠K♠, A♥K♥, A♣K♣, A♦K♦). One resource for an aspiring player who is truly interested in learning the fundamental probabilities is *Hold'em's Odds Book* by Mike Petriv.

Reraising Preflop

There are three main reasons for adopting a more aggressive reraising strategy to effectively combat the stealer. Reraising punishes the stealer, sets up profitable postflop play, and establishes variation.

1. Punish the opposition.

I'm not the first person to suggest reraising to slow down your opponent on future action. In fact, Sklansky and Malmuth make it apparent that it is critical for your opponent to worry that a raise will cost more than it appears. As they say, "He needs to know that he's in jeopardy of a reraise. Thus you frequently reraise for the sake of future hands, not the hand that you are holding."

But is reraising 10% of your hands enough? 10% represents the cream of the crop: AA-99 (6 possible combinations each), AK-AT(16 combinations each), KQ(16), KJs(4), KTs(4), QJs(4), JTs(4). These hands are so dominating that many of them would be 3-bet in a full ring game. Versus a steal raise, the selection is too thin.

More importantly, reraising 10% of the time will likely not even affect a blind stealing

opponent who is raising 100% of the time preflop. Out of 10 hands, the stealer will immediately win the blinds 6 times, play on the flop against an out of position caller 3 times, and face a reraise only once. In this situation, even against a reraise, it becomes pretty easy for the small blind to fold if the flop doesn't hit him hard, since he knows he is competing against a premium hand.

2. **Set up Flop play.**

'If you're going to be in the hand to the end, you might as well get the money in early.' I'm not sure where I read or heard the above advice, but it makes a lot of sense. With a powerful hand, you want to put pressure your opponent and make him pay for the right to outdraw you. You want to earn the most money possible, and fundamentally, you want to get your money in while you are ahead. (This is an oversimplification, but it works for shorthanded play due to a concept called 'clustering'.)

Mason Malmuth wrote about shorthanded play in *Poker Essays*, a good book for advanced players to hone specific theories. "Concept No. 3: Be prepared to go to the river." Basically, if your hand is strong and **unless** the board develops in a very scary manner, you will often want to showdown. Since you will be going to the river with many hands, you should get the money in early, which makes a showdown strategy more likely to be correct and profitable in the long run.

A second factor is initiative. I mentioned above that most preflop stealers will not be affected by reraises, especially those raising 100% of the time preflop. In my experience, most opponents simply fold if the flop didn't hit their hand since they *expect* to be against a monster hand. Even those who do not habitually steal raise will still respect an opponent who reraised preflop. In other words, if you are the big blind and raise with a hand like JTs, you should virtually always bet on the flop, even if the flop misses entirely. Putting the pressure back on your opponent is critical. Opponents may simply concede on the flop, expecting to be against a very powerful hand and not wishing to pay a turn and river bet to see a showdown.

3. **Establish variation.**

The third reason to increase aggression preflop and reraise with a wider selection of hands addresses the predictability of the play. 10% narrows the possible hands considerably, and it creates an undeniable problem if the flop arrives with 3 rags. Under Sklansky and Malmuth's advice, you would be reraising with big cards 3 out of 4 times; this is simply too predictable against even average competition.

So, what is appropriate for a reraise preflop from the big blind? What if we added 88-66(6 combinations each), KJo(12), KTo(12), QJo(12), QT(16), A9s-A2s(4 combinations each), T9s(4), and 98s(4)? The total is an additional 110 hands, which progresses the amount of reraising hands to 18.25% of total hands. Notice that most of these hands can be taken to a showdown, yet they create enough variation to make any flop potentially dangerous for your adversary.

Watching the opposition

An aggressive counterstrategy is only part of the equation. You will still be calling with other hands. You will still need to vary your play to keep your opponent off your scent. I recommend slowplaying AA or KK sometimes, reraising with lesser holdings on occasion, and following up with occasionally unpredictable flop play. Keep them guessing. Meanwhile, watch your opposition. Preflop, you will adjust your standards in the same direction as your opponent. If the small blind stops raising half the time, you should not call as often, since you will too often be playing bad cards with bad position, a costly combination. Reraising is still valuable but should be reduced as well. You want to slow down against an opponent who raises only with legitimate hands.

In addition, you must consider the postflop play of your opponent. If the opponent plays very

well with position: earning extra bets, staying aggressive, and following a solid bluffing strategy, then he will earn a significant advantage each hand played on the flop. With your higher postflop burden, you must adjust by folding more preflop. Against an expert, you will fold quite often (and therefore call less than Sklansky and Malmuth's recommended strategy). The important thing to note is that you *will* be losing money by folding the big blind more often. Repeat: YOU WILL BE VOLUNTARILY LOSING!!!! But you will lose less money folding than playing marginal hands that cost extra bets after the flop. Sometimes (often) you cannot win in the big blind of a heads-up matchup; your best choice is simply to minimize losses. Don't worry; you'll make your profits when you are in position and have the advantage.

Slow 'em Down

Finally, a good preflop game will complement the overall strategy. Getting the money in early with the best hand will help to mitigate your positional disadvantage to some degree. But the best reason to stay aggressive may be intimidation. If you can scare your opponent into slowing down, you will begin to win the blinds for free, and you will not be forced to play at a disadvantage so often. In other words, you *want* your opponent to stop raising your blinds. So snarl (metaphorically) and attack back! Until next time, good luck!

1.15 Short-Handed Hold'Em: Don't Wake a Sleeping Giant

By Jason Pohl

In the last article, I pointed out that short-handed poker is a game of small edges, but that the number of decisions made in an hour are higher. One of the interesting aspects of such a game is that behaviors that would not normally have much impact in a full game will have a pronounced detriment short-handed. In this article, we will examine the prominent effect of ignoring an old common sense maxim in short-handed poker.

Most of us were taught the fairy tale "Jack and the Beanstalk" as a child. In this anecdote, Jack tries to reach a golden harp. To do so, he must apply all his energy to sneak past a sleeping giant. Jack does not want to wake up the giant, because if he does, he'd be in big trouble. The story teaches a subconscious, simple, and smart lesson. "Don't wake a sleeping giant."

Scenario 1: The "Low Limit Shark"

A couple months ago, I had the pleasure to make my semi-annual trip to Las Vegas. I play poker online at home, so most of the trip was spent engaging in the "forbidden" gambling fruits: the -EV table games. After three days of losing hundreds at the blackjack tables and sportsbooks around town, I made my first trip to the home of the pros: Bellagio's glorious poker room. I was impressed, and the style fit right in with my desire to take it easy and have some fun.

After a short wait, I sat down at a lower limit table, ordered myself a drink, and went crazy. It was a raucous game. I dropped \$500 and had a great time. After just a few hours, I was down to my final \$200 of the day. At that moment, I become aware of a new player to my immediate right. He was a 35-year old man, and I noticed him because I bet out of turn when he delayed. He was taking the game very seriously. He paused when the action reached him preflop and checked his holecards the last possible moment. Even then, he scanned two or three spots behind him before making his play. Suddenly, I remembered a fundamental truth: Poker is not just played for fun.

When I saw this player next to me, the lightbulb in my head cleared the alcohol-induced fog in three seconds flat. A challenge had been issued, even if the man did not intend it. My desire to win erupted. The results are unimportant, but I did win back \$400 before I called it a night. More importantly, the new player had modified my motivation and behavior. I have no doubt I could have gone broke and left the table fully satisfied, leaving the new player to clean up and profit, if only I had kept playing for fun.

Sklansky and Malmuth point out that it is important not to take too long to act in a low-limit game, because it can ruin the "fun" atmosphere of the game and let others know you are playing to win. Scenario 1 is a classic example. In short-handed poker, there is an additional factor. Observation is critical. However, we often only consider our ability to watch others. This gentleman took extra time and effort, so he recognized the importance of observation. In the process, he inadvertently made sure other players noticed him. In short-handed poker, it is financial suicide to call such attention to yourself. If others are scrutinizing you closely, they will eventually figure out ways to counter your play.

Scenario 2: The "Angry Loser"

Like most of you, I work a full-time job. One night a few weeks ago, after a particularly tough day at work, I jumped online to play poker to blow off some steam. I was not playing my 'A' game, to say the least.

My game of choice was 5-handed Texas hold'em. As I enjoyed my leisure time, I read some football articles, flipping back and forth to the poker action. About an hour into the action, a critical hand occurred.

Preflop: I held 8♦6♦ in the big blind. Cutoff raised, button cold called, and I threw in an extra bet.

Flop: 5♠9♣Q♥

After I checked, the cutoff checked as well. Not surprisingly, the button tossed in a bet. On a normal day, if this were a hand I would play, I would bet out or maybe check-raise. With 4 outs, my draw is not sufficient for the pot odds, especially with one player left behind me (who could raise). However, I called.

Without fail, small mistakes compound into bigger ones, and I found myself the victim of a raising battle as the cutoff check-raised. I was left in a tough spot with a growing pot and a 4-outer in my hands. I should have dropped my hand at some point on the flop, but with waning attention, I did not. Instead, I called a total of 4 small bets on the flop and 1 big bet on the turn. As any bad-beat enthusiast could predict, I caught the nuts on the river.

Turn: 2♦

River: 7♦

So, I played badly yet won a large pot. This story could end there.

I could have continued to read about the weekend's NFL games, playing poker with half effort. Instead, the cutoff angrily typed into the chat box, using derogatory language. Most players have seen the behavior a thousand times, but it is often dismissed as "part of the game" and simple rudeness. It is also unprofitable.

I decided my opponent was correct. I needed to pay more attention to the poker game, so I did. The cutoff steamed away the rest of his money, and I played serious, mistake-free poker for the rest of my session.

Increased Magnitude in Short-Handed Poker

In short-handed poker, players will be making much more marginal decisions, and sometimes, due to a bad read or misunderstanding of short-handed concepts, a vicious bad beat will occur. Yet, it is imperative for a profitable short-handed player to never berate or correct their opponents. Nothing good can come of it. A bad player might improve, get upset and leave, or ignore it. A good player might feel offended and target the "angry loser." I mentioned above that it is better not to have people paying too much attention in the first place. Painting a target on your back is worse, and causing the "live ones" to leave is the greatest crime of all. Why push away the bad players while challenging the good players?

There are a million more examples that any number of players could give. This website includes several authors who have discussed similar stories. The convergent theme is this: If you do something that draws negative attention to yourself, you are likely reducing your ability to win. I am not saying that you should sit quietly and brood at your local game to avoid suspicion. In fact, you would probably draw attention by appearing so serious. Instead, just act normal, smile, and don't offend anybody. Appear to have fun even if you aren't, or at least don't take out your frustration on other players.

And that brings us back to our premise at the top of the article. "Never wake a sleeping giant." The problem in short-handed poker is that every other player is a potential "giant." With the proper motivation and the desire to concentrate, any player can observe, target, and beat you. Hence, one goal in short-handed poker is to not "wake" any of your opponents. In a full game, you might be able to avoid somebody bent on revenge. In a short-handed game, it is impossible.

Accordingly, if your goal is to win money, keep every possible edge for yourself. Don't antagonize the opposition and be content making the right plays. If you get angry, yell at your computer monitor. It won't hold a grudge. Until the next article, good luck.

1.16 Short-Handed Hold'Em: Back to the Basics

By Jason Pohl

Short-handed poker is mostly an online phenomenon. Shuffling a deck, even for the most experienced dealer, will always take an inordinate amount of time when compared to the instant response of a computer. Thus, shorthanded poker has seen its popularity increase with the growth of online poker. Maybe the relative novelty of online poker (and even more recent appearance of 5-handed table offerings at online poker sites) explains the minimal offerings of literature concerning short-handed poker. But the advantages of shorthanded play make it worthwhile for any aspiring player to focus significant energy studying, even if they will never seek out a short-handed game.

In this article, I will detail three essentials that provide the foundation for how short-handed play is different from ring games. Throughout this and future articles, the main focus will remain on Texas Hold 'Em, by far the most popular form of short-handed play.

Fundamental #1:

Short-handed play is fast (high average hands per hour). This might seem self-explanatory, but its impact is so large that it might not be considered fully at first glance. There are several factors that make online short-handed Texas Hold'Em a very fast game. Online poker is well

known to allow players to average twice to three times more hands per hour than its live B&M counterpart.

Shuffling is instantaneous, players can act before their turn, dealers never have to split pots or call the floor, and poker software interfaces let players act more quickly than in a B&M cardroom. And these advantages of online poker are magnified at shorthanded games. Many hands end quickly through blind stealing or folds on the flop, so the instant shuffling has an increased impact. Of course, there are also fewer players who must make decisions. All these effects multiply, leading to averages of 150-200+ hands per hour in many cases.

But what does this mean to you, the aspiring winner? Lots and lots of money, most importantly. Poker is a game of many small edges. The more good decisions a winner makes (+EV decisions), the more money they earn. Simple, eh? Well, short-handed games allow a winner to make more decisions per hour than in a 10-handed game for two main reasons. The most straightforward (but common to all forms of online poker) is simply what we discussed above. There are more hands played per hour. However, a lesser considered reason is the looseness of the typical short-handed player. Due to the high price of the blinds, each player will take part in more hands. More hands played will result in more decisions to be made and each of these decisions is an opportunity for the good player.

So, there's the prospect of making a lot of money fast. But beware. The incredibly fast pace of shorthanded play is a double-edged sword. Many players complain of the very high variance of short-handed tables. On one hand, luck actually plays a smaller role in theory due to the higher number of decision opportunities per hour. To explain this phenomenon, I'll consider a case where a person is flipping a coin. If one person flips a coin only 10 times, there is a significant chance the percentages of 'heads' will vary greatly. It wouldn't be so shocking to see 60 or 70% of all flips end in 'heads' (or tails).

However, if that same person flipped a coin 100 times, the chances of 'heads' coming up 70% of the time are extremely small. The math needed to demonstrate the actual probabilities in our two scenarios is just an expansion of simple arithmetic, but too cumbersome for the purpose of this article. The point is that while luck swings to both good and bad players alike, the variance in general will be lower as more decisions are made.

If we've proven that luck is a smaller factor, why would a high variance be a normal complaint? Simply put, the game often proceeds faster than players can adjust. While conditions can change quickly in poker under any set of circumstances, the damage that can be done in shorthanded play is amplified. Let's say you are playing what is normally a winning strategy for your game. If an opponent crafts a solid strategy capitalizing on your weaknesses, you may not realize you are being outplayed for quite a few hands. The longer it takes to counter, the more money you will lose.

In other words, since your opponents have changed, the decisions you make will have negative expectations. The speed of play may mean that a lot of hands pass before you even realize what is happening. Furthermore, shorthanded play can often be very volatile and unpredictable, for reasons I will highlight in the next section and in future articles. Decisions will be closer to marginal in general than they would be in other games because even great short-handed players are forced to do a lot of educated guessing with very imperfect information.

Fundamental #2:

Short-handed play is usually loose and aggressive. At the time I am writing this article, there are six 10-handed \$3/\$6 games of Hold'Em at a popular online poker site. The average pot

size is \$32 exactly. At the same time, there are three 5-handed \$3/\$6 games at the same site, with an average pot size of \$27. Why such a small difference? The answer lies in an oft-used phrase, "Poker begins as a fight for the blinds." In a 10-handed game, tight play is so critical that it often is the biggest difference between winners and losers in a low-limit game. One can afford to wait for premium hands before entering a pot. In a 5-handed game, keeping the same tight standards will be suicide to your bankroll. Each player will pay one of the blinds 40% of the time, constantly putting in money without any guarantee of even reasonable cards. Sklansky and Malmuth point out the need for far looser standards pre-flop in what is pretty much the only available literature that focuses on short-handed play, *Hold 'Em Poker for Advanced Players*. As they show with basic math, a good short-handed player will need to play at least 40% of their hands pre-flop in many. Short-handed players will enter a lot more pots and see a lot more flops than their ring-game counterparts. In addition, the nature of Texas Hold 'Em rewards aggressive play, and this is never more true than in short-handed play. Why is being aggressive so critical?

Consider a common situation where a player raises pre-flop in a short-handed game and the big blind calls, making it heads-up on the flop. Four small bets are already in the pot. First, a little mathematical background. A player with a non-pocket pair will only improve to a pair about one-third of the time. This average is decreased if one's opponent has a similar holding, such as A9 vs A8. If a player has connectors, such as QJ, QT, Q9, there is an additional chance of between about 7-11% that the flop will result in a straight or open-ended straight draw. A player with two suited cards will flop a four-flush or flush 12% of the time (by the way, a player with suited connectors such as JTs will flop either a four-flush, open-ended straight, or completed hand about 16% of the time). In other words, your opponent will flop a good draw or pair less than HALF the time, but the same applies to you.

After a bet, there would be five small bets at stake. Five small bets is not enough to justify a gut straight draw or draw at overcards without extraordinary implied odds. So, if a player holds QJ and the flop is 2d 5h 8c for example, they will have a very difficult time calling even a single bet. Drawing towards overcards in this case is not justified by the pot odds (there is a 6:41 chance of improving, or about 7 to 1 against making a pair on the turn). Also note that if that QJ is going against a set, two pair, or is dominated by a hand such as AQ, AJ, KQ, KJ, etc, then it does not even have 6 outs and may be drawing virtually dead. The QJ is in a position of vulnerability. A call is marginal at best.

To capitalize on this vulnerability, good short-handed players will often bluff at a ragged flop (or any flop for that matter) since they are receiving 4-to-1 odds for their bluff and their opponent will not have connected with the flop approximately 50% of the time. In response, a good player will often raise back, as a bluff or semibluff, or with as little as 3rd pair. After all, folding too often makes the bluff profitable, so a good player must fight back to keep from being bullied. Now, this process can often result in a conflict that looks more like a game of "chicken" than poker (i.e. two players bullying each other trying to force the other to fold). This power game creates some difficult decisions for the short-handed player, but the main premise is that most play is aggressive and loose. There is a wider variety of hands played and a wider set of strategies used than in a 10-handed game. Bluffs, semibluffs, semibluff reraises, check-raise bluffs, and bluff raising can all be found at online 5-handed tables because **THEY ARE OFTEN EFFECTIVE**. In turn, players with legitimate hands bet, raise, and reraise with far more abandon than in a full ring game, and their opponents will raise, reraise, or call with a far wider range of hands. This means a lot of money is going into each pot, often before the turn, even though the action is usually heads-up. It's easy to correlate how the increased range

of hands and aggressiveness results in more 'educating guessing' and fewer clear-cut decisions for a good player.

Fundamental #3:

To win at short-handed poker, you must be observant. I might be a poker purist, but I believe good poker should include a high degree of bluffing, aggression, and guts. That's certainly how mass society views the game. But the truth in full ring games, especially at low limits, is that bluffs are usually bad plays, tightness is often a huge factor separating winners and losers, and guts have far less to do with how much is won than Hollywood would ever have us believe. Utilizing a good conservative strategy, staying patient, understanding pot odds, and some basic card reading skills are the main tools of winners. Online players (including a lot of professionals) sometimes play two or three 10-handed games at the same time because they can win by simply using a straightforward, tight strategy. The same decisions come up repeatedly, and straightforward play takes the cash. These professionals win even though they don't know the tendencies of each player because the advantage of knowing each players tendencies is reduced.

I am not attempting to say that being observant is unimportant in full-ring games. But the fact remains that especially in low limit games, many professionals win without being observant because it is less important than other skills such as card selection (tightness).

