



ADVANCED POT-LIMIT OMAHA

Volume I: Small Ball and Short-Handed Play



Jeff Hwang





Advanced Pot-Limit Omaha

Small Ball and Short-Handed Play

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By

Jeff Hwang

Dimat Enterprises, Inc.

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Advanced Pot-Limit Omaha: Small Ball and Short-Handed Play

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To St. Louis, Omaha Poker Central



Jeff Hwang

Jeff Hwang is an expert blackjack player, a semi-professional poker player, a columnist for Card Player magazine, and the best-selling author of Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy. A graduate of Washington University in St. Louis with degrees in both finance and management, Jeff is also an investment writer/analyst and a long-time contributor to The Motley Fool/Fool.com, a multi-media financial services company.

Jeff has been an advantage player since 1999, when he took an interest in blackjack and started hitting up the cruise ships off the coast of Florida near his hometown of Ft. Lauderdale. Shortly after graduating from college in 2003, Jeff began covering the gaming industry stocks for The Motley Fool, where his highly regarded work on the gaming industry in general and the regional gaming markets in particular has led to an appearance in Cigar Aficionado, as well as in publications as geographically diverse as the Las Vegas Business Press, Macau Business, and the Baton Rouge Business Report. At the same time, Jeff picked up poker, and began playing regularly on the riverboats in his adopted home of St. Louis.

Jeff's interest in blackjack, poker, and the gaming industry has led him to visit virtually every commercial casino in the United States, and has given him an intimate knowledge of the riverboat casinos unrivaled in the financial media. Time spent playing poker primarily on the riverboats of Missouri, Mississippi, and Indiana provided the impetus for Jeff's first book, Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy, which was released in December 2007.

In March 2008, Jeff was enlisted by Card Player magazine to write a regular column on Omaha poker, and -- given his background as an investment analyst -- bankroll management. And thanks in large part to the success of both the column and the book, Jeff quickly established himself as the world's leading authority on Omaha poker.

In August 2008, in an effort to dive deeper into the gaming industry, Jeff made the move to Las Vegas and enrolled in the MBA/MS in Hotel Administration program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

In November, in a partnership of mutual interests with North Carolina-based PokerTek, Jeff began hosting a weekly small-stakes PLO game on PokerTek's PokerPro electronic poker tables in the fully-automated poker room at Las Vegas's Excalibur Hotel and Casino. And on November 20th, 2008, Jeff hosted the official kickoff event at Excalibur with a lineup featuring David Sklansky, a three-time World Series of Poker gold bracelet winner and influential poker author, and Lyle Berman -- a three-time World Series of Poker gold bracelet winner, as well as Chairman of PokerTek, Lakes Entertainment, and World Poker Tour Enterprises.

About Dimat Enterprises, Inc.

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To publish today's best poker books and grow the game we all love.

Our Pledge

To Our Customers: Dimat is committed to the publication of outstanding poker books that combine cutting-edge content and strategy with clear instruction from today's leading players.

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A portion of Dimat Enterprise's proceeds is donated to Colombianitos, a unique charity founded in Atlanta, Georgia which seeks to improve the lives of underprivileged children in Colombia. Dimat's founder, Matthew Hilger, is a member of the Board of Directors and encourages you to sponsor a child or support the charity by visiting www.colombianitos.org. With a budget of less than \$1 million annually, you can make a difference! Dimat has raised over \$75,000 to date.

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Texas Hold'em Odds and Probabilities: Limit, No-Limit, and Tournament Strategies, by Matthew Hilger, published in 2006.

The Poker Mindset: Essential Attitudes for Poker Success, by Ian Taylor and Matthew Hilger, published in 2007.

Winning Poker Tournaments One Hand at a Time: Volume I, by Eric "Rizen" Lynch, Jon "PearlJammer" Turner, and Jon "Apestyles" Van Fleet, June 2008.

Internet Texas Hold'em New Expanded Edition, by Matthew Hilger, January 2009.

Advanced Pot-Limit Omaha: Small Ball and Short-Handed Play, by Jeff Hwang, June 2009.

Upcoming

Advanced Pot-Limit Omaha Volume II: LAG Play and Short-Handed Workbook, by Jeff Hwang, Fall 2009.

Winning Poker Tournaments One Hand at a Time: Volume II, by Eric "Rizen" Lynch, Jon "PearlJammer" Turner, and Jon "Apestyles" Van Fleet, Fall 2009.

Want to improve your PLO?

Join our new Pot-Limit Omaha forum at www.InternetTexasHoldem.com

- Hosted by Jeff Hwang
- Discuss hand examples
- Ask questions about the book
- Share ideas with other PLO players

Anyone who makes 50 quality posts in the Omaha forum will receive a free autographed copy of Jeff's next book, *Advanced Pot-Limit Omaha Volume II: LAG play and Short-Handed Workbook* (this offer valid thru December 31st, 2