On the other hand...

In short-handed games, a winning player does one fundamental thing that sets him or her apart from the losing player. They adjust their own play to their opponents to capitalize on their opponents' mistakes. Being observant and adjusting one's playing style is the most important requirement for being a winning short-handed player. First, with a higher rate of hands played, an observant player can pick up the tendencies and playing style of opponents much more quickly.

Of course, there are many, many individual inclinations that can be exploited with a good counterstrategy (e.g. a player might fold too often to raises or check raises, they might not call enough in the blinds or they might call too much, or a player might fold too often on the end). There seem to be almost infinite possibilities. It might seem obvious, but almost every tendency can be countered. And in shorthanded play, strong card reading, psychology, and observation skills will result in opportunities for +EV players quickly and often.

All a winning player has to know is how to read those tendencies quickly and counter them effectively. But of course, therein lies the rub. Reading trends and understanding other players can be very difficult, and finding the best defense is harder yet. And in the real world, your opponents will not always be predictable. They will vary their play or will adjust to your counterstrategies. Your goal is to prepare ahead, and be ready to adjust quicker than your opponent. To be a winning player, you will always be one step ahead, outguessing, outthinking, and outplaying each opponent.

The subject of short-handed play is so complex and rich because it is in many ways completely different than the full-ring counterpart. There may not be a lot of shorthanded literature available to offer a straightforward strategy that wins, but the relative newness of the game is not the only reason. Instead, shorthanded poker is exceptional because each scenario is distinct, and a winning player, more than anything else, must adjust to each situation uniquely. Until the next article, good luck.

2 Hypermegachi's 6-Max Guide

2.1 Introduction

Just as a counterargument to the 1bb an hour on the main page, it is true that in limit you cannot make as much as NL. However, I find the advantages of limit make in a viable choice over NL for many people. For one, limit is all about making the decision with the most positive expected value at the given moment given all the information you have. You have 3 actions every time: bet, call, and fold. Choosing the best one is the one that maximizes expected value. If you are good at making many little decisions over and over, you will make a lot of money playing limit.

1bb per hour is somewhat underrated. There are many players who sustain even a 4bb/100 at the lowest limits. For the higher limits 2bb/100 is very sustainable. If you are making 2bb/100 quad tabling 10/20 you will be raking in the big bucks.

Also, the last thing to mention is the amount of fish. At the party \$25NL there are plenty fish in the see. As you move up the ranks, the number of fish goes down a lot, so instead of getting paid off with your big hands, lots of times you only get the blinds, which of course sucks. There just aren't many fish that will play at the \$200NL tables, and when they do, they bust out fast.

When you move up the ranks in limit, the fish obviously decrease, but there are still lots of them to make it profitable. In fact I find this surprising when fnord was posting 15/30 hands and the complete crap these people were playing...the same ones at 0.5/1.

And also a prelude to my guide, I am not claiming to know everything about shorthanded games. However, I do believe all of the information I'm providing is correct, to my knowledge. I am also a poker player, and I am also constantly learning. Thus, if you read something, and you disagree I welcome your comments and criticisms so I can learn from my mistakes. So drop in the forum, and give me a PM!

6 Max Texas Hold'em Limit Games

Shorthanded games give the aggressive player the edge, if they know how to play well. However, just because shorthanded games require aggression, doesn't mean you should become loose and aggressive. Those players take massive swings at shorthanded play, and inevitably end up losing in the long run.

Before you should consider tackling 6max, you should be very competent at the full ring game, with enough hands to know you're soundly beating the game. There are many things profitable in full ring that go down in value for 6max. For example, suited aces are very profitable full ring in a passive table, because with such a big pot with dead money, it's worth chasing for that flush. In 6max this will get you burned.

In this guide, you are learning to be tight and aggressive. It's the only way to play. By tight, I mean you should be seeing 20% of all flops out of the blinds. Unlike full ring, if you see lower than 20% you are missing out on a lot of profitable situations, and that will affect your win rate. When you get enough experience, you can move up to 25% of all flops. 30% is the highest you can play profitably at, and very few players can achieve that.

Also, if you plan to play seriously I highly recommend pokertracker. Pretty useless for no limit, but for limit it is essential to analyzing your game, and plugging leaks. Limit is all about the little things. The player with the least little mistakes makes that extra 0.5bb/100.

So I've mentioned playing aggressive, mentioned playing tight, and there's one last thing that's very important, in fact the most important. POSITION. Having that button is so crucial that your starting hand requirements change drastically relative to your position from the button.

Now that you have a general idea of what 6max is all about, time to break it down.

2.2 Preflop Play

Position is the single most important deciding factor of what hands to play, so I'm going to break it down by position.

UTG

Open raise or fold. You do not want to call here with anything. The only exception is if the table is unusually aggressive preflop, and you hold AA or KK, and you know there's an 80% chance there's a raise behind you, then you can consider limp-raising. UTG is the worst position preflop, limping can be very costly if someone raises after you. You must open raise to try and get as many people to fold after you, or try and induce mistakes by making them cold call.

As a side note now that I mentioned, cold calling is a HUGE leak in many people's games. This goes in full ring, and it applies in 6max. Do not cold call! Exceptions are if you're on the button and 2 people cold called already, and you hold a suited ace, expecting the blinds to call, etc.

UTG+1

Again the situation is very similar to UTG.

CO

This is when you start to get good position. The only time you should call is when UTG or UTG+1 limped ahead of you. Otherwise, if you're going to play the hand, raise. You want to buy the button by making them fold.

Button

Again, like CO, call only when there are limpers before you. If it's folded to you, raise with decent hands if you think there's a good chance the blinds will fold.

Now, I mentioned calling only against limpers. The decision to call vs. raise is often very close. For example, I call with KTo, but I'll raise with KTs. Don't get too stuck up on things like this, your decision preflop in situations like this account for a small percentage of your win rate over the long run. Postflop is where all the money is made.

SB

You have awesome odds here, so if no one has raised, call with anything suited, and connectors.

BB

If everyone folds to the button, who raises, don't be a chicken if you have a decent hand. Even A3o is worth calling to tell the button to screw off trying to steal your blind. Having the ace is important though, with K3o the decision is more dependent on your read on the player.

Hands

Pocket pairs: These hands go up in value shorthanded. Fold the lowest pairs early position. Call with the lower pairs if there are limpers ahead of you in late position, raise the higher ones in all positions.

Suited connectors: These hands are junk shorthanded. Only play 98s or higher, and only in late position with limpers.

Suited aces and kings: Again like all speculative hands, they go way down in value shorthanded. Just like suited connectors, only late position with limpers.

High card hands: These hands go up in value. KTo, weak hand in full ring, strong hand shorthanded. You should not be afraid of open raising with this hand, from all positions.

Powerhouse hands. AA, KK, QQ, JJ, TT, AK, AQ, AJ, KQ...these are all hands you should try to raise, reraise, and cap preflop, depending on what type of players your opponents are.

Just a side note, many players do not like raising and reraise with AK. They like to call, and see the flop cheaply, and when they hit their pair they'll bet aggressively, otherwise they will fold. This is TERRIBLE. You are holding AK, the 3rd or 4th best fricken hand! If you aren't going to raise with that what ARE you going to raise with? Limit is all about doing the thing that maximizes expectation. The chances of AK being the current best hand are VERY high. Raise for value.

Since I expect you to know what hands are good and what hands are crappy, the only change you need to make from full tables is you will be raising a lot more preflop. If it's folded to you, raise if you're going to play the hand. Call if callers ahead of you. Reraise and cap all your premium holdings.

Facing a Raise

Like I've mentioned before, cold calling is a HUGE LEAK. Don't do it. The only time you should even think about cold calling is if it was a hand you would have raised if no one else did. Getting reads are important, if a TP-P raises before you, you can probably safely muck your AQo, knowing you're probably up against AK, AA, or KK. Against a tight aggressive it's a coin flip. They could have AA, or they could have ATo. You should either reraise, or fold. I don't like cold calling. I don't like calling in general. For me I reraise AQ, and fold everything else. TT and higher pairs I reraise, medium pairs 77-99 depends on the opponent to reraise or call, and how many opponents will be in the hand. The only time I cold call is when there are multiple cold callers in front of me, and I have a lower pocket pair or suited connectors.

Basically the overall idea for cold calling, play AS A TIGHT AS A TIGHT ANIMALS ASS. Just to give you a general idea, in the last 1000 hands I've played, I've cold called 4 times. And that's probably too loose.

In summary; raise or fold. Call with hands too crappy to raise with, but too good to fold (but only after someone else called). Cold call only when necessary...i.e. almost never.

Facing a Reraise After You Raised

If you raised first, and it gets 3bet and capped back to you, muck your hand unless you hold the goods. Treat this as if you were cold calling.

What if it's one bet back to you? In most situations I will call. You don't want to fold after you raise or people who notice will start throwing extra raises at you. However, if a loose passive reraises your raise, what else will they raise with? Give them credit and fold. If a tight aggressive raises, that's when you gotta decide whether to reraise, call, or fold. This depends on position as well. Being first to act or last to act for the rest of the round against a specific player will change what action you must take. Unfortunately I do not have enough experience in these situations to give any meaningful advice (mainly because I choose soft tables).

2.3 Postflop Play

You raise a lot preflop for one reason. You are telling everyone after you that you think your hand is worthy of having the button. You are telling them that if they think their hand is more worthy, then they must cold call or reraise you. This is all a set up for what makes you money....postflop play, so you want to go into the flop with the best position possible.

There are many decisions preflop that have little effect on your long term win rate. Bet, raise, fold, call, they all mean relatively little compared to what you do postflop will mean. Your decisions postflop are much more important because they can cost you the pot. Losing a big pot you should win is a disaster! You must prevent that from happening.

In general, you always want to be the one that's betting and raising. Calling is weak, and none of us want to be weak. The only time you should be calling is when you are on a draw, and getting the odds and/or implied odds to call.

The basic run down is this. On the flop you want to protect your hand by getting it heads up, or build the pot with a monster or drawing hand. On the turn is when you need to decide if your hand is good. Very few players are capable of raising you on the turn without the goods. Don't be the sheriff and call down to find out. Trust in your read. If you call down on the turn, you must call down on the river too. All those big bets will add up. Remember, limit is about all the little things adding up. It's just not "one more bet." It's one more bet over and over, causing you to lose money.

2.4 Hand Values

monster = top pair top kicker or better

good hand = top pair weak kicker

marginal hand = mid pair good kicker

bad hand = everything else (only the very best players can play mid pair crappy kicker profitably, so don't try it until you have the experience)

As you can see, the monster category is a lot lower than in full ring. Top pair top kicker very rarely wins the pot in full ring. The main reason for this is because in full ring the blinds come

very slowly, so you can be VERY selective of what hands you play. Also, often with more limpers and a passive preflop game, longhanded lets speculative hands like suited cards, lower pockets, connectors, etc. to play profitably, and cheaply.

Those hands just don't get lucky enough to be profitable shorthanded because there isn't enough dead money in the pot. Avoid them unless there are multiple limpers with you having the button.

In summary, the average winning hand is a function of the number of players seeing the flop. Most of the time only 3 or sometimes 4 people see the flop shorthanded, and it thins to 3 or 2 on the turn and river. With fewer players, you need a lesser hand to win. However, if you happen to find yourself in a very loose shorthanded table, like 5 or 6 people seeing the flop all the time, move your hand values up. A single pair will not win very often.

2.5 Flop Play EP

Assuming at least 3 handed...

Bad Hands:

Lowest pair isn't best too often, you can muck these hands.

Marginal Hands:

Being in early position has the advantage of building pots when you have a monster, and check-raising marginal hands to protect your hand, and increasing your chances of winning. A lot of advice out there suggests you shouldn't continue beyond the flop with less than top pair. Having medium pair is very often the best hand shorthanded. If everyone checks to the button, who bets, you MUST raise here with mid pair. Many people bet on the button with nothing, you may have him beat. Other players after you may have top pair with weak kicker, facing 2 cold, they might fold fearing being outkicked.

Good Hands:

With top pair good kicker, or better hands, I like to bet out to build a pot. I will not slow down on the turn or river until my opponents tell me to (by raising back at me).

Pocket Pairs:

Play it like a marginal hand if your your PP can beat mid pair, muck it otherwise. Play it like a good hand if your pocket pair hits a set, or is higher than the board.

Flush Draws and Open Ended Straight Draws:

You want as many people in the pot as possible. If the table is loose with many people calling to the river with crap, bet out to build the pot. If the table is fairly tight, check with the intention of calling when the button bets, to try and get more callers. If the player after you bets, and people call afterwards, when it's your turn, RAISE. You have nothing now, but no one is going to fold for one more bet. Maximize the pot you can win by raising.

Gutshots

Call if you're getting odds, otherwise fold.

Overcards

These are a bastard to play early position, being you cannot use the freecard and free

showdown plays. Needless to say, if the board is very ragged, I will try for a check raise, and bet out on the turn, and hope they fold. If the check raise fails, and the turn doesn't help, then well you're screwed . Depending on your reads you may choose to bet out, or check fold. If the board is coordinated, I will check/fold, knowing there's too many ways I can be beat.

Backdoor Draws

Not worth playing if this is the only thing you have.

Multiple combination of the above

Again, consider the board, consider the players, and do what maximizes the pot size and your ability to win it. Check raise marginal hands, bet out strong hands and draws, and reraise for value to build big pots.

2.6 Flop Play MP

Assuming at least 3 handed...

Bad Hands:

Lowest pair isn't best too often, you can muck these hands. Being sandwiched should give you more than enough reason to fold this.

Marginal Hands:

Hitting a marginal hand in middle position is very difficult to play. Here's the problem. You have a marginal hand, so you must protect it by betting. But when you bet, the players after you (1 or 2) can raise! If they raise, you cannot fold because if you fold too much everyone will take extra shots at you. And of course, they have position on you on the turn. If you just check, well the button can also check and you've given them a free look at the river. About the only good thing that could happen is if someone before you bet, allowing you to raise. They are usually betting to build a pot, perhaps on a draw. Destroy their drawing odds by thinning the field.

Good Hands:

Bet them, lesser hands will call, if they fold that's fine too.

Pocket Pairs:

Read above about marginal hands.

Flush Draws and Open Ended Straight Draws:

Keep as many people in the pot as possible. Flushes and straights win big against big fields, so you want many opponents. Call if early position bets to get more callers after you. Check if early position checks.

Gutshots

Call if you're getting odds, otherwise fold.

Overcards

Again these are difficult to play. Basically same ideas as being in early position. If early position bets, either raise (for free card/free showdown) or fold.

Backdoor Draws

Not worth playing if this is the only thing you have.

Multiple combination of the above

Again, consider the board, consider the players, and do what maximizes the pot size and your ability to win it. Check raise marginal hands, bet out strong hands and draws, and reraise for value to build big pots.

All in all, there are not too many differences between early and middle position. Being early gives you the advantage to build your pots with flush draws, and check raise marginal hands. With a weak draw middle position, getting caught between an aggressive button and aggressive blind can be costly, so you should avoid such situations if possible. Bet if you think there's a good chance that it will make the people after you fold, thus "buying" the button. This will allow you to try for the free card, or free showdown. If people after you call, you cannot like your hand much. But they could have a weaker marginal hand than you. Depending on your read you can bet the turn or not.

2.7 Flop Play LP

Assuming at least 3 handed...

Bad Hands:

If it's checked to you, bet if there's a high chance everyone will fold. Take the free card.

Marginal Hands:

If it's checked to you, bet it. You may have the best hand you may not. Bet to find out. If someone before you bets, raise it to drive other people out. They will often check to you on the turn. You will then have a choice between the free card or free showdown. I prefer the free showdown for 2 reasons. One, betting the flop and turn gives your opponents 2 chances to fold. Also, the free showdown prevents a check raise on the river. But of course, if you think your hand is best, value bet.

Draws

Bet and try to build pots. If someone early bets, and there are 2 or 3 callers, you want to raise your flush and OESD. Your raise is for value, you have a huge chance of winning the pot. Juice it up while you can!

Weak Draws

I like to bet these when it's checked to me, usually for the free card. This applies for gutshots and overcards, although I'll do the free showdown with overcards rather than the free card.

Now if you've read my early position advice, you'll see that being on the button you can be check raised. Fortunately at the lower limits the only people capable of making this play are good players, or stupid players. Find out which type of player they are and adjust accordingly. Unless you have absolutely nothing, call if it's 1 small bet back to you. Then you can fold the turn if you don't improve.

2.8 Flop Play in the Blinds

Playing the blinds well is one of the most difficult skills to master. This is one of the more profound differences between longhanded and shorthanded play. The blinds come around

twice as fast, and people will take shots at your blinds. You cannot let them bully you around. In other positions you are usually fine because you are playing premium hands anyway. Even if everyone just calls, you have 960 in the blinds, and the flop comes 249, it's hard to know where you are.

In that situation, you can bet out to test the waters. But if someone has A9, they may call it, or raise it. If they raise it you can muck, knowing you're in deep shit. If they call it, you're in deep shit too, because there are a lot of passive players who will call like this. You'll likely end up paying them off if they don't raise.

Going for the check raise is alright too, but most of the time you'll just scare the button into thinking they're in deep shit, and they'll just call down the turn and river bets, and flip over T9.

Playing blinds is difficult because there is no way you can "buy" the button. If you bought it that means everyone folded. Thus, the blinds are really only profitable when you have monsters.

You are expected to lose money in the blinds, you just need to minimize it as much as possible. Be aggressive with marginal holdings. I like to stick with my mantra..."if they don't raise, I have the better hand."

2.9 General Flop Comments

Playing the flop well is crucial because most of the time, if you are playing the flop, you are playing the turn and river too. You do not want to make it costly to play the later streets. Read the board, and look for possible draws and put your opponents on hands (even the unlikely ones). The reason to be aggressive is because besides winning a bigger pot when you have the best hand, and causing people to fold, you get INFORMATION.

Calling, is not information. To me, calling is "I like my hand." That's it. In fact I've played against players who wouldn't raise even though they hit their set. They held TT...didn't raise preflop. Hit the set on the flop, didn't bet. Turn didn't bet. Even the river they didn't raise it. Being aggressive will make you fall prey to slowplaying. Don't worry about it. Getting slowplayed doesn't happen often enough for it to be considered a problem.

Anyways, most of the time your opponents will just call. If anyone raises you, put them on a hand. Are they fish, or are they tight aggressive? If they are a fish, you can safely muck your hand on the turn if you don't improve knowing they are not capable of raising on a draw or semibluff. Against a tight aggressive, well trust in your read and hope you were right....reraise your best hands, muck marginal hands if the board is coordinated.

If you haven't noticed yet, it is difficult to make the right decision if you are up against a bet or raise. You need to make the decision to avoid folding the possible best hand, or paying off the better hand. You don't want to be in this position very often, that's why you should be more or less playing raise/fold. Be aggressive with a hand you want to play, fold everything else. Let your opponents make the mistakes. Fortunately at the lower limits you can to put your opponents in a situation to call unprofitably WAY MORE OFTEN than it is the other way around.

2.10 Turn Play

Now you've reach the turn. You like your hand enough to take it to the bigger streets. This is the time to make the laydown, or continue to the river. Never ever call down on curiosity. The turn is NOT the time to make loose calls. Loose calls should be restricted to the flop when it's still relatively cheap. Trust in your read. Don't waste 2 big bets to find out.

Early Position

Fairly simple if you have a monster...bet out. Playing marginal hands is more difficult. Did they just call the flop? Did they reraise you on the flop? Again, if no one else has shown aggression, my hand is best. I like to bet out on the turn with marginal hands good kicker to test the waters, if they raise, I am pretty sure I'm beat. Most players will not raise on the turn without the goods.

Middle Position

Most often by the turn it will be heads up. Sometimes it will end up 3 handed. Anyways, you want a decent hand here because you don't wanna be stuck between 2 aggressive players with a drawing hand. If early position bets, you can try buying the button by raising your marginal hands. But remember, the bet sizes are double now, so you must decide if it's worth risking that extra bet to win the pot. Most players will not bet out on the turn without a good hand.

Late Position

Well, if you bet or raised the flop, most likely they will check to you. You have a choice between the free card and the free showdown. Do the free showdown against weak tight players (because they can make laydowns), and do the free card against calling stations (because they won't fold). If someone early bets, depending on your read, call down or fold. I don't like it when someone else takes the steering wheel, so I'll tend to fold if I can't be the aggressor.

2.11 River Play

You've made it this far. There's almost no folding now. The pots by this time are big enough for you to call down with almost anything. If people were passive through all streets, then you can consider folding (because the pot will be small). However, if someone bets into you, and you only hold mid pair top kicker, what should you do?

I consider a big pot to contain 10BB or more. With 1BB back to you, you are getting 11:1 odds to call. In other words, you only need to beat the bettor 8.3% of the time for this call to be profitable. You CANNOT fold unless you are over 90% sure you are beat. Almost no read is that accurate. Maybe if the board was 4 flush with 4 to a straight you can fold. Otherwise you shouldn't fold. You will be constantly surprised with the crap your opponents are playing.

Early Position

If you've been betting the entire time, you should bet again if the river is a blank. If the river completes many potential draws, you should still bet it. Just because the river card completes flushes and straight draws doesn't mean your opponents hold them. If they are straightforward opponents, they might raise you, allowing you to fold (only if the pot is under 10bb, call if it's big). You spend just as much when you are ahead as you are behind. Check calling the river automatically when a scare card comes will make you miss a lot of value bets. Do not assume the worse. If they shown a lot of aggression on the turn, then I may check call it down.

Middle Position

If you're still at the river at middle position, you must have a pretty good hand. If someone early bets, before you call rerun the hand and see what late position players have done in previous streets. You do not want them raising after you because it will be very costly.

Late Position

Call down scary rivers in big pots. Bet blanks when you have a hand.

Facing a raise Again, most players will not raise back at you without a good hand on the river. However, before you go psycho and hit the raise button again, put them on a hand. Just today I was dealt rockets. Hit a set on the flop, bet the flop, bet the turn, bet the river, and I got raised. I paused for a second, and I thought no fricken way they have QT for the gutshot on the river. I reraised, and they cap it back. Yep they had QT.

Bet or check behind? Bet out, or check/fold?

Theory of Poker mentions that sometimes you cannot bet because the only hands that will call are the ones that beat you. This is true, but only with thinking opponents. Loose low limit games are filled with players who will call with the lowest pair just to make sure you aren't bluffing them out of the pot with an unimproved AK. Because of this, you should be able to value bet a large percentage of your hands, even the marginal ones. Put a label of tight or loose on the player and adjust accordingly. Tend to be aggressive against loose opponents, and passive against tight players on the river, with your marginal holdings.

2.12 Protecting Your Hand

A lot of this information is explained in greater detail in Ed Miller's Small Stakes Holdem. It is an excellent book and I recommend it to anyone who wants to excel their holdem game. However, do not follow his preflop charts in shorthanded games for which hands to call. Limping is a money loser shorthanded, don't do it first in the pot. Raise if you want to play the hand.

Now, an important concept...

Protecting Your Hand

The concept of protecting your hand is trying to make your opponents fold better hands, or make them call unprofitably. Many limit players from the full ring get slaughtered in shorthanded games because they fold too damn much! The fit-or-fold strategy in full ring is a sure money loser shorthanded. They hit top pair, but weak kicker. They will fold sometimes even for one bet on the flop, because the thought of being outkicked is so menacing. They don't know they are folding the best hand more often than not.

So, bet and make those players fold! Now, what about someone early betting, and you raising with mid pair good kicker after they bet? This gives these weak tight players even MORE reason to fold their top pair weak kicker because it costs them 2 bets. Remember, you want overcalls if you're drawing to a monster, or flopped a monster (like a set). You only need to raise to protect weaker one pair hands. Many loose players call, even to the river with low pair. With each additional caller, the one after is getting better odds to call. You want to raise

because by making these players fold it improves your winning chances (for the times the turn and river makes their hand into the winner).

People might argue that if you don't raise the flop, you are going to miss bets with the current best hand. This is often wrong. Players will tend to check/call down players who were aggressive the previous street. "Check to the raiser" is very common in low stakes games. That's why freecards, cheap showdowns, free showdowns, etc. work. Because of this, if you raise the flop, you will only get them to call your turn and river bets. If you just call the flop, but raise the turn, since you are now the new aggressor you get at least one extra big bet.

There is an interesting concept when you are playing against multiple bad players, them COMBINED can have enough outs to beat you. So instead of the 1st player having 4 outs, the 2nd player 4 outs, 3rd player 4 outs, you can think of it has 12 outs against you. This is called the "schooling" concept. You should raise to slim it down to 8 or 4 outs against you.

Another reason for betting and raising, is because players tend to check to the raiser of the previous street. By betting and raising you can take free cards and free showdowns.

When Raising Will Not Protect Your Hand

Even though you can protect your hand by betting and raising, sometimes you are unable to protect your hand. For example, preflop UTG limps (bad! don't do it yourself), and UTG+1 raises. CO folds, and you 3bet your aces. The small blind folds, big blind calls (bad yet again), and the limper calls (bad!). The big blind and limper have done terrible mistakes by cold calling. Be happy if they are doing it all the time because their money will end up in your pockets. Anyways, on with the hand...UTG+1 caps, and everyone calls.

The pot is 16 small bets. There are very few hands that will cap preflop, so you can put UTG+1 on KK or QQ, etc. The flop comes with a 2 flush, and 2 to a straight, medium cards. You almost certainly have the best hand, however, your hand is vulnerable so you should protect it. You probably have UTG+1 beat unless the miracle K or Q comes, so your concern is the blind and limper on a draw. The small blind checks, limper checks, and UTG+1 bets again. You should NOT raise.

Why? Playing poker is all about inducing mistakes from your opponents. There are people that argue that the chances of you having the best hand are TOO great right now, so you must raise for value. However, after you raise, the pot will contain 19 small bets. After your raise, the SB gets 8:1 odds to call, which is the threshold to call profitably for 4 out draws (because of implied odds). The limper gets 10.5:1 odds after the blind calls. And with one bet back, UTG+1 can even call a 2 out draw profitably! Since you shown aggression on the flop, your opponents will likely check to you on the turn. But since you raised it on the flop, on the turn the pot will be 12 big bets. So even if you bet, any 4 out draw (like gutshots) can call profitably getting over 12:1 odds. Thus, in this situation raising the flop will not protect your hand because your opponents can call profitably (and with the pot so big you can be CERTAIN none of them will fold). Your raise does not make your opponents do any mistakes.

Your best chance to protect your hand is to wait for the turn where the bets double, and the turn doesn't help any draws. If you called, the pot on the turn will be 10 big bets. The small blind and limper haven't done much except call, so you can expect them to check to the raiser UTG+1, who will bet, allowing you to raise. Your raise will face the blind and limper with 13:2, or 6.5:1 odds, which is far too crappy for one more card to come. You have just allowed your

opponents to make mistakes by calling, thus you gain.

People still argue that they want to win the biggest pot possible by raising the flop and then planning to raise the turn again. However, because the theme "check to the raiser" is so common, you will actually more likely make the pot SMALLER by raising on the flop instead of the turn. Reraising the flop will slow you opponents down on the turn (unless they themselves have a monster). But just calling the flop, and unexpectedly raising the turn will tap them for at least one more big bet, resulting in a bigger pot.

In summary, a flop raise fails to protect your hand when the raise allows your opponents to call profitably (ie big pots). Wait until the turn. With one card left on the river to destroy your hand you are less likely to be taken down. Jam the pot on the turn, and charge the callers more than what they bargained for.

Your opponents' mistakes is money in your pocket. Do whatever you must to make them do the MOST mistakes.

Pot Size and Opponents

Now before you go raising everything, you need to look at the pot. ALL decisions should be centered on the size of the pot. If the pot is 3 small bets, and someone bets and you hold mid pair good kicker, it's not worth spending 2 small bets to win 4. So fold it.

However, if you have a marginal hand, with a backdoor flush draw, you have some outs to the best hand (such as trips on the turn, 2 pair, flush redraw). If you have the odds (and/or implied odds) to call, THEN that's when you want to raise, to thin the field.

With weaker hands such as single pair, and sometimes 2 pair, you want to thin the field. With flush and straight draws, you want many opponents. Many players make the mistake of betting and raising the crap out of their straights and flushes when they hit on the turn. What they don't realize is they just make it heads up, instead of gaining the 2 extra bets from callers if they didn't raise. Maximize your hand! Straights and flushes are strong enough to take down many opponents, so keep them in and take more of their money.

Fine print:

Just as a warning, playing marginal hands is a HUGE money loser if you do it wrong, so before you raise that mid pair or even bottom pair, ask yourself why you are raising, and what you want your opponents to do when you raise. But of course, if you don't play marginal hands at all shorthanded you'll get your ass kicked anyways. So learn to do it well!

Also, this entire post about protecting your hand is from the material I learned in Theory of Poker and Small Stakes Holdem, so props to the 2+2 authors who awakened me when I first read this.

2.13 Blind Steals

The Swings

I'm sure most of you have heard of the 300BB rule for full ring. And if you haven't you probably shouldn't be reading this guide. 300BB is the MINIMUM you should have for 6max. Don't even think about playing shorthanded without being properly bankrolled. I've taken

40BB swings up and down playing shorthanded within an hour or 2 (I've heard of people taking 100BB swings as well). Since you're playing many more marginal hands than normal, you'll be going to showdowns thinking you'll only win 60% of the time. Full ring, often you shouldn't go to showdown without being 80% sure you'll win. This amounts to way more swings than usual. Not being properly bankrolled is just asking the poker gods to bust you.

Anyways, on to more strategies...

Blind Defense and Steals

Defending blind steals:

Playing the blinds well against a possible blind steal is very difficult. For one, playing the player is much more important. One of the many benefits of playing shorthanded is you get to improve your reading skills. This will transfer well when you move up limits, which tend to have better players (but still plenty fish in the sea).

If you suspect a steal, call with anything connected, anything suited, ace rag, king good kicker. If you feel like being aggressive, you can reraise with the slightly better hands and bet out on the flop no matter what comes. Most of the time I'll bet out on the flop if I suspect it's a steal. If they reraise, I'll relook at the board and put them on a hand. Playing the blinds against a steal is very dependent on your read on the player, so you just need to be in this situation lots of times before you get good.

Against thinking tight aggressive players I'll reraise preflop. You may be dominated, you may not be. But the point is when you reraise, even with hands just barely callable, you are telling that player to screw off and not try again next time. Postflop, it is a constant battle of betting, check raising, check calling, reraising, capping, the whole deal. Your reading skills are put to the test!

Against passive players tight and loose, if you like your hand enough then call, and bet out on the flop. Fold to a raise. These players are too straightforward to try any tricky plays. If they call, they are probably on a draw. So bet the turn again if it's a blank, and they will probably fold. If they call again, bet marginal and better hands. Check/call weak hands. Check/fold high card hands unless it's AK or AQ etc.

Against loose aggressives, well either call down, or go into a raising war. They will often show you crap at the showdown, but that doesn't mean they won't hit 2 pair with 53o. I like to call the preflop bet, and then call down with marginal hands, and fold everything else.

It takes lots and lots of experience to play well against blind steals. And since they happen infrequently, you can't really assess how good your blind play is until you have a shitload of hands. You expect to break even in the long run...which beats losing all those blinds.

And a further note, heads up, ace high is a pretty good hand, especially if the board is ragged. Your opponents probably raised with face cards. With all unders you can be pretty sure they missed too. AK and AQ are strong hands because they don't run into kicker problems.

Blind stealing:

Being in position is a huge advantage when you are blind stealing. You get to see what your

opponents are doing. If you flop a monster, and they are defending their blinds, and they bet out, you can wait for the turn, and raise them there. You can take free cards, and do free showdowns. Bet if you think there's more than a 50% chance they'll fold or you have the best hand. Take the free cards and free showdowns if you think there is very little chance they'll fold, and you have a weak hand.

2.14 Bluffing

Most of the time you'll be playing against loose passive players with table selection. Don't bother bluffing at the lower limits, they won't fold. Even with lowest pair they will call you down. However, if you have a read of the player and you think there's a good chance they will fold, then you can bet. I rarely do stone cold bluffs unless it's heads up for a fight over the blinds and I only have ace high. Your success bluffing more than one person goes straight down the drain. Let's say your chances of bluffing one of them is 60%. You will only be able to bluff both of them successfully $(0.60)(0.60) = 36\%$ of the time. As you can see, with each additional player your success goes way down.

Inducing Bluffs

Say you have middle pair, but with a very crappy kicker. The board isn't coordinated at all. It's 4 handed, and everyone checks the flop. Everyone checks the blank turn. The blank river falls, and then someone early bets for no apparent reason at all. The 2 after him fold, and it's your turn. Since you close the action, you should call. The pot is laying 3:1, so if you think the bluffer is bluffing more than 25% of the time, you're theoretically making money on the call.

Now, switch roles. The bluffer bets, the person after folds, and now it's your turn (so one person after you left). Do not call in this situation, because you do not close the action. If you can only beat a bluff, you should raise to make the person after you fold.

As you can see, doing something like above is what drives the variance up for shorthanded games. You shouldn't attempt it until you have significant experience. But sometimes, you just have that gut feeling, "yeah this guy is bluffing." Call them down. You need to win many small pots as well as big pots. In full ring games you don't give a crap about these little pots because your A2s limping in with 8 other players will pay you off huge when you hit, and it only costs you 1 small bet.

Now this isn't to say you should try and win EVERY pot you're in even the small ones. This situation is special because no one has shown aggression, and then a river bet comes out of no where. If someone early bet the flop, and 2 people called, and you called as well. The turn was no help, and early position bets again, 1 folds, and the other calls. You should fold. With middle pair weak kicker, you probably won't win against an aggressor and a caller.

2.15 Showdown

Some of you may be confused about how I'm describing the "free showdown." I'm not even sure if I am using the correct term. In SSH it mentions the "cheap showdown." This is when you use the free card play, and plan to check behind on the river again if you miss.

I'm describing the "free showdown" as betting/raising the flop, so they check to you on the

turn, where you bet again. So this will induce them to check yet again to you on the river, when THEN you can check behind for a "free" showdown.

I personally don't like the cheap showdown because it feels awkwardly weak. It does have it's uses, but I think even betting on the turn with overcards is often still a value bet, and thus you are making the correct move by betting because you have the current best hand.

2.16 Summary

Well..probably the last, I can't think of anything else to post about. About the only thing left is about reading people. I don't think this skill can really be taught. Like Johnny Chan says, you need that poker instinct. If there's anything 6max will do is it will improve your reading skills ten fold. So...just keep playing and let experience take care of training your reading skills.

Summary

Preflop:

- play tight early position, play looser late position
- almost always raise first in
- play very tight against a raise...fold or reraise most of the time (cold call if there are lots of people in the pot and implied odds warrant it)

Flop:

- protect your marginal hands by raising or check-raising
- build pots with your strong draws, bet into loose opponents, check call tight opponents
- some loose calls are ok if you close the action

Turn and River:

- continue betting into callers, just because they call doesn't mean they have anything
- don't slow down until raised back, reraise and cap all monster draws
- take free cards with weak draws, take free showdowns with stronger draws

Position:

- tend to play passively hands in early and middle position
- tend to play aggressively hands in late position
- if you are going to call in middle position, raise if there's a good chance you can get the button to fold

Hand values:

- it takes a lesser hand to win against 2 opponents, and takes a monster hand to win against 5 opponents, so adjust accordingly

Protecting your hand:

- bet and raise marginal hands if it will make players after you make unprofitable calls, or fold a better hand
- if the pot is big, just call the flop, and raise the turn on a safe card to induce bigger mistakes by your opponents
- from SSHE, raising when you should call can cost you one bet, but calling when you should raise can cost you the entire pot.

Blind steals and defense:

- take a shot at the blinds with decent hands
- defend your BB with anything good, even ace high

Swings:

- 300BB is the absolute minimum you should have. 100BB swings up and down are not uncommon

Bluffing:

- don't bother trying to bluff more than one opponent
- bluff if the chance they will fold is greater than 50%
- induced bluffs (ie bets from opponents that come out of no where) you should call with marginal to weak hands if you close the action, and raise if you can only beat a bluff but there are people after you

General:

- if they don't raise, my hand is still best
- every time you hit the call you should question why you did it...was it a long shot call, or are you just calling to find out what they hold?
- how much you start calling is a good indicator if you're playing properly or playing on tilt
- try and adapt a bet/raise/fold mentality, call only when necessary
- play aggressively in big pots, passively in small pots
- do not fold for 1 bet in big pots, you only need to be right more than 8% of the time, expect to catch a crappier hand or a bluff much more often than that
- don't worry about being slowplayed, playing aggressively makes you fall prey to traps...pay off with confidence! You won't get slowplayed enough for it to be a problem.
- most importantly, pot size is what drives all your decisions

Credits:

- me! hypermegachi
- David Sklansky's Theory of Poker
- Ed Miller's Small Stakes Holdem
- the limit players of FTR: Fnord, mike4066, elipsesjeff, Lonnie, gutshot, and more...
- honourable mention: soupie, ripptyde, a500lbgorilla, radashack
- others: if I forgot to mention your name, it belongs here
- and most importantly FTR itself for providing me with such a great online poker community!

3 Other articles

3.1 Leaks in Your Shorthanded Limit Hold'em Game

1) Calling too much from the SB: It's tempting when there are only 2 players in the hand to play that Q30 from the SB - after all, you do have a paint card and you've been seeing small pairs and weak kickers take down pots all day. But especially in games where completing the SB takes 2/3rds of a bet rather than just 1/2, calling too much from the SB adds up and quick. You're still going to be out of position all hand, and position needs to be respected even more in a short game. Tighten up from this position and ditch the borderline hands.

2) Playing small suited connectors: If you're used to a full limit ring or NL games, you will probably overvalue the suited connectors 98 and down when you first start to play short. These hands are pretty much worthless except for mixing up your play. Raise with them occasionally to throw your opponents off, maybe toss in a call from the BB when the pot is raised and you're looking at a 4 way pot or better, but otherwise let them go.

3) Trying to run over a table that won't fold: This is a huge leak for aggressive players. When you run into a short table full of call stations, you NEED to adjust and back off some hands when you just miss. Yes, the other players SHOULD fold their 10 6 on a flop of K J 10, but stop pushing with 77 when it becomes obvious that other players habitually call down with nothing. Hang back for a bit, punish them with some good hands, and then try to run over them again.

4) Overplaying small pocket pairs: Yes, pairs in the pocket are a strong hand, and there's nothing wrong with trying to pick up the blinds UTG raising with 55. The problem with pairs 8 and down is that the flop almost always brings overcards or an obvious draw and this puts you in a tough spot on the flop- especially if there are players to act behind you. Calling raises with low pp's is a real problem short unless you really feel like you can outplay the raiser. Reraising is a good occasional play, but if you make it three bets preflop you've essentially committed yourself to playing the hand through barring a terrifying flop. What it boils down to if you're bleeding in a short game, cut these hands out of your arsenal until you feel comfortable again.

5) Playing draws without odds: pot odds don't disappear just because you're shorthanded. calling a straight draw HU at 3-1 on the turn is just a bad idea, unless you also have two overcards or a pair to go with it. You still need to have odds to draw, and calling draws with sub par odds is one of the most common leaks I see shorthanded. Betting draws is a much stronger play, but if you're at the table described in leak 3) then don't forget - you still need odds to bet draws. They don't have to be as good because of the chance you can pick up the pot by betting, but as the chances of everyone folding decrease, the odds the pot gives you have to increase to justify a call.

Shorthanded play is a great opportunity for profit, but remember, since you see more hands than in a full ring, the impact of each leak on your bankroll is magnified proportionately.

3.2 MecosKing on Shorthanded Limit Hold'em, Part 1

Im a winning player on the PP 10/20 6 max and the 15/20 Short tables. My PT numbers are: I see almost 40% of flops, raise 17% of the time, and have an aggression factor of 2.8. I win only 55% of my showdowns. I am up 13k for the year over 170 hours of playing (2 tables at least at a time) I love SH, and after playing a lot of it, it makes playing full ring holdem seem like omaha.

I dont pretend that every winning player has stats like mine - in fact i am aware that my game needs tightening up - even for SH my game can be over aggressive, and my showdown winning % should be higher. Im trying to better my numbers. Although at SH, it doesnt need to be as high as in full ring. The reason for this is that often you will find yourself headsup against a preflop raiser and youll have top pair, and youll have to call him down, and he'll turn over kings, and youll lose. The thing is, in SH, you will find yourself paying off more hands than in full ring, but you will also find yourself getting paid off a lot more on your hands. The trick to winning at SH is payoff less than you GET paid off, and to use aggression to pick up lots of little to midsize pots.

There are two essential factors to SH play

(1) Aggression

(2) Knowing your players

(2.5) Image [less important than 1 and 2 but important nonetheless]

**NOTE: POKERTRACKER IS VERY GOOD FOR AN SH PLAYER - i highly recommend it, esp. since you see so many of the same guys over and over again.

Aggression and knowing your players tie in with eachother, because you need to know which players to get aggressive with, and with what hands.

Player types and ways to play

You play differently against different players, and differently depending on what your image is also [more on this later] There are four basic types of players.

(1) Sherriffs [calling stations basically] - not that aggressive, and will 'keep you honest' with things like small pairs and even ace highs. They dont bluff, and you shouldnt bluff against them. There is psychology involved here - You will see them paying off others left and right- you'll ache for a peice of thier action, then youll pick up AQs on the button and breathe a sigh of relief...FINALLY you'll think ... im gonna get PAID! Then if you miss, you'll jam it the whole way anyway, then endup paying THEM off - beleive me to this day, i catch myself doing that, and its a bad bad habit...

These guys are GREAT to have at the table- they always put thier money in with the worst of it, make countless -EV moves. But, you need to play right against them to capitalize on how bad they are. If you have an AK and keep on bluffing at them and get called down by a pair of 4's your gonna be pissed that they flopped a gutshot draw, made bottom pair on the turn, and called you down. The moral of the story is, you should only try to steal from them on the flop and the turn, and not on the river. If you have an AK and they were on a gutshot draw, then they would probably fold anyway (even they wont keep you honest with 8 high) and if your no good, and they called your turn bet with a tiny pair, then theyre calling you on the river,

because they hope that you have exactly the type of hand you have.

When these guys bet, you should give them credit for a hand, and only get involved if you have something good, and you should respect a preflop raise from one of these guys, unless hes in steal position, and as bad as he is, he's at least learned to lean on the blinds from the button. [PT will help you with this] - even in that case, you should try and flop something against them, because theres always the risk of being kept honest with an ace high if you jam a weak draw or are just on a bluff. Calling stations call - its what they do best, so you have to turn that against them by showing them a hand. Don't let theyre bad habits work in thier favor by bluffing off chips to them.

The good news is that you can value bet marginal hands against a calling station and end up way ahead doing it. For example, middle pair with decent kicker, top pair/no kicker, or in some cases even bottom pair when you suspect that all they have is big paint, and they miss the board but are going to call you down anyway. A situation like this is when they raise preflop from a non-steal position and you are in the blinds with something like 67s and flop comes 6910 or 78J, and you check raise (or bet) the flop and dont get raised, your probably good if blanks come off on the turn or river. You should probably muck to a raise (or peel one off then muck the turn if you dont improve) because that means that the calling station has at least a J. If the turn and river have no big cards, you can often value bet your 7 and hope he calls with this big ace.

The moral of the story is basically, dont bluff at a sherriff, and respect dont pay him off when he bets it at you. If you dont have a decent hand, just let it go. The great thing about a sheriff is that you dont need to sit there with middle pair/iffy kicker and wonder if hes betting the turn with a straight draw from under the gun.

The average player (Or 'vanilla' as excession would call him) [JOE AVERAGE]

He plays SH sort of the same as he does full ring, except he loosens up his starting requirements - he knows that KJo is now playable UTG and maybe even realizes that Q9 aint even sot bad near the button. A savvy Joe player can win at SH, but probably wont ever win big because he's post flop, he plays SH similarly to the way he plays full ring, and is liable to laydown too many hands to aggressive players.

This is the way to exploit Mr. Joe.. Raise his blinds, and bet bet bet at him. When he raises your blinds, 3 bet him with hands like 89s and lead on the flop, no matter what falls. This is the way to beat the average player - pound pound pound on him, and he'll eventually lose more than he wins, because he will only win when he hits the flop, and even when he catches just a little of the flop, he'll be inclined to lay his hand down unless he's got the top pair, or maybe middle pair with a good kicker. flop a flush draw? against his preflop raise? check raise him and bet the turn and the river, even if you miss (respect raises and reraises though!). Open ended straight draw? same thing! Middle pair? That too. The beauty of the average player, which to some extent makes him desireable even over the weaker calling station, is that he'll let you know BEYOND A DOUBT if hes got a hand. For Example, if youve got QJ on the button and raise, and he calls from the BB, and the flop is KJ8 and he check raises you, theres an awfully good chance that he's got the king [this is still a tough laydown against most SH opponents- this is probably why my showdowns won % isnt what it should be, but Pokertracker has helped me alot with that-- but if he's tight, then mucking is the safest play]. If he leads and you raise and he three bets, you KNOW he's got the king. See, The sheriff will

sometimes let you bet bet bet your second pair, even value bet it on the end [as you usually SHOULD against him] and then lo and behold, he's got top pair! The average player will usually not pose this problem. Lets say that above, the turn is a 9 and he check/calls. Unless the the river helps you (J or T) then your best of checking behind. If he's your avg player, especially Full Ring, then he's always worried about his kicker, and loathe to bet/raise for fear of the raise or the reraise. Check it down- there arent too many hands and average player would call with on this river that you can beat. Check and hope he has a busted draw, or J10, or something.

The moral of the story here is that you should pound on Joe Average harder than you do any of the other players in SH, because he, like the calling station, is not too hard to read- but unlike the calling station, he doesnt payoff bad hands. So, lean on him. In SH holdem, if you can only win when you have make hands, your not going to win much in the long run, and Joe average is just this player. Joe Average in a short handed game is similar to a rock in a full ring game, unless he knows how to adjust his play.

Aggressive players [2 kinds]

Semi loose/Semi Tight/Aggressive and MANIACS

Semi loose/semi tight aggressive is what you want to be in SH. Your aggression puts people on the defensive, and because of your aggressive play, your opponents dont know what to do against you. You should check/raise as often as you bet, and jam up things like flush draws into weak opponents. There are a few things that these aggressive players do...

-Blind theft- : Im a fan of it - although, some people take it to an extreme. If i wakup to a 930 on the button, im going to muck it no matter whose in the blinds, unless i happen to be drunk when im playing- and even then ill muck it 80% of the time. Some will raise with literally any 2 cards to steal the blinds. While its annoying to be to the left of someone like this, all you have to do to make up for a few rounds of missed blinds is win a pot off one of these thieves.

However, blind theft is good when your not OVER aggressive with it. Raise any two cards in the wheelhouse (10-A) when your on the button, or any Ax, and any pair higher than 5s in the hole.. Youd be surprised how often you raise with 66 and the BB calls, the flop comes AQ9 its checked, you bet, he mucks. At 10/20, youve made \$25 this way - you do this once, youve paid for your blinds for two rounds (almost). The key here is NOT to overplay these blind stealing hands - because even a reasonably tight player will often call you with a bad hand when defending his blinds. If you have Ax and the flop comes K910, and theres any resistance at all, your best off just giving up after the flop - theres no reason to walk into a check raise, or to bluff off chips with your ace high against 1070. Remember that EVEN TIGHT PLAYERS (good ones anyway) LOOSEN UP WHEN DEFENDING BLINDS AND CALL WITH WORSE HANDS. Of course, this works out great when you flop something halfway decent, because you get paid off. Be aggressive, but dont overplay your blind steals.

Along the same lines, jamming up something like a flush draw from steal position is not a bad idea either. Lets say you have Ks10s on the button and you raise into the blinds, and the BB (avg/tight player) calls, and the flop is 7s8sJd. You have a monster draw with an overcard also, but its odds arent quite good enough to jam it up for value against a single opponent. But, when you factor in the odds of making your opponent muck by a show of strength, then your odds to win go well over 50%. For example lets say the BB leads into you on that hand, you

should usually raise and lead the turn. This is because if he's got an 8 or 7 and is just testing the waters, you'd rather him muck than have the river come and you end up with king high against a pair of 8s. If he three bets you you should then concede that you are beat probably beat, and then 4 bet for an extra card. Even if he's got a monster like 910 or 77,, he'll probably check the turn figuring he can check raise you on the turn.

The other option in this situation (and this is a tough move to make) is smooth call the flop and raise the turn even if you miss (bet the turn if he doesn't lead). This will make a tight player muck most hands - because it represents a really big hand like a set or an overpair. The problem with this is that if he has a jack, he'll more than likely give you a crying call, at which point you better hit on the river.

****NOTE:** If you do this, try to resist the urge to bet the river- you will get called about 90-95% of the time. It's tempting to try and steal it there but the sad fact is that the only hand that can beat you that would muck at that point is an ace high flush draw, and the chances of him having that do not justify a bet. Sometimes, your beat- and yeah it sucks but oh well.

The point is that the aggressive player does EVERYTHING he can to win the pot, especially against the less aggressive players. And more often than not, he's successful.

Playing against aggressive players [not maniacs]

-Is difficult because they mix up their play, and it's tough to figure out what they're up to because they play many more hands strongly than your avg player. The best way to deal with someone like that is to play back at them- let them know that when they mess with you they're playing with fire, and usually they'll let up on you. Check raise them often with marginal hands when they are in steal positions / making suspicious bets.

[**NOTE: Playing against slightly loose/aggro players is different than playing against maniacs. the SLAPs will give let up on you if they really don't have anything, whereas a maniac will reraise you with 280- maniacs are different than aggressive players]\

Picking your spots against good aggressive players

There are times to defend, times to calldown, and times to lie down. Say an aggressive player raises your blind and you have A100 or K10, or something like that. The flop comes 893. This is a perfect time to check raise the aggressive player on the flop and lead the turn if a blank comes off, because the board PROBABLY didn't hit him (He probably has JK, JQ, A5, or maybe even 77) but it's not SO bad that he'll call you down with high cards. Flops with mid range cards in them are perfect to bluff at against good aggressive players, because even though they raised, the hand they have is probably a halfway legitimate one (an ace, or some paint, or something) without these cards in it - and at the same time, the cards on the board are themselves decent enough that you could've defended with them - like j8, j9, 78, etc. and a raiser with AK probably won't call you down.

When to lie down

On the other hand, if you have a K100 in the BB and the button raises you, and the flop comes 337, you can pretty much forget about bluffing, because under most circumstances, any Ax will call you all the way. This is not ALWAYS the case, but it's the case often enough that you should just give up on flops like this. On the other hand, if you yourself have a decent ace on a

flop like this, you may very well have the raiser beat. But if you have Q10, KJ, etc, your best off giving up.

BASICALLY- pick your spots, defend against the aggressive player on midrange flops, and jam up your good draws (flush/open end). Awful flops like 236 and paired flops like 7710 will often see an ace high call down. (this goes double for flops which are both paired AND awful)

Calling

Calling against a good aggressive player is usually not the best option, unless possibly you are in position and have a very strong (top pair/big kicker or better), aren't too worried about a suckout, and KNOW your going to call the river anyway. Like, if you have AK and the flop is K87 rainbow, and you get lead into, just calling the whole way and throwing in a river value raise might be the best option if the board doesn't develop too badly. Think about it. You have AK, let's say he has KJ. If you raise him on the flop, he'll check/call you the rest of the way and you'll make 3 big bets (postflop) instead of 3.5. You could raise the turn of course, but then you run the risk of him having not KJ or KQ but K5s or JJ, and he'll muck it right there. heads up against an aggressive player, esp at a short handed table, you can milk a top pair hand like that for all its worth, without too much worry of a suckout. Worst case scenario, he checks the turn, you bet, and he folds his 89, and you lose 1/2 a bet. But in the long run, if an aggressive player leads into you on the flop, chances are he'll bet the turn also. Of course, this scenario changes drastically when the pot is 3 handed or more. You need to get that raise in ASAP against any sort of field, to get the bad draws off their hands as quickly as possible, or at least give them incorrect odds to hit their kicker, or their gutshot, or whatever. You don't want the 8s to pair and then get raised on the turn, and be in a situation where you either have to muck a good hand, or else payoff someone who has you beat at least 75% of the time.

Summary

BASICALLY- pick your spots, defend against the aggressive player on midrange flops, and jam up your good draws (flush/open end). Awful flops like 236 and paired flops like 7710 will often see an ace high call down, (this goes double for flops which are both paired AND awful) so don't bluff at them unless the player your bluffing against is very weak tight. I can't stress that enough: **DO NOT BLUFF** into a strong player on an awful board, because the chances are that he won't buy it, and the chances are that he'll be right. You'll make that set of deuces at some point, and the ace high will feel pretty stupid for calling. Till then, let it alone.

MANIACS: See the forum about BEAR HUNTING. Maniacs are too unpredictable, and jamming up marginal hands against them isn't generally that great because they'll come over the top of you anyway, and you'll be stuck in there with a marginal hand, and be so invested that you pretty much have to call. Maniacs can turn even an aggressive player into a calling station. This is why it's best to tighten up and stay out of their way. You'll want to gamble with them because it seems so profitable in theory, and maybe because they gave you a bad beat (tripped up his deuces on the river against your top pair hand, but was raising the whole way)

--See excessions little speil about this. This goes into psychology. The fact is when your running bad, your running bad. Sometimes you get no cards and love from the deck at all. Its too bad when this happens against a maniac, but its very important **NOT TO FORCE HANDS AGAINST A MANIAC**. Forcing hands is bad anyway, but you can get away with it sometimes if your up against weak predictable players. But maniacs just get too expensive and are too

unpredictable, and you can lose an entire buyin calling him down with AKno pair when hes been jamming 33 the whole time on a board of 8810Q9. Sure, he looks like an idiot, but who won the pot? exactly. The only reason maniacs can even afford to keep playing cards is because they make bad players out of good players, and catch a card or two here and there while theyre at it. Dont fall victim to it. I know it seems like the maniac busting before you get into a pot with him is the end of the world, but it isnt, i promise. There will always be another maniac.

Image

The last thing is image. Personally, my image varies from table to table. If i get caught on a few bluffs early on when i jammed the pot with a gutshot draw against a raiser and get called down and beaten, my image is one of loose aggressive, at which point people are more liable to call me. In these cases, i try to play my hands for value for awhile. If I pickup some solid cards early on and get to showdown some quality cards, then i start loosening up my preflop raising/starting requirements and lean on people more because the natural tendency of people is to think 'that guy has shown down two big hands, and hes raising again. He plays good cards only, he must have it' and they'll muck. The more superstitious of the lot will think 'he's running hot im staying out of his way' and muck there too. Basically, you play exactly opposite of what people think, and thus take advantage of thier biases. If thier bias is in favor of sheriffing you, then show them a hand, even a marginal one might do. If thier bias is in favor of thinking your on a rush or only playing aces and kings, then lean on em as much as you can. You are probably, by nature, a certain TYPE of player, but this type should be able to be very flexible and change as the the circumstances require.

3.3 MecosKing on Shorthanded Limit Hold'em, Part 2

Thanks guys, for all the responses i got to my first post- im glad some of you found it useful. I got a few responses from people that are just starting out trying to play shorthanded, and realized that my post was geared a little bit more towards experienced players. So, I dedicate this post to you guys starting out.

You should not play quite as aggressively as i mentioned earler because first, you need to (a) get comfortable in the game your in, (b) Have some idea of the way the players play first, and ©, you need to be able to handle a decent swing (100BB probably) before you start playing like that. So, this post is for you guys that responded to my first one saying that you are just starting out. Also, good ole ATE gave me the 3rd degree for advocating a style thats not altogether suited for everybody, at least beginners.

Short handed holdem, contrary to what my original post could imply, is not in fact, a circus where you should 3 bet it from the blinds with 104s and try to run the button raiser over on a board of AK996. (although there are times for this!) There are many rules that apply to it that are pretty similar to full ring, and remembering this is KEY. There are a few principles to remember here.

(1) LOOSE AGGRESSIVE PLAY ONLY SHOWS BIG PROFIT FROM THE LAST TWO POSITIONS. THE FIRST TWO POSITIONS SHOULD BE PLAYED TO MINIMIZE LOSS RATHER THAN TO MAXIMIZE PROFIT.

THE FIRST TWO POSITIONS [HANDS]

RAISING HANDS

AA-99 AKs, AKo, AQs, AQo, AJs.

Reraise (against a single raiser): 99-KK, AK(o or s) AQ (against a loose raiser)

COLD CALL: AA, AQs ONLY!

**NOTICE: AA is so strong that against a single raiser, i cold call the two bets. This is not too dangerous at a short table because you dont run the risk of getting 4 cold calls after you here. -The reason is: a UTG raiser gets cold called from the cutoff at a short table, the guy looking down at 78s will usually muck, whereas at a full table, he'll call, and probably be right to, because at a full table, there are a bunch of people after him that will see the pot growing, and throw thier money in, which will make the blinds throw thier money in, which will ultimately lead to a 7 handed pot, which is a nightmare for AA. BUT, at short handed, there just arent enough people at the table liable to have halfway decent enough hands to build a pot. So, the people that youll get calling you are the ones with dominated hands like Ax, and predictable top pair making hands like KQ (Not 'sleepers' like 78s-those are the ones that beat aces). -COLD CALLING AA AT SHORT HANDED LEADS TO MUCH MORE PROFIT IN THE LONG RUN.

-AQs is just too good to laydown SH, and can handle a little more action than AQo

Against a raiser and a cold caller reraise with: AA-JJ, AK, s or o. AQs, call.

Muck AQo

Against a raiser and a reraiser, call AK, reraise AA-QQ.

Playing JJ against a raise and a reraise is usually a nono in full ring, but in SH you might want to just call it.

Muck everything else to a raise and a reraise.

LIMPING HANDS

KQ-KJ, AJo-A9o, A8s-A4s, JQs, JQo KTs (iffy) all pocket pairs under 8.

TROUBLE HANDS

**10Js, 910s are playable, but also tricky-- to show a profit with these hands from early position, you have to be able to muck a top pair hand from time to time, and thats not always easy - if you dont think you can do that, then save yourself some heartache and dont play these hands.

88 also a very iffy. Your better off just limping with it and mucking it to a raise in the beginning.

NEVER CALL A RAISE (when your not in the blinds) WITH

AJ or worse, 66 or worse [you can 3 bet small pairs to isolate and show a small profit but not in the beginning- you gotta have a read on people to do that, and really be willing to mix it up on scary flops- which you probably shouldnt do at the outset.

ONE OFF THE BUTTON- A MUCH nicer position than the first two!

If there have been no callers-

RAISE: All early position raising hands, + AJ,, AT, A9,88,77, 10Js (maybe)

LIMP: All suited connectors 67 or better.

BUTTON (no callers so far)

RAISE: Any ace, any pocket pair, any two cards 10 or better, 910s

LIMP: NEVER LIMP FROM THE BUTTON EVER IF THERE ARE NOT CALLERS IN FRONT! If You pickup 67s and are really jonesing to play it from the button, then raise it. Otherwise, just dump it- the LAST thing you should do is give the blinds a free ride when you hold an iffy hand. Raising hands like this from time to time throws your opponents off - just DONT GET THE IDEA TO DO IT TOO OFTEN.

EXCEPTION: You have AA on the button. Especially if the blinds are tight, a dirty little trick is to limp with those. Notice i did NOT say KK or QQ. If someone with an A3o or K7s in the blinds wants to beat my big pair, them dammit, he's gonna pay for it.

IF THERE ARE CALLERS: Use a bit more discretion - play the usual early position limping hands (decent size paint) and raise the same mid position raising hands, but dont play the late position steal hands like JTo and K9o.

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(2) PLAY LOOSER than usual, and AGGRESSIVELY BUT NOT STUPID

Just because a table is short does not mean that hand standards go out the window. People play SH (esp 4-5 handed) and think that now, they can limp in with Ax, JTo, Q9, and other hands that every decent ring player knows is a deathtrap. In essence, they are people that are not disciplined enough to observe the starting requirements for full ring holdem (I am one of them I should know!)

But, what they fail to realize is that they are playing a different game now, so what they do is loosen up thier starting requirements and thier calling requirements, but otherwise play the same. They often call when they should raise, and muck when they should call and check when they should bet. Average players often find themselves acting like ROCKS and CALLING STATIONS when the action speeds up on a live SH table--and they think the solution is to decrease thier starting requirements...which is true to SOME extent. What they dont realize is: But where the MONEY IS MADE is by decreasing your BETTING and RAISING requirements POSTFLOP rather than your starting requirements PREFLOP. This is where money is made! For example, If someone limps with K9 (BAD MOVE) and you raise in late position with JTs (to steal the blinds and get position over a limper whose already told you he doesnt have a hand worht raising) and the flop comes J9xxx, you are much more likely to get paid the whole way than you are at a full table, because at full tables, people put raisers on big hands, whereas here, they often put late position raisers on a steal, even if there was an early limper.

There is no easy answer for the poor ***** with K9- hes in hot water. Hes in bad position against an aggressive pre flop raiser with just enough of a hand to justify a call. He can check

raise and lead the turn (which is what id probably do) and hope that the raiser has AK or 88 - but here he will get called, and then when he checks the river hes going to get bet at, and then he's going to be so invested, and so at a loss for any other option, that he will call, and lose. [learning to muck in this situation is a major long term money saver though, but again, its HARD and thats why most people dont do it]

This happens to the best of us in SH, and me as much as anyone - its the nature of the beast - knowing your players and getting a feel for your table will help you minimize this, but oftentimes in headsup pots, your just going to have to take beatings on marginal hands. You must try and REDUCE this by playing BETTER HANDS from early position than most of the other players. SHORT HANDED POKER CAN BE A CIRCUS - BUT ONLY FROM LATE POSITION!

The good news is that this is a double edged sword, and getting on the winning side is what you strive to do. You will not beleive the hands that you will get paid off on...The Guy with JT will make more off that K9 than anyone raising with JT should be allowed to make! This is because:

- (a) The general attitude of many SH players is that people are constantly trying to bluff them
- (b) In SH Pots are often heads up, the attitude 'if I dont keep him honest, then nobody else will' (in FR, its not that hard to fold a good second pair hand when there are two other players in after you against the raiser)

YOU WILL MAKE INFINITELY MORE OFF YOUR HANDS IN LATE POSITION, NO MATTER WHAT THEY ARE. PLAY TO MINIMIZE EARLY POSITION LOSS, AND MAXIMIZE LATE POSITION GAIN.

This is why you raise all those hands from the button. People in SH ALWAYS assume your trying to steal it, so they call with hands like 48. And if the flop comes 34J they are liable to call the river against your QJ or your 99, hoping you were trying to steal with Ax or something like that.

(3) CHECK RAISE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE!!

SH holdem tables are the check raise capitals of the world. The reason for this is that the button tends to get out of line when the flop gets checked to him, and will bet damn near anything, or nothing at all! So lets say you are UTG with JQo and limp. 2 people and the Button call and the BB checks.

FLOP: J85 (lets say rainbow) I would NOT bet this. I would go for the check raise for about a million reasons

- (1) VALUE: you probably have the best hand, and
- (2) A check raise will protect this hand, while a bet will not, ESPECIALLY at a short handed table.
- (3) In SH, someone in late position is more likely to make a move on the pot than in a full game;
- (4) Check raising as often as possible will prevent people from trying to steal from you because they will fear the check/raise.
- (5) If you MISS your check raise with your top pair hand, you are more likely to get paid off if your hand holds up.
- (6) If you get reraised, either by the original bettor or someone in the middle who checked, you

get a better idea of where you're at in the hand before it comes to an expensive street. Also, someone that checked in the first instance cold calls 2 is a red flag.

See, a fair amount of players will peel a card off on the turn with as little as one overcard (A4o for example) because they'll figure that it's good if they hit it since there aren't too many people in (these players are awful by the way) Someone with QK will definitely peel one off, as will someone with 89, A8, and even 46. And in these cases, they will probably have correct odds to call a single small bet to peel one, since they will be winning a sizeable pot if they hit. Your checkraise makes them have to call two bets to chase a pretty thin draw, and either they will MUCK (a good thing) or they will CALL (a -EV move, and hence a good thing also). And, if you miss your checkraise, and the turn comes a brick like a 4 or something like that, and you make a big bet, someone who checked middle pair is now very likely going to pay you off, figuring you'd have bet your top pair hand, and are now betting some sort of draw, or a worse middle pair or something.

In addition, if you get three bet anywhere along the line, especially if the board is not that live (no flush draw or probable straight draws) then you now know you could be up against a monster (a bigger top pair hand or a set) and can check/call the whole way (or MUCK the turn if you don't improve and REALLY think you're beat) instead of having to deal with calling a check raise on the turn.

In fact, if the pot is heads up, you can check raise with damn near anything, because the late position players will bet into you with damn near anything when checked to! For example, say you're in the BB with 55 and end up involved with one mid position limper, and a button limper, and the flop comes 26J, and it's checked to the button who bets, now would be a great time for a check raise. Sure, he might have the jack, and if you get 3 bet it's not a hard muck. But chances are he's got anything but the jack, and will lay it down to a turn bet, and feel dumb that he lost an entire big bet trying to move on a pot that was only 1.5 bets anyway. More than likely, he'll lay down a weak 6 too in this case, because in most cases, calling down with a hand like that is a -EV move. And, the mid position player who almost certainly has at least one overcard or hell, maybe even A6s will lay his hand down to the checkraise, figuring he's no good, and doesn't have odds to chase.

Lastly, when the check raise of a good top pair hand MISSES (sucks) then (hopefully a brick fell on the turn) you can put in a BIG bet- and since the pot is still small, the worse hands definitely won't have odds to chase - however, smaller pairs that would've peeled off one to hit their kicker on the flop may call you down to the river now, thinking you're on a steal.

So basically, check raising does SO many good things, I can't even begin to describe. It's a good play for value and to protect your hand as well as to put your aggressive opponents back in line, and if it misses, it at least doubles as a slowplay of a good hand, that hopefully didn't get cracked. [of course when that A comes off on the turn, as it SO often does, and the guy that limped with it Under the Gun takes it down, just console yourself by thinking 'Ach! Oh well, this ***** is so bad, he'd probably have peeled one off with that crap even if I had bet it!'

Summary

(1) Play the first 2 positions like a full table with few exceptions; make as much as you can by others getting in there with bad hands

(2) Play the last two positions more aggressively - lean on the blinds, if you have a respectable hand, try to isolate a single limper - the blinds in SH are often very loose, and limpers often call with very bad hands (like 890) and will call station down a tiny pair against a late position raise- you wouldn't believe how often I've been called down, literally with bottom pair/worst kicker. (Of course, every now and then it's good, and that can be embarrassing)

(3) Check raise as often as you can

Well, so much for my wit and wisdom. If you guys would like one final post, then I will, at some point. Hopefully I didn't make some dreadful screwup with anything I said somewhere in there...use at your own risk---

4 2+2 posts

4.1 Standard Hand 101

Chris Daddy Cool:

I see this kind of "What should I do?" hand all the time. This is my "typical" standard line.

UB 10/20

I limp UTG with A♥ 7♥. Folded to the button who raises. Blinds drop out. I call.

Flop: A♣ 5♥ 3♦

Check. Bet. Call.

Turn: 9♣

Check. Bet. Call.

River: T♠

I bet.

btspider:

are you calling a river raise here since the button may have isolation raised with a wide range of PP's?

Chris Daddy Cool:

Yes I am calling a river raise.

For bonus points, tell me why this line is better than say... betting the flop and then calling down after getting raised?

Vern:

If your hand is behind you pay 1/2 SB less unless he has a river raising hand where you pay 1/2 sb more but if you are ahead you miss a BB when he checks the river w/o an ace. You are unlikely to get a better ace to drop either but could get a premium pocket pair to bet.

Haupt_234:

Well, you are either way ahead to a pocket pair below AA or way behind, to a larger ace.

If you bet/checkraise the flop, you will only be raised from a hand that likely has you

dominated (A10-AK). Betting may also end the induced bluffs of your opponent's JJ or QQ.

But, if you check/call to the river, your opponent will either keep betting his underpair or his large ace (since it is HU).

Your bet on the river is a great one. Many opponents will check the river through with their underpair here, as well as be afraid to raise with a larger ace.

I like this line of play.

4.2 Open-raising standards

Nate tha' Great:

If the opponents literally always defend their blinds, then some of your marginal hands are good enough to win more than their fair share. For example, QTo holds wins 40.2% of the time against two random hands, and J9s wins 39.5% of the time against two random hands. Plus you are in position and ought to be able play better than them postflop. The raise should really be thought of as being for value, rather than as a steal.

If the opponents are a bit more selective about the hands that they defend with, that isn't all bad for you. Now you won't win as much money postflop since there are relatively stronger hands up against you, but you'll win more money preflop since the steal will sometimes succeed.

In other words, you *almost can't go wrong* by stealing frequently against passive opponents, whether they are very loose, somewhat loose, or somewhat tight. That doesn't mean that you can play like a blind money postflop; you need to know when to push and when to take the free card, when to represent the King that comes off on the river and when to give up. But any player with some decent postflop skills ought to be able to turn a profit by stealing with a pretty liberal range of hands when up against passive opponents.

Against *aggressive* opponents who are capable of 3-betting preflop and making semi-bluffs and so forth postflop, you need to be much more careful.

4.3 Am I just running badly?

Nemesis:

Over the past 10k hands i've gone on the dreaded -300 BB run. Of course this leads to self doubt and "am i really a winner" popping into my head a lot. Would any 2-3bb/100 winners mind letting me pour over their PTracker databases. I know this gives an awful lot of info about your own playing style, but i'm desperate. As far as my own raw Ptracker stats go they're fairly mundane, with the exception of WTSD and PFR% which schneids has been so kind to point out to me.

VPIP 20.19%
PFR 11.42%
W\$WSF 34.4%
WTSD 36.84%
W\$SD 47.57%
Folded SB to steal 78%
Folded BB 56.7%
Attempted to steal 18.6%
BB/100 -3.09

naphand:

Judging from posts like this one, people really need to realise that 30K just is not a big enough sample for the stats to reveal trends *on their own*. There should be enough data, combined with what you know about your game, for you to make some adjustments, but it really is about *what you know* about your game and your typical opponents.

On a downswing of this magnitude, it is easy to do the following:

(1) Become more aggressive on the Flop & Turn with hands like TP or 2nd-pair GK, trying to *force* out players who you know will either (i) not fold anyway, or (ii) will be drawing live or are ahead.

(2) Call down too often, simply *not believing* you can keep losing with your premium hands that hit the flop. They *must* be bluffing some of the time... 🙄

Look closely at your PFR% and be sure that you are raising enough good hands (11% is possible with a bad run of cards, over 10K hands, though not very likely) also check to see you are raising with position, and re-raising enough.

V\$IP is ok. Rest look ok, except steal attempts.

You should be comfortable "steal-raising" around 25% even against blinds who never fold. By this I mean you have enough value raises OTB and CO, to be able to hit 25%. Go and spend some time reviewing what hands you should be raising in these spots against 2-3 random hands, it's a lot. 25% is being pretty mean to yourself.

I would say on a bad run, keep your PF and Flop play aggressive (it is still cheap on these streets), be sensible on the flop (don't stick around with hands that will be trouble, or can hit and easily suffer a re-draw, esp. multi-way). Allow yourself the chance to keep folding on those flops that miss, stay in with overcards when you can do so cheaply, and have some kind of extra re-draw potential (when facing a bet), again multi-way. Check/fold overcards with no draws against 3 or more players depending on the flop texture, playing auto-bet into 3-4 players with a 2-suited and connected board is going to lose money in \$1/\$2.

On the Turn, learn to keep quitting to a CR except where you have big draws or where you have a good read. Passive players raising or CR the Turn usually have the goods. Do not be tempted to always 3-bet a CR with TPTK when the board is 2-suited, they are not

always on the flush draw. DO NOT GET FRUSTRATED AND DEMORALISED, even though this is the natural way to feel. Keep reminding yourself what the correct play is, keep watching your opponents.

Get into your mind the idea that *the next card does not matter* when making your play. Your play is correct for the given situation, regardless of what the next card actually is. Make your play correct, and then make your response to the next card correct. Always re-assess the board, make sure you value-bet.

I was watching \$100/\$200 on Stars earlier this week and the one feature that was apparent was the players' capacity to just keep value-betting, relentlessly.

crocket:

I would like you to elaborate on two things.

#1

You mention re-raising. I have found that at the \$1/2 level that the typical players will only raise with premium hands. Re-raising, even with position, with hands less than I would re-raise with in a typical ring game (i.e. AA-JJ, AKs, AK, possibly TT or 99 depending on the situation) has brought me nothing but trouble. However, I seem to be leaning more towards cold calling (it's very hard for me to do because I'm so anti-cold call) because of the likelihood that many will cold call behind me. (i.e. hands like AJs, KJs, sometimes even JTs, or T9s).

Could you give some examples of cases where you think reraising is appropriate in a 6-max game?

#2

This should be an easy one. I'm kind of slow and I didn't understand what you meant about the Stars comment. Did you mean that players were just auto betting the flop, turn, and river just because they had raised pre-flop when it probably wasn't the right thing to do because the flop had missed them so badly and they were getting called down by someone who had paired the board or a strong draw for example?

Is this what you meant by "relentlessly value betting". This is definitely one of my leaks if that is what you meant.

Naphand:

If you are in games where the players only raise premium hands, then you have a lot of easy decisions PF. Predictable. There are still plenty of players who raise light, or with some favourite type of hand (such as any pair, any suited Broadway regardless of kicker, any A). Against players like this, you must re-raise more often to really hurt the limpets who want to play every hand, of course you need a decent hand to re-raise with, and that needs to be better the more you think players will cold-call.

Edit: I read an article by a player who was in a live game and could see the next players cards (let's not discuss the ethics). He raised every playable hand (it was full-ring I believe). Getting HU or short with one player whose cards *you know* is a massive

advantage, even without seeing the flop. The more you can put your opponent on a tight range of hands, the more willing you should be to re-raise as you will be able to outplay them post-flop. Oddly enough, those players with a very wide/light raising standards should also be re-raised more, but this time for value. It's the players in-between that are the problem.

Example: Loose player who raises AAAP (Any Ace Any Position) re-raise your mid-pairs up, good Aces and hands like KQ, QJs). Be aware that you want position in this spot, re-raising a multi-way pot out of position with something like AJo or KQo is quite a tricky proposition, big suited it should be auto.

I don't like cold-calling unless there is already another cold-caller in. If the table is *very* likely to cold call behind you then you can indeed cold call more with big suited (never a PP or AKo/AQo), JTs would be my minimum outside the blinds (T9s and J9s are too much trouble and get you out-kicked too often) and probably only OTB with at least one caller in and loose, predictable blinds. T9s and J9s are value-steal hands.

If you want to know what I mean by the Stars comment, go watch the \$100/\$200 Stars game. These guys will not let up betting until they are told, except on some ultra-bad boards (and then they probably have the goods... 😊). All those hands you thought the River was scary? They *will* bet.

4.4 Stop'n'Go

fsuplayer:

I have one question concerning the stop 'n go.

Obviously a S&G is used to combat when you think somebody is raising for a free card, so you then bet into them on a blank turn, thus charging them the max for their draw.

Here is what i dont completely understand:

If I am fairly confident that the villain is raising for a free card, why not 3 bet immediately and then lead the turn?

just trying to clear up when exactly to 3 bet, or when to just call and lead out on the turn.

I realize that their odds are much worse on the turn to hit, but you are still a fav. on the flop, so why not stay agg. right there?

Nate tha' Great:

You make an excellent point. There aren't many heads up situations in which the stop-n-go is superior to the 3-bet-n-go. If you *know* that your opponent is raising for a free card, you absolutely *must* 3-bet.

More realistically, however, there are spots when an opponent may be raising for a free

card, but may also be raising with a legitimate hand.

For example, suppose that you hold

K ♠ Q ♦

and the flop is Q ♣ T ♣ 5 ♦.

Suppose that you know that your opponent holds EXACTLY one of the following three hands. Your equity against each hand is in parenthesis:

A ♣ K ♥ (68.6%)

A ♣ 9 ♣ (54.4%)

A ♠ Q ♠ (14.3%)

Your combined equity against this range of hands is 45.8%. Even though you are "ahead" against two of his three combinations, you are actually an underdog in the hand because he has more outs to catch up if he's behind than you have to catch up if you are behind. Therefore, 3-betting is probably not advisable.

Now suppose that the 2 ♥ falls on the turn.

Your equity position has improved quite a bit:

A ♣ K ♥ (84.1%)

A ♣ 9 ♣ (72.7%)

A ♠ Q ♠ (6.8%)

You are now a 54.5% *favorite* against his collective range of holdings, so you should bet.

In multiway situations, the stop-n-go comes up more frequently if you flop something like top pair on a highly coordinated board, since your opponents may hold a lot of collective outs against you.

4.5 25 very simple questions

Guido:

I'm trying to adapt to 6-max but up until now it's very hard for me. I do play aggressive but maybe a little too aggressive. Up until now I've only played 2K hands at 5/10 and I'm down 70BB. I know this isn't much and the swings can be huge but I have a lot of questions. Assume a typical 5/10 with no reads. Please tell me what your action would be in every situation.

1 You have 88 at the button and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

2 You have 77 at the button and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

3 You have 88 in SB and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

4 You have 77 in SB and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

5 You have 88 in BB and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

- 6 You have 77 in BB and UTG or UTG + 1 raises
- 7 You have 88 in SB and CO or button raises
- 8 You have 77 in SB and CO or button raises
- 9 You have 88 in BB and CO or button raises
- 10 You have 77 in BB and CO or button raises
- 11 In any of these questions would you play 66 different than 77?
- 12 You have KJo in CO and it's folded to you
- 13 You have QJo in CO and it's folded to you
- 14 You have JTo in CO and it's folded to you
- 15 You have T9s in CO and it's folded to you
- 16 You have 89s in CO and it's folded to you
- 17 You have J9s in CO and it's folded to you
- 18 Would there be any difference when you are at the button in question 12-17?
- 19 You open raised QJo in LP, BB called. Flop is 257r, BB bets out.
- 20 When do you play 22-66?
- 21 UTG raises, a CC and you have 78o in BB
- 22 Button raises, you have K2s in BB
- 23 Button raises and you have K8s in BB
- 24 1 limper and you have 78o in SB
- 25 1 limper and you have 72s in SB

Sorry when these are very simple for you and I'm boring you with them. Thanks for your time,

Guido

samdash:

Assuming you know nothing about the players in any of the situations...

1. 3 bet
2. 3 bet
3. 3 bet
4. 3 bet
5. Call and lead out on most flops
6. Call and lead out on most flops
7. 3 bet
8. 3 bet
9. Sometimes I 3 bet, sometimes I call/lead out
10. same
11. you have to draw the line somewhere
12. raise it up
13. usually raise unless you've developed a "maniac" table image
14. fold
15. I sometimes raise this here, probably depends on image
If you play "big cards only" but occasionally a hand like this
it should work well for you.
16. Similar to T9s
17. sdfldfisdflisdjfd
18. I open raise these all on the button. They're probably all good enough even against a staunch blind defender.

19. try to keep track of how often he's making this play. If you've caught him doing it with nothing, occasionally put in a raise here. Usually fold - most people do this with small pairs hoping you'll give up right away, as checkraising will usually get you further involved in the hand.

20. open raise any pair on the button obviously...depending on table image and how loose

the table is I'll sometimes raise as early as UTG with 55 and 66.

21. fold

22. fold

23. call and play fit or fold on the flop

24. fold

25. fold

peter_rus:

Without readings i usually:

1-10 3bet if NO limpers between us - if they exist-then call.

11 In any of these questions would you play 66 different than 77?

no

12-13 raise

14-17 fold

18 Would there be any difference when you are at the button in question 12-17?

Yes, J9s - raise

19 You open raised QJo in LP, BB called. Flop is 257r, BB bets out.

Depending on BB i

1. Fold

2. raise

3. call (and fold or raise on turn)

I mix such things.

20 When do you play 22-66?

66 Raise first from any pos. 55 - Raise UTG+1,CO,BUTTON. 44-Raise first on Button or SB. 33,22 - Raise against BB from SB only.

55,66 3bet on Button if CO raise or fold sometimes if some tight UTG raised too.

21 UTG raises, a CC and you have 78o in BB

depend on my current mood - call more often.

22 Button raises, you have K2s in BB

call.

23 Button raises and you have K8s in BB

call

24 1 limper and you have 78o in SB

fold

25 1 limper and you have 72s in SB

fold

Guido:

It seems that the two of you almost always 3-bet 77 and 88 against an unknown raiser. Peter_rus where do you draw the line? Do you 3-bet 55? Why don't you raise 9Ts but do raise J9s at the button first in?

Should 55 and 66 be raised from almost any position first in?

You guys seem to think different about K2 and K8s as hands to defend your blinds with. What does the rest think about this?

When there are 2 limpers and you hold 27s or 78o in the SB what do you do?

Thanks,

Guido

tripdad:

- 1.3-bet
- 2.3-bet
- 3.call
- 4.call
- 5.call
- 6.call
- 7.3-bet
- 8.3-bet
- 9.3-bet
- 10.3-bet
- 11.no
- 12.raise
- 13.raise
- 14.raise
- 15.raise
- 16.fold
- 17.fold
- 18.no

- 19.raise
- 20.most always
- 21.fold
- 22.fold
- 23.fold
- 24.fold
- 25.fold

Nate tha' Great:

This is what I'd usually do; I won't make any claims that it's correct.

1 You have 88 at the button and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

3-bet

2 You have 77 at the button and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

3-bet

3 You have 88 in SB and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

3-bet or call

4 You have 77 in SB and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

3-bet or call

5 You have 88 in BB and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

call

6 You have 77 in BB and UTG or UTG + 1 raises

call

7 You have 88 in SB and CO or button raises

3-bet

8 You have 77 in SB and CO or button raises

3-bet

9 You have 88 in BB and CO or button raises

3-bet or call

10 You have 77 in BB and CO or button raises

3-bet or call

11 In any of these questions would you play 66 different than 77?

The only close decisions, IMHO, are #3 and #4. I might muck 66 against a tough UTG raiser.

12 You have KJo in CO and it's folded to you

Raise

13 You have QJo in CO and it's folded to you

Raise

14 You have JTo in CO and it's folded to you

Raise or fold, depending on table texture. Usually raise.

15 You have T9s in CO and it's folded to you

Raise or fold, depending on table texture. I like this hand better than JTo.

16 You have 89s in CO and it's folded to you

Raise or fold. Usually raise.

17 You have J9s in CO and it's folded to you

Raise or fold. Usually raise.

18 Would there be any difference when you are at the button in question 12-17?

Not really.

19 You open raised QJo in LP, BB called. Flop is 257r, BB bets out.

Probably call. Sometimes raise.

20 When do you play 22-66?

When I feel like it.

21 UTG raises, a CC and you have 78o in BB

Depends on how tough the UTG player is. I probably call with offsuit connectors more than I should.

22 Button raises, you have K2s in BB

Fold 50%, Call 30%, 3-bet 20%

23 Button raises and you have K8s in BB

Call or 3-bet

24 1 limper and you have 78o in SB

Call

25 1 limper and you have 72s in SB

Fold

samdash: (to Nate tha' Great)

1 limper and you have 78o in SB, call

Really?

Nate tha' Great:

Sure, unless the BB is very aggressive. It's an okay hand and I can play well postflop.

Schneids: (to samdash)

Easy call. Especially against people that overplay their hands and go too far with them.

stripsqueez:

i dont want to answer 25 questions - i think guido already knows the answer to 23 of them anyway

i do want to comment on a couple of answers - completing the SB (assuming its a 1:2 blind structure) with 87o after 1 limper is too loose - if the other guys are horrible then i could probably complete with 72o and it wouldnt be too bad, but as a default plan i dont like it

3 betting an UTG raise from the SB with 88 or 77 seems a pushy business to me - someone show me 100+ hands from pokertracker where this plan has been adopted with say 66-88 and its + and i will recant

stripsqueez - chickenhawk

Vehn: (to stripsqueez)

I agree 100%

Schneids:

Quote:

i do want to comment on a couple of answers - completing the SB (assuming its a 1:2 blind structure) with 87o after 1 limper is too loose - if the other guys are horrible then i could probably complete with 72o and it wouldnt be too bad, but as

a default plan i dont like it

Tightie??

Quote:

3 betting an UTG raise from the SB with 88 or 77 seems a pushy business to me - someone show me 100+ hands from pokertracker where this plan has been adopted with say 66-88 and its + and i will recant

I tend to agree with this statement, though I'm curious if there is any 'easy' way to have Pokertracker help me research this further? Or is the only way to do such a thing by going to the position tab, clicking on SB, then looking through the HH of each occurrence and calculating by hand the times you have 88, etc, against an UTG raise?

I ask because glancing, I see I have raised 88 66% of the time from my SB. I'm curious if there's a more exact way to examine when I'm raising versus completing versus folding.

samdash:

Mixed responses on the 780 in SB scenario - I don't think this matters either way - if you play better than your opponents go ahead and get in there if you want to. Looks like it can show a small amount of profit according to some people's PT results. Now about 3 betting the small pairs out of the small blind... this might not be the best idea against the tighter opponents. But Against some of the more aggressive players that will raise any 2 big cards I think its important to take control and try to force them into a mistake on the flop (folding when they miss but still have 6 outs). EX They raise with KQ and you take it away on an A high flop. If you just call and then bet out it looks a little fishy, plus you're probably better off eliminating the big blind from the hand. I could even see pushing an opponent off of a pocket pair a couple ranks higher (3 bet with 77 against what is actually 99 then lead out on A K X flop - pretty rare this will happen but perhaps a small added benefit of the play). Do you think these reasons make it correct against the right players?

Schneids:

650: 181 times, 51.38VPIP, -.16BB/hand
750: 183 times, 0.55VPIP, -.25BB/hand
760: 181 times, 53.04VPIP, -.21BB/hand
860: 161 times, 36.02VPIP, -.24BB/hand
870: 173 times, 52.6VPIP, -.28BB/hand
960: 179 times, 25.14VPIP, -.23BB/hand
970: 193 times, 43.52VPIP, +.09BBB/hand

980: 168 times, 57.14VPIP, -.18BB/hand
T60: 164 times, 18.29VPIP, -.11BB/hand
T70: 150 times, 37.33VPIP, -.27BB/hand
T80: 201 times, 50.25VPIP, -.19BB/hand
T90: 180 times, 63.33VPIP, +.11BB/hand

Alright, so in that group of hands, there are only two where to this point in time it'd have been better to fold every single time rather than play with them.

Considering this whole group of hands shows a trend of doing better than $-.25\text{BB/hand}$, I think for me and for my game anyway, it is better for me to selectively complete and play these hands. These numbers show my bottom line has improved when in comparison to folding and remaining at 0 EV with them, therefore I stand behind my statements that these types of hands are 'typically' playable for a complete in the SB, specifically in the 10/20 6-max anyway.

Guido:

Well I don't think I'm a bad player in a full ring game but I want to get a feeling about the differences between 6-max and a full ring game. In a full ring game I almost always raise 99 and sometimes 88. But how far down should you go with this in a 6-max game. I know pairs go up in value same with two paint cards. And again how far do you go. I'm not a very good player when it's shorthanded in a full ring game. Probably because I'm too tight when it gets down to 1 or 2 opponents. That's why I asked these questions. I can guess but I might be completely wrong. And as I can see from the answers there is almost no hand where everybody does the same so it isn't very clear.

Guido

Schneids:

Don't sweat any of this.

I know the present me is a better player than the me 6 months ago that saw over 30% of flops and was rather passive postflop.

I know the present me sees things the me of 6 months ago sucked at.

I know the present me sees things from the me of 1 month ago that were still leaks.

And I'm pretty damn sure the me of 1 month from now will think the present me was a leaky player.

With the exception of maybe 3 or 4 people that come to my mind who frequent this particular forum, I am pretty sure we're all learning and picking up things constantly. So even if one hand you post might be "easy" for a few of the posters here, it's still great you're posting them and about 99% of the rest of us are all learning from your posts as well.

Guido:

At the moment it's just hard. When I played at full ring games I had a 150BB downswing. Now I'm playing 6-max and I can add an other 90BB to that. I posted those hands because I'm not sure but nobody responds to them. Stripsqueez said I'm not aggressive enough. I think it's just misplaced aggression. To figure this out I need feedback.

I have a hard time playing overcards.

Two examples:

EP raises, I 3-bet AK, rest folds. Flop 268r and EP check-raises me. Most of the time I fold or call and fold on the turn.

1 limper, I raise AQo and the rest folds. Flop 36Kr, I bet and the limper check-raises me. I fold.

Same kind of situations with a pair. A raise, I 3-bet TT and the flop comes QJ3r and I get check-raised.

Or I open raise 77, get 3-bet by the SB and the BB comes along. Flop comes KQ4r, SB bets, BB calls, I fold.

Sometimes I re-raise when I have TT on a J62r board for example but it seems that virually every hand I enter I lose. And it feels like every time I fold I would have ended up a winner.

I don't mind it when I lose as long as I know I'm playing well. At 6-max I don't know whether I'm playing well or not, at a full ring game I do.

I have an other question:

How do you play ATo after 2 limpers and you are in the blinds? Raise?

Thanks,

Guido

naphand:

If you don't know what you are doing, what the hell are you doing playing \$5/\$10?

Party is not the only site to offer SH, but it is the only on that offers nothing between \$1/\$2 and \$5/\$10. The players may be the most stupid, but that does not make it the best place to play, esp. if you want to learn.

UB has better post-flop players, even at the lower limits. Stars has more aggro players, even at the lower limits.

If you are folding AKo to a CR, drop limits and play a level where you don't worry about

3-betting, calling down or CR him back on the Turn. Play at a level where you can try different plans/styles without threatening your bankroll. At the moment you seem to be losing too much in too many uncertain positions.

Also, spend more time reading the posts from the last 6 months on the forum. It does not take long to pick up a good playing style for these kinds of hands, it is then just a question of having the balls/nouse/sense to apply that to the game. When you are learning, you need to be reading theory, reading the forum, posting some, and playing some. Rinse and repeat.

When posting hands, I recommend you review your play each day and maybe post one or two hands that you felt you played particularly badly or were very uncertain about. More interesting hands get a better response, esp. if you bother to explain your rationale to the rest of the forum. Just how do you expect to get a coherent response from 25 questions? You will get 25 different answers!

Take responsibility for your own learning by doing your own research here, in books and at the tables, and concentrating on a particular aspect of your game. If your pre-flop choices are giving you problems, then you don't even need to post here, this has been discussed over and over and over and over on this forum. Look through PokerTracker and see which position is giving you the biggest leak, or some similar aspect of your game. Then go to work.

The forum is not a magic bullet, it's just a vehicle to develop your own thinking. There is no simple/single answer to any question (aparet from the extremes).

Guido:

Thanks for your advice Naphand. I wouldn't call myself a complete beginner. I'm just new to 6-max and need to adjust my hand selection. I've read some posts about this but some are specific situations. I'm confident about my postflop play, I've some leaks just like everybody else but not major ones I think. I've lot's of experience at full ring tables just not at 6-max.

Quote:

At the moment you seem to be losing too much in too many uncertain positions.

I learn quickly and that's why I posted a lot of hands. I'm sorry when those hands are boring to you. Please ignore them. I have some leaks but those are easy to plug I think. I just need to adjust to 6-max. I don't think all the hands I've posted are that easy though...

Quote:

Also, spend more time reading the posts from the last 6 months on the forum.

I've read a lot of posts...

Quote:

When you are learning, you need to be reading theory, reading the forum, posting some, and playing some. Rinse and repeat.

I don't do anything else...

Quote:

I recommend you review your play each day and maybe post one or two hands that you felt you played particularly badly or were very uncertain about.

I always request the HH when I'm playing and I didn't like the way I played it. When I end my session I go through those hands and sometimes post them when I have no idea what would be the best way to play them.

Quote:

Just how do you expect to get a coherent response from 25 questions? You will get 25 different answers!

I didn't expect the same answers. I just wanted to get an idea about how aggressive you need to play preflop. That's all...

Quote:

Take responsibility for your own learning by doing your own research here, in books and at the tables, and concentrating on a particular aspect of your game.

Again, I don't do anything else...

Quote:

If your pre-flop choices are giving you problems, then you don't even need to post here, this has been discussed over and over and over and over on this forum.

I don't think this is completely true. I realize that I've asked some basic questions and I'm sorry about that. I don't think all preflop decisions are easy and I certainly don't think everything has been discussed here and I also don't think it's wrong to post them again when most of us can learn something from it.

Quote:

The forum is not a magic bullet, it's just a vehicle to develop your own thinking. There is no simple/single answer to any question

I know that. This isn't the first time I'm at 2+2...

Thanks,

Guido

naphand:

Quote:

I don't do anything else...

Get out more.

Quote:

I don't think all preflop decisions are easy and I certainly don't think everything has been discussed here and I also don't think it's wrong to post them again when most of us can learn something from it.

PF is the easiest and most formulaic part of poker. Our choices are almost always very simple. Some situations occur that are a bit trickier, but the answers are almost always very simple.

This forum will *never* answer all the questions, or cover every angle. But is it really about questions? I repeat; there is enough on this forum for you to develop an entirely coherent, solid PF strategy. It is about strategy, not hands. It will never be a "completed" manual of answers. The same PF question is different according to:

- (i) Table conditions
- (ii) Your table image
- (iii) What you did previously
- (iv) What you want to achieve in this hand PF
- (v) What image you want to create
- (vi) Your position
- (vii) The position of your opponents relative to you
- (viii) What your opponents have been doing
- (ix) How you feel today
- (x) What is going on at the other table/s
- (xi) The presence of a maniac
- (xii) The number of fishy players

Given all this you then have to decide what your actions are likely to achieve, and adjust according to what happens. Just as hands do not take place "in a vacuum cleaner", your PF decisions have to be taken in context as well. What makes PF decision so much easier is, we don't have a previous round of betting to consider.

It is like the argument: if you call a raise with ATs, why not A9s? and if A9s why not A8s etc. (as has happened recently, again).

IF IT IS STILL A CONCERN then tighten up your hand selection. This will cost you a some EV but reduce your variance hugely, and make a lot of post-flop decisions easier. The normal advice to "keep playing good poker" applies only where you actually believe you are playing good poker.

Peter_rus:

Quote:

3 betting an UTG raise from the SB with 88 or 77 seems a pushy business to me

It's good busyness i think. Just 2 things:

1. You scared UTG-raiser.
2. You very possibly take push out blinds and the rest of table - thus gives you 0.7BB to pot immediately.
3. You very probably (around 55-70% depending on raiser) ahead of raiser PF.

One thing to consider: I reraise UTG raise depending of his PFR if it 18 and higher - i would reraise even 55 if 15+ - i would reraise 66+, if 13 - 77, 11 - 88 etc.

The only thing to worry about while 3-bet is that early raiser has big pair. If so - he will cap. If not - you are ahead. He can fold TT to AJ4-flop very easy, if he has Ace you easily spot this by his calling/raising on flop. If flop is a rag - he is forced to draw his overcards thus give you much more money.

Medium (5-9) pairs is very strong cards in 6max.

I don't know if my stats are good in general or no but i like it and use the way to 3-bet them in 5/10:

hand	times	win_pct	bb_hand	flop_pct	pfr	wtsd	wsd
99	149,00	56,38	0,68	99,33	97,99	53,52	47,37
88	134,00	56,72	0,48	97,01	94,03	52,07	49,21
77	145,00	54,48	0,77	95,17	84,83	52,21	57,75
66	165,00	48,48	0,34	92,12	76,97	42,07	45,90
55	157,00	45,22	0,75	79,62	55,41	45,86	60,66

stripsqueez: (to Schneids)

Quote:

I stand behind my statements that these types of hands are 'typically' playable for a complete in the SB, specifically in the 10/20 6-max anyway

i rushed home yesterday anxious to pull out pokertracker and demonstrate you have no clue

ummm - you win

stripsqueez - chickenhawk

4.6 Bugs on Maniacs

BugsBunny:

Maniacs can be very profitable, as some of you have found out. They basically come in 2 flavors, with a couple of subflavors as well - all maniacs aren't created equal. You have the thinking LAG. These can be very dangerous at any time and play well postflop. You forget that fact because you have them classified as a maniac. They make their money when people start to play back at them and they actually have the goods. They get paid off huge. When they don't have a hand and someone plays back at them they'll fold, although if nobody plays back at them they'll often try to bluff till the river.

The thinking maniac will also recognize a good player and try to not get tangled up in hands with them unless they really have the goods.

Then you have your classic maniac. This one will raise preflop and all the way to the river with a hand or without. Subflavors will slow down on the turn.

Both kinds can be profitable. Both kinds can destroy you when they start to catch cards, especially if you run into and don't recognize the thinking kind and mistake himm for the "standard" kind. But even the standard kind can get into a run where he can't miss.

With either kind if you can isolate them they're often worth calling down with as little as A or K high (with a K you usually want a decent kicker, but not necessarily. K high is obviously higher variance). That means never raising/betting except for the preflop isolation raise and simply checking or calling as needed. If your calling down with a weak hand you don't want to give them any opportunity to raise you, but every opportunity to bluff their chips to you.

Note that the thinking kind will recognize what you're doing (eventually) and start checking behind as well. That's fine - don't fall into the trap of starting to bet against them if they start checking since they'll then start checking they're good hands to check-raise you, probably on the river. (Remember these are thinking LAGS we're talking about)Just stay in pure calldown mode.

When you have more players in the hand and they don't let you isolate, or you have multiple LAGS in the gam that like to raise each other and really build up those pots (which is what LAGS love to do, they live for the giant pot). You need to tighten way up - especially postflop. The more players that are normally in a hand the more you need to tighten up. If you're paying multiple bets on every street to can't afford to be chasing down draws etc. You're implied odds are just too damaged. However if you have 2 maniacs that consistently go at it then any pair can become profitable, as long as you fold with no set. (2 opponents, you need to make 11 BB postflop) If they consistently cap every street and both play and call caps to the river that's 12 BB. If you get even 1 other player calling preflop you only need 9 BB postflop, which becomes easier. Now you can figure 5 BB on the flop meaning you only need 4 BB on the turn and river. That's usually easy with 2 true maniacs in the hand.

Note that if you have, or can reasonably expect, multiple players in the hand (even if

you reraise) then sometimes calling is the better play. You don't necessarily want to always reraise a maniac preflop. Pairs, especially medium to small ones, fall in this category. If you can isolate then they're usually worth reraising with. Otherwise you usually want to just call and build up a multiway pot playing for a set.

So with multiple players in the hand you have to adjust both preflop and postflop, but it can also be very profitable. Those days where you can't catch anything though can get very expensive.

One other thing about manics. Most of them are readable to at least some extent. The pure maniac that raises preflop and on every street is actually a rather rare creature. They may not be easy to read, but there are indications. First try to figure out what types of hands they play preflop (there's a difference between a 50% VPIP, 70% VPIP and 90% VPIP. But even the 90% VPIP has some hands that they won't play. What are they?

Next try to figure out their betting patterns. They have them, although they may be difficult to figure out..

Finally - don't get in raising wars with mediocre hands. Save the raising wars for very strong hands.

A book with some great sections in it on playing against maniacs of different flavors is *Inside the Poker Mind* by John Feeney (2+2). 18 pages dedicated to playing against maniacs. It's a very good book for other reasons as well and is highly recommended by me.

4.7 Bugs on small/middle pairs

BugsBunny:

How to play small to middle pairs (especially the middle ones) is one of the keys to this game. But what I believe is the correct method is counter-intuitive for someone coming from a full ring game.

First, the Sklansky quote you think you remember is in reference to calling a raise in the BB with any pair (all you need is the raiser and one cold-caller). At least that's the one I think you're thinking of.

In a shorthanded game, against a raiser, you have 2 choices. Raise to isolate or fold. If you can get it HU and he doesn't have a higher wired pair you have the edge (usually, depending on your exact pair and on his hand. something like JTs is a small favorite over small PP's, I believe up to 66 (might be 77) - if they stay to the river). So deciding if you raise or fold becomes player dependent. The lower his raising standards the more likely you should be to isolate. How to play after that depends, of course, but in many cases (not all) you should probably at least call down to a showdown (trying to get there cheaply).

If there's already cold-callers it becomes a different issue. One thing about the 6 max game is that people tend to stay in with hands longer than they do in a full ring. So if

you hit a set (especially on a raggedy board) you can usually get paid off by overcards. With that in mind you can usually cold-call a raise with a pair, if you're on the button, and you have at least 1 cold-caller to the initial raise. By coldcalling you're also inducing the blinds to come along.

I'll also usually limp behind any number of limpers if I'm on the BT (and may raise trying to drive out the blinds with the stronger medium pairs). But limping on the BT gives you multiple ways to win the pot, since you can often steal the pot (possibly with the best hand) if the flop gets checked around to you.

Finally we come to UTG play, where I'm know often limping with any pair. This isn't something I'd recommend if you're just starting 6 max though. When you limp early one of 2 things is likely to happen. If you're normally aggressive people may suspect you have something like AA and fold around to the BB. That's good, because I'll take a pair, especially with position, against a random hand anyway. The other possibility is that you get a bunch of people limping along. That's good because you now have odds to draw for a set. When you limp like this from early note that you are NOT just playing for set potential. But knowing how and when to push you're pair of 3's into the field from EP can be very tricky (check-raise in the correct circumstances for 1).

Finally, if you have 2 or 3 players in you can consider cold-calling a 3 bet if you're in the BB. Because of the pot size (and the fact they were willing to get in for 3 bets) you'll usually get paid off enough if you hit you're set there. With 2 opponents you're getting 3.5 to 1 on the initial call and can usually extract 4 more BB without too much trouble.

Note that some of the above is more geared for the aggressive games found at 5/10 and up. In passive games (or against passive opponents in general) where you may not get paid off some of the assumptions change, but if they're passive they're unlikely to be in there for 3 bets in the first place (unless they're total calling stations, which means you will get paid off).

So ultimately it depends :) but pairs are usually more playable then you may think, if you play them correctly postflop. Hopw some of the above makes sense, i Haven't proofread it so it may read like a jumbled mess. If you have any more questions I'll try and answer them.

4.8 Bugs on his stats

BugsBunny:

OK just so you have some idea of what ballpark I feel stats should be in heres my stats for January: (Standard deviation = 16.4 BB/100). These aren't perfect and I'm working to improve them, but I think that they're not bad.

Game Level	Total Hands	Vol. Put \$ In The Pot	Vol. Put \$ In From SB	Folded SB To Steal	Folded BB To Steal	Att. To Steal Blinds	Won \$ WSF %	BB/100 Hands	Went To SD %	Won \$ At SD %	PF Raise %
\$5/\$10 (6)	29,879	23.75	33.86	80.99	62.82	33.94	42.52	3.01	37.22	51.56	15.58

s p Position Statistics: (Use Control-Click to select with Between 2 AND 10 Players)

Position (# off the Button)	Total Hands	Vol. Put \$ In Pot	Cold Call PF %	Win % In This Pos.	Won \$ WSF %	BB Won/Hand	Went To SD %	Won \$ At SD %	PF Raise %	Raise First In %
BUTTON	5,745	24.94	0.40	13.73	49.49	0.13	43.88	52.16	18.21	13.26
1	5,318	24.46	0.21	13.71	50.53	0.14	44.38	55.45	20.63	15.96
2	4,574	17.27	0.00	9.34	46.98	0.04	45.51	49.19	15.48	13.27
3	2,632	16.22	0.00	9.16	52.12	0.10	48.68	59.78	12.65	12.54
BB	5,774	20.26	0.00	28.16	34.16	(0.15)	28.49	48.73	7.78	0.03
SB	5,836	33.86	0.00	16.76	45.44	(0.04)	39.81	51.32	17.51	9.53

Total Hands: 29,879

Vol. Put \$ In Pot: 23.75 % (7,097 times out of 29,879)

Vol. Put \$ In From SB: 33.86 % (1,976 times out of 5,836)

Saw Flop All Hands: 29.63 % (8,853 times out of 29,879)

Saw Flop Not A Blind: 18.95 % (3,462 times out of 18,269)

Folded SB To Steal: 80.99 % (720 times out of 889)

Folded BB To Steal: 62.82 % (774 times out of 1,232)

Fold BB To Steal HU: 58.92 % (459 times out of 779)

Blind Defense:	Times	Fold%	Ww/oSD%	WSD%	W\$SD%
Small Blind	169	19.53	21.30	59.17	60.00
Big Blind	458	33.84	24.24	41.92	49.48

Att. To Steal Blinds: 33.94 % (2,096 times out of 6,175)

Steal Success:	No Flop%	Fold%	Ww/oSD%	WSD%	W\$SD%
	21.95	16.79	48.86	34.35	52.08

Won \$ When Saw Flop: 42.52 % (3,764 times out of 8,853)

Win Rate Per 100 Hands: \$30.10

Big Bets Won Per 100 Hands: 3.01

Went To Showdown: 37.22 % (3,295 times out of 8,853)

Won \$ At SD: 51.56 % (1,699 times out of 3,295)

Raised Pre-flop: 15.58 % (4,655 times out of 29,879)

Limp/Call Reraise PF: 0.01 % (4 times out of 29,879)

First Action on Flop After A Pre-flop Raise:

Raise:	9.34 % (435 times out of 4,655)
Bet:	62.49 % (2,909 times out of 4,655)
Call:	4.06 % (189 times out of 4,655)
Check:	6.08 % (283 times out of 4,655)
Check/Raise:	0.60 % (28 times out of 4,655)
Fold:	3.27 % (152 times out of 4,655)
No Flop/No Action:	14.16 % (659 times out of 4,655)

Player Actions:	Poss.Actions	Raise %	Bet %	Call %	Check %	Fold %	Aggression Factor*
Pre-flop:	30,371	15.55	0.00	10.63	7.97	65.85	
Flop:	11,814	10.53	35.79	11.97	23.45	18.27	3.87
Turn:	7,149	8.22	44.37	13.89	21.21	12.31	3.79
River:	4,864	4.83	30.59	19.28	35.90	9.40	1.84
Total:	54,198	12.53	16.40	12.13	15.59	43.35	3.28

Player Actions:	Ww/oSD%	Fold%	WSD%	W\$SD%	Ww/oSD%	Fold%	WSD%	W\$SD%
Pre-flop:	38.90	18.52	42.58	54.59	17.40	51.23	31.37	47.13
Flop:	34.09	17.03	48.88	53.15	15.72	25.93	58.34	51.77
Turn:	28.28	9.31	62.41	53.96	3.77	15.44	80.79	42.46
River:	21.84	1.83	76.33	72.10	0.00	0.13	99.87	25.71

Folded To River Bet: 35.47 % (426 times out of 1,201)

When Folds Hand:	No Fold %	Pre-flop %	Flop %	Turn %	River %
	21.37	66.93	7.22	2.95	1.53

Check Raises:	Times	% of Possible Actions	Flop %	Turn %	River %
	235	0.99	62.98	33.62	3.40

I think that:

- 1) I have to defend from the BB a bit more against steals.
- 2) I have to tone down the overall aggression somewhat

3) In conjunction with 2 I need to increase my c/r number by .5 to 1% (it should probably be somewhere between 1.5 and 2%)

These points are especially true once I move to 10/20 (which is a more aggressive game to start with hence needs more trapping, slowplaying and just calling down). There might be 1 or 2 other small areas, not sure yet myself. I want to try to eke out another .5 + BB/100, that would probably put me at the upper end of whats doable at this limit (3.5 to 4, *maybe* 4.5 is pretty much the max longterm earn that can be obtained at this limit from everything I've heard). That said If I can stay at 3 BB/100 I'd be a pretty happy camper.

The other area that will change at 10/20 is VPIP, which will get higher by a few points. The blind structure is different so additional hands will be playable out of the SB (more suited hands are completable, as well as some of the better unsuited connectors which I now muck preflop)

The improvements at this stage are almost certainly of the incremental variety though, nothing major. The major overhauls have been done over the last 2 months or so and this is where I ended up.

But there's always room for improvement.

The other thing I want to say is don't try to duplicate these stats, that's not the purpose. First of all the level you're playing at will dictate what some of the numbers should be for optimum results. Second of all it's possible to win with different styles (up to a point). However if some numbers are wildly out of wack it's an area you can probably investigate and see what's happening in terms of your game. Some of the numbers are more style deterministic than others.

5 Hand Examples

5.1 Blind play, a few hands from a 6-max beginner

Guido:

Hi all,

I started playing 6-max last week for a couple of reasons. First of all to improve my SH game and especially my blind play. I'm terrible in defending my blinds and stealing with marginal hands. Second, I have a better game selection at 6-max games during the daytime (Europe) than at full ring games. And the third reason is that I just want to learn something different after playing thousands of hands at full ring games.

I've already talked with some good and regular posters in this forum (thanks again for helping me out) and it seemed my postflop play isn't that bad, but I have to defend my blinds more, complete more in the SB and steal more in LP. Tonight I played for the first time after talking with them and here are a couple of hands I would like your opinion on. Most of them are probably very boring. Sorry about that but I'm just beginning.

I will make 3 posts. One with some hands where I played in the blinds, one about blind stealing and one with some normal hands.

Hand 1

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 5 handed)

Preflop: Guido is BB with T♦, K♠.
1 fold, MP raises, 2 folds, Guido calls,

Flop: (4.40 SB) 6♠, 3♠, A♣ (2 players)
Guido checks, MP bets, Guido folds.

Final Pot: 2.70 BB

Normally I would muck this but is this a hand I can defend with when I think it's a steal?

Hand 2

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 5 handed)

Preflop: Guido is BB with J♦, 6♦.
3 folds, SB completes, Guido checks,

Flop: (2 SB) Q♠, J♣, 6♥ (2 players)
SB checks, Guido bets, SB calls.

Turn: (2 BB) Q♥ (2 players)

SB bets, Guido calls.

River: (4 BB) 8♦ (2 players)
SB checks, Guido bets, SB calls.

Final Pot: 6 BB

Hand 3

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is BB with 4♠, 5♠.
3 folds, Button raises, 1 fold, Guido calls,

Flop: (4.40 SB) 8♠, 3♥, 4♦ (2 players)
Guido bets, Button calls.

Turn: (3.20 BB) 5♣ (2 players)
Guido bets, Button calls.

River: (5.20 BB) 6♠ (2 players)
Guido bets, Button folds.

Final Pot: 6.20 BB

Hand 4

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is BB with A♠, T♦.
3 folds, Button raises, 1 fold, Guido 3-bets, Button calls.

Flop: (6.40 SB) A♣, 9♠, 5♣ (2 players)
Guido bets, Button calls.

Turn: (4.20 BB) Q♠ (2 players)
Guido checks, Button bets, Guido calls.

River: (6.20 BB) 8♦ (2 players)
Guido bets, Button folds.

Final Pot: 7.20 BB

Hand 5

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 4 handed)

Preflop: Guido is SB with 6♣, 6♦.
UTG calls, 1 fold, Guido raises, 1 fold, UTG calls.

Flop: (5 SB) Q♥, 4♦, 8♥ (2 players)
Guido bets, UTG folds.

Final Pot: 3 BB

Hand 6

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is BB with Q♥, 8♦.
UTG calls, 3 folds, SB completes, Guido checks,

Flop: (3 SB) 6♣, Q♣, A♦ (3 players)
SB checks, Guido bets, UTG calls, SB calls.

Turn: (3 BB) 3♦ (3 players)
SB checks, Guido bets, UTG folds, SB calls.

River: (5 BB) T♥ (2 players)
SB checks, Guido bets, SB calls.

Final Pot: 7 BB

Hand 7

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 5 handed)

Preflop: Guido is BB with 9♣, 9♥.
UTG calls, 1 fold, Button raises, 1 fold, Guido 3-bets, UTG calls, Button calls.

Flop: (9.40 SB) 3♣, K♠, 6♦ (3 players)
Guido bets, UTG calls, Button calls.

Turn: (6.20 BB) A♣ (3 players)
Guido bets, UTG folds, Button calls.

River: (8.20 BB) K♣ (2 players)
Guido checks, Button checks.

Final Pot: 8.20 BB

Hand 8

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is BB with 8♠, A♠.
3 folds, Button raises, 1 fold, Guido calls,

Flop: (4.40 SB) 7♦, J♣, 4♥ (2 players)
Guido checks, Button bets, Guido folds.

Final Pot: 2.70 BB

Thanks,

Guido

Vehn:

1: fold preflop. I call here against CO raises.

2: ok?

3: ok? I usually checkraise.

4: eh? What are you doing?

5: ok?

6: ok?

7: check here is probably for the best but then again these guys will call with anything on the river and you can easily let it go for a raise.

8: I never let this go here on a flop like this without a fight.

Guido:

1) Ok, but when you suspect a steal even from an MP? It seems that you think it's good enough when you think it's a steal right?

3) Good point

4) I'm defending :D, not good? Why not?

8) Yeah a little too easy but would you check-raise the flop? Bet the flop? Call the flop?

Frogger:

Vehn,

Why would he checkraise on Hand #3 when there's an OESD on board. 34568.. All someone needs is a 2 or a seven and he has the 2 pair destroyed. I think that's a check/call situation. You don't want to cost yourself 3 bets if you checkraise into a hand that has you beat and you don't want to cost yourself an additional bet by betting into him. I've experienced a few pretty bad suckouts lately so my opinion may be a little skewed.

Hand 4, the only thing I see wrong is his turn play. He checked and then called a bet instead of checkraising. That's it from me.

Guido:

Vehn is talking about check-raising the turn.

Guido

Vehn:

No on hand 3 I would checkraise the flop and bet all streets minus an ace.

I think KTo is too weak to defend against typical player's button+2 open raises.

Hand 8 with a decent ace here I only call (vs. 3-betting) preflop with the intention of checkraising any favorable flop i.e. one non ace playing zone card (9-K). I 3 bet preflop 50+% of the time though.

Peter_rus:

1 - fine.

2 - raise turn

3 - better - check-raise flop.

4 - i like check-raising sometimes turn like this - but never check-calling. Why raise river when you call turn?

5 - very nice

6 - i would like check-call turn depending on texture of game.

7 - check-fold on turn but not always - sometimes i would do same way as you.

8 - i like check-raise/fold if 3-betted on such hands. Another option - 3-bet PF lead flop.

Guido:

1) Why do you think it's ok to defend with KTo after a MP raise?

2) Why do you want to raise the turn?

3) Ok, I understand that, but is defending with 45s ok?

4) I've no idea what I was thinking.

5) Ok

6) Why? And what texture would that be?

7) Ok

8) Ok

Peter_rus:

Quote:

1) Why do you think it's ok to defend with KTo after a MP raise?

Because it's nice hand and only one raiser against you. If there were caller - i probably fold but not always. He can have 77-AA, AK-AT, KQ and some tricky hands some people likes that you ahead of. So i have odds to call. I'd like not to overrate effect of domination - it's not full game and domination doesn't so improtant.

Quote:

Ok, I understand that, but is defending with 45s ok?

I defend always with any suited connector cause they have the best chances to get big pot from huge hands like AA etc. But i consider myself commonly more loopy player on blind and at all than the most part of this site.

Guido:

When you think he will raise 77-AA, AK-AT, KQ then I think you should fold this. He has to raise with a lot more worse hand to make a call correct IMO. And would a normal player do that in MP? That's the question...

Quote:

So i have odds to call.

Uhm, this means nothing in this context.

Quote:

I defend always with any suited connector cause they have the best chances to get big pot from huge hands like AA etc.

It's HU and I don't think the pot will be that big most of the time. When I know he has a high PP I wouldn't think about calling for just a second. He has to be stealing or he has to have high cards to make a call correct IMO.

I don't think being loose in the blinds is bad but you give wrong reasons...

Peter_rus:

Quote:

When you think he will raise 77-AA, AK-AT, KQ then I think you should fold this.

Against 77-99 i can catch pair 1/3 of time
 Against TT-QQ i can catch higher pair 1/6 of time
 Against AK,AT,KQ i can catch non dominated pair 1/6 of time
 Against AJ,AQ i i can catch pair 1/3 of time
 Against AA,KK i suck
 Assuming pair is twice less probability then 2 diff cards and also reduced probability for having him K or T in hand (regardles suited or unsuited) count:

$(3*1/3 + 2.5*1/6 + 4.5*1/6 + 4*1/3) / 15.5$ equals 0,23 of my win so i have odds 1:3.42 - add here my straight enhanced ability and him reduced because of many pocket pairs and also add some hands like KJs,QJs etc and you will definately get your pot odds higher than 1:3.2

Also you position penalty would be much rewarded by him usual autobet raise on flop.

Guido:

I have no idea how you get this equation but you seem to forget that when you are behind you lose a lot more most of the time than you win when you are in front.

Peter_rus:

Maybe you're right - i don't like to count much penalty for position while HU because of almost auto raise (which will come immediatly always) after preflop raise always makes raiser on flop like a blind. Many also call my reraise giving so me 2 extra SB for free when i'm ahead. If you count this you will find that your odds will grow. How much? And isn't it enough? Time will show - i will try.

5.2 Some hands

Guido:

Hand 1

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is UTG with A♦, J♦.

Guido raises, 4 folds, BB calls,

Flop: (4.40 SB) Q♣, 4♥, 9♦ (2 players)

BB checks, Guido bets, BB calls.

Turn: (3.20 BB) 7♦ (2 players)

BB checks, Guido checks.

River: (3.20 BB) 6♠ (2 players)

BB checks, Guido checks.

Final Pot: 3.20 BB

Ugh, I guess I should bet the turn.

Hand 2

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is UTG with T♦, T♠.
Guido raises, 3 folds, SB calls, BB calls,

Flop: (6 SB) K♠, 4♣, K♣ (3 players)
SB checks, BB checks, Guido bets, SB calls, BB calls.

Turn: (4.50 BB) 6♦ (3 players)
SB checks, BB checks, Guido bets, SB raises, BB calls, Guido calls.

River: (10.50 BB) 3♣ (3 players)
SB bets, BB calls, Guido calls.

Final Pot: 13.50 BB

Fold the turn? Fold the river?

Hand 3

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is CO with J♦, Q♦.
UTG calls, 1 fold, Guido raises, 2 folds, BB calls, UTG calls.

Flop: (6.40 SB) 3♣, 6♠, 7♥ (3 players)
BB checks, UTG bets, Guido calls, BB calls.

Turn: (4.70 BB) 4♦ (3 players)
BB checks, UTG bets, Guido folds, BB calls.

Hand 4

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is Button with 8♣, A♣. CO posts a blind of \$7.
1 fold, MP calls, CO (poster) checks, Guido raises, 2 folds, MP calls, CO calls.

Flop: (7.80 SB) J♥, T♣, Q♦ (3 players)
MP checks, CO checks, Guido bets, MP folds, CO calls.

Turn: (4.90 BB) 6♦ (2 players)

CO checks, **Guido bets**, CO calls.

River: (6.90 BB) 4♠ (2 players)

CO checks, Guido checks.

Final Pot: 6.90 BB

Hand 5

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is Button with 7♣, 7♥.

UTG raises, 2 folds, **Guido 3-bets**, 2 folds, UTG calls.

Flop: (7.40 SB) 8♣, 2♦, 8♥ (2 players)

UTG checks, **Guido bets**, UTG calls.

Turn: (4.70 BB) 6♠ (2 players)

UTG checks, **Guido bets**, UTG calls.

River: (6.70 BB) 9♠ (2 players)

UTG checks, **Guido bets**, UTG calls.

Final Pot: 8.70 BB

With no read I guess a little too aggressive 😊.

Hand 6

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is Button with Q♥, A♣.

UTG calls, 2 folds, **Guido raises**, 2 folds, UTG calls.

Flop: (5.40 SB) 9♥, 2♠, A♦ (2 players)

UTG checks, **Guido bets**, UTG calls.

Turn: (3.70 BB) 3♠ (2 players)

UTG checks, **Guido bets**, **UTG raises**, Guido calls.

River: (7.70 BB) J♠ (2 players)

UTG bets, Guido calls.

Final Pot: 9.70 BB

Thanks,

Guido

stripsqueez:

1 - bet the turn

2 - folding the turn or river is possible - calling them down isnt awful

3 - this looks a bit weak but i think its fine - just too many outs with too much money in the pot - calling the flop and folding the turn is never a great line and i try hard to do it as little as possible

4 - normal

5 - very normal

6 - you can certainly adapt to a turn 3 bet but i think this is more usual

stripsqueez - chickenhawk

Nate tha' Great:

Hand 1 is a close decision; if the flop were Q74 instead of Q94, then I think you would definitely want to check, but this particular flop gives a gutshot or OESD to a lot of BB calling hands. I think the deciding factor in whether to bet or not is how likely your opponent is to check-raise.

Hand 2 - I think that calling down is +EV here if against a lone opponent, but BB changes the equation - both because his cold call makes it much less likely that your hand will be best at showdown, and because his presence makes it somewhat less likely that SB is bluffing. I definitely think you want to fold the river once the flush draw comes through and BB calls again.

Hand 3 - Yeah, okay. I don't think you always want to call the flop but your overcard outs are *probably* clean here. I'd feel better about the call if the board contained a ♦.

Hand 4 - Preflop is good. I hate this flop though and I think it might be one of those rare (for me) cases where I check behind after a PFR - lots of limping hands contain a Q, J or T - I think you're going to get check-raised on this sort of flop a lot. If you adopt the more aggressive line and bet the flop then I think following through on the turn is okay.

Hand 5 - exactly how I'd play it.

Hand 6 - Yes, calling down is standard. I don't like that flush coming on the river but I think you still have to call down.

Guido:

Could you explain why hand 4 and 5 are normal?

stripsqueez:

i think nate is more right than me re hand 4 - given that i have sensed wussiness in some of these hands i wasnt about to encourage more - i think its normal but close pre-flop and its normal but close to just keep on betting - you could give up on the flop or turn - when 1 goes on the flop i'm tilted to betting the turn

as for 5 the average UTG raises loose so 77 is a perfectly respectable 3 bet on the button - i would 3 bet an open raiser from most anywhere before the blinds with 77 unless perhaps i had plenty of respect for his raise - after the flop i doubt you have questions - you will get called down by an A a lot

stripsqueez - chickenhawk

5.2 Some more hands

Guido:

Hand 7

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is Button with 9♣, A♦.

UTG calls, 1 fold, CO calls, Guido calls, 1 fold, BB raises, UTG calls, CO calls, Guido calls.

Flop: (8.40 SB) 2♠, 5♠, A♥ (4 players)

BB checks, UTG checks, CO checks, Guido bets, BB calls, UTG calls, CO folds.

Turn: (5.70 BB) T♦ (3 players)

BB checks, UTG checks, Guido bets, BB folds, UTG folds.

Final Pot: 6.70 BB

Is calling PF ok?

Hand 8

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is CO with T♥, A♠.

1 fold, MP calls, Guido raises, 1 fold, SB calls, 1 fold, MP calls.

Flop: (7 SB) K♥, K♣, 3♣ (3 players)

SB bets, MP calls, Guido folds.

Hand 9

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is Button with K♥, Q♥.

2 folds, CO calls, Guido raises, 1 fold, BB calls, CO calls.

Flop: (6.40 SB) 2♣, 4♦, 5♦ (3 players)

BB checks, CO bets, Guido calls, BB calls.

Turn: (4.70 BB) K♦ (3 players)
BB checks, CO checks, Guido bets, BB calls, CO calls.

River: (7.70 BB) 3♥ (3 players)
BB bets, CO folds, Guido calls.

Final Pot: 9.70 BB

Hand 10

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is CO with K♣, Q♥.
1 fold, MP calls, Guido raises, 1 fold, SB calls, 1 fold, MP calls.

Flop: (7 SB) 5♠, J♣, T♣ (3 players)
SB checks, MP checks, Guido bets, SB calls, MP folds.

Turn: (4.50 BB) T♥ (2 players)
SB checks, Guido checks.

River: (4.50 BB) 4♣ (2 players)
SB bets, Guido folds.

Final Pot: 5.50 BB

I guess I should bet the turn, call a C/R and fold on the river when I don't improve.

Hand 11

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 6 handed)

Preflop: Guido is Button with Q♥, K♠.
2 folds, CO calls, Guido raises, 1 fold, BB calls, CO calls.

Flop: (6.40 SB) 9♣, K♥, 9♠ (3 players)
BB checks, CO checks, Guido bets, BB folds, CO calls.

Turn: (4.20 BB) T♣ (2 players)
CO bets, Guido raises, CO calls.

River: (8.20 BB) 8♣ (2 players)
CO checks, Guido checks.

Final Pot: 8.20 BB

Value bet?

Thanks,

Guido

stripsqueez:

7 - raise and fold in that order appeal more to me

8 - i am very conscious of doing this - i did this twice in a short space of time last night when the guy who bet into me was a big rock who had caught me spraying chips a few times before - when 2 other guys subsequently tried betting in to me after a pre-flop raise they folded to my raise - i guess i do it as much as i think i can get away with and against an opponent who i reckon means it

9 - much the same as 8 - on a board this drawy a gratuitous raise every now and then isnt a bad plan

10 - by itself no huge crime was committed but i'm starting to see a pattern of wussiness - i prefer betting the turn - its close because its not pleasant to be raised as you have to call - so many guys calling a flop bet with garbage who will then auto bluff the river when you check the turn is what motivates me to bet the turn

11 - i reckon thats an easy value bet unless i have a clear view about this player

stripsqueez - chickenhawk

Peter_rus:

7. Raise PF or fold it if UTGs like calling AJo or check-raise QQ and higher.

8. Raise flop.

9. Nice

10. Raise turn.

11. I would call turn. Many people slowplay trips. But you raised and get called - thats why i put him on K with bad kicker or T. So - bet the river is ok - flush is rarely here.

Guido:

8) could you explain why?

Thanks,

Guido

Peter_rus:

You have position and not bad hand on this flop. What do you putting them on? I often like SB - bluff betting when flop is 2-7 (XX) where XX high cards because pair on flop rarely hit someone trips.

I think first one has nothing or 3 or flash draw or some ace. Second one can have QJ or flush draw or rarely trips.

Anyway if you are behind - they will show you this either here on flop or on turn and you can easily fold - if they don't show strength - you sure if you catch A or T that you are ahead or if it's not turned you can easily check turn and then think about calling river. Representing pocket pair or K by raise you can push low pairs out on turn or on river. Anyway - when pair flops and there are no more than 2 opponents - I rarely fold flop on such action because - chances of someone to hit something reduced estimate about twice times than when flop's 3-kind cards.

Samdash: (to Peter_rus)

I strongly disagree. I will often raise a single player in this spot, but with a bet AND a call ahead of you, I get rid of this every time. You are almost certainly behind to one of the players and could be drawing close to dead.

Guido: (to Peter_rus)

Yes I have position but what does that have to do raising this on the flop? Why is this such a good flop for my hand? It's not only the SB but the BB as well.

What you say is just wishful thinking IMO it's based on nothing. One or both of them could have a pair as well and one of them might have trips. I know this isn't very likely but it's also not very likely when you put one of them on an ace and the other on QJ.

The Ace and Ten of clubs don't have to be clean...

I understand that when a pair flops on the board there is less chance that someone has hit something but when they do, they aren't releasing that on the turn or river. I think you are a little too optimistic about how strong a river bet is.

Guido

Nate tha' Great:

Hand 7. When I'm playing well, I raise this. When I'm playing *really* well, I fold this. When I'm playing poorly, I call this. Postflop is standard.

Hand 8. I agree with Sam (and you it looks like) that the overcall is scary and probably renders this a fold. I prefer calling and raising a blank turn to raising the flop.

Hand 9. This is kind of a troublesome position you're in; the CO could well be on a weak A that has flopped a wheel draw, but Party 10/20 opponents are notoriously difficult to push off ace-high ... I'm sure that usually I'd call here if I were playing the hand in real time but an elite player might find a fold. Similarly, I suspect the river call is slightly -EV.

Hand 10 - again, how likely your opponent is to go for a check-raise is a decisive factor here ... I think I slightly prefer a check with the intention of calling down with K-high if a blank falls on the river and you're bet into.

Hand 11 - I suspect it's close to a coin toss as to whether to call or raise the turn. With the line that you took, which I'd take against an opponent who was overaggressive but not tricky (describes maybe 60% of players in the 6-max games) I think that you certainly have a value bet on the river.

5.3 Middle pair, very aggressive

theBruiser500:

Party Poker 5/10 Hold'em (6 max, 4 handed)

Preflop: Hero is Button with $6\spadesuit, 6\diamond$. UTG posts a blind of \$5.
Hero raises, SB folds, BB folds, UTG (poster) calls.

Flop: (4.40 SB) $K\diamond, K\clubsuit, 3\clubsuit$ (2 players)
UTG checks, Hero bets, UTG calls.

Turn: (3.20 BB) $2\diamond$ (2 players)
UTG checks, Hero bets, UTG raises, Hero 3-bets, UTG caps, Hero folds.

Final Pot: 10.20 BB

When he checkraised me thought he might be putting a play on me with that board, maybe I should have jsut called him down then? When he caps I don't see how I'm not beaten.

Nate tha' Great:

I don't see what purpose the 3-bet on the turn serves. Calling down costs you the same as 3-bet/folding, and that way you're guaranteed the chance to see a showdown and possibly spike a 2-outer.

theBruiser500:

Let me see how much that 2 outer is worth... 3 BB on the turn, then 4 more with your advice on the turn plus I'll get at least 2 bets from him on the river so 9 BB 22:1 or 1/20 times so very roughly I think that comes out to 1/3 to 1/2 a BB, a not insignificant amount.

I guess I never really considered a 2 outers worth in NL because when someone bets into me their bet is too big for me to think "i'm probably beat but i have outs."

Nate tha' Great:

You've got the math just right. Giving up on that 2-outer costs you more than you might think, especially when there's otherwise relatively little difference between calling down and 3-bet/folding.

Yeah, I was going to say something similar. Having a general strategy of seeing a lot of cards/showdowns cheaply is pretty viable against aggressive limit opponents like the ones you'll see in the 6-max games.

spamuell:

Quote:

I don't see what purpose the 3-bet on the turn serves. Calling down costs you the same as 3-bet/folding, and that way you're guaranteed the chance to see a showdown and possibly spike a 2-outer.

Because if UTG is making a play thinking you're unlikely to have paired then he is very likely to have six outs to beat you which fold to the three-bet. I'd much rather UTG routinely folded a six-outer than that I sometimes ended up folding a two-outer.

No?

Nate tha' Great:

Since UTG will usually bet a missed 6-outer on the river, you're effectively charging him for drawing by inducing a bluff on the end. The benefit of collecting this extra bet should roughly match the the equity that you lose from allowing him to draw out on you 6/46 of the time.

theBruiser500:

Let's see, 6 outs for a 8 BB pot (3 on turn, 4 bets, and one on river when I call) in exchange for 1 bet he gives to me when he bluffs. Well it's 7:1 to hit 6 outer, and he's playing for an 8 BB pot so that's good for him. That's if he always has 6 outs though, some of the time he'll have 3 outs and soem of the time he'll have a king and the math I did back there shows that I get about 1/2 a BB when by just calling his KK. Plus I'll also have spent that extra 3rd bet raising the turn with an inferior hand but on the other hand, if I just call I'm calling a river bet so it's 3 bets anyway... It seems pretty close to me, but I'm not sure my logic is correct here. Anyone see if I'm missing something?

Nate tha' Great:

6/46 of an 8 BB pot is 1.04 BB, but you get 1 BB of that back assuming that he bluffs into you on the river. So, yes, technically you'd prefer him to fold and not see a river card, but the difference only amounts to 0.04 BB.

theBruiser500:

Thanks, that's a much clearer way of saying it! Plus that doesn't take into account the times he does have a king in which it's definitely better if I just call.

aflaba:

I agree with everything if I can assume that my opponent will bluff me every time on the river. Is that a correct assumption though...? I don't know. If not then so far I disagree that calling must be the best option. This is probably because there is something I don't understand :P

You have him beat

*Assume your opponent has overcards to your pair of sixes 90% of the time... we round that to 100%. If you call the turn raise he gains 1 BB in pot equity compared to if you would have raised and he would have folded. Every time.

Taking only this into consideration:
+1BB for raising per occurrence

*If you call him down you induce a bet on the river. But seeing that you called his 3-bet, is it sure that he will come out bluffing every time? Maybe it is more probable he will only bluff the river 50% of the time? If so...

Taking only this into consideration:
+0.5 BB for calling per occurrence

You are beat:
You have either 0 outs or 2 outs.

When you have 0 outs both calling and raising is equal.

When you have 2 outs and call down: If we assume he bluffs the river 50% of the time this two-outer is worth $1/23 * 6.5 = 0.3BB$ per time you have it. But how often do you have this 2-outer? I don't think you have it a lot of times... More frequently I think he is on a K or a flush-draw than on 22, 33 or 77+(which he would also probably reraise preflop?)

When he is on a flush draw:

Lets assume he has one overcard and a flush draw in mean. That is $3+9=12$ outs.
 $12/46=.25$.

*If you call him down. You pay him off on the river 25% of times. If he bluffs 50% of the times he misses, then he bluffs you 35%+ of the times he has a flush draw. So per flush draw you win $-1 * .25 + 1 * .35 = 0.10$ BB

*If you 3-bet. You make him pay 1 BB more per draw. he has 12 outs so he loses $1 - 2 * 0.25 = 0.5$ BB. Also he will not bluff you on the river if he misses his flush draw since you showed such great strength 3-betting.

=This means by three-betting you win $0.5 - 0.1 = 0.4$ BB more per time he is on a flush draw compared to calling him down.

Taking all of this in regard, if my estimations are even close to being close to correct, I think that 3-betting is better than calling down.

This is if you don't consider the turn cap bluff. I've seen players cap semi-bluff the turn sometimes with flushdraw. Every time this happens it costs you $8 * .8 = 6.5$ BB. Maybe this danger outweighs the pros of 3-betting, maybe not?

Disclaimer: I think I should have thought this post over more before I posted it but I'm really tired so I'll just hope everything is correct...

Have I taken everything into consideration? Anything else wrong? I just don't see how calling down is clearly better than 3-betting. Is it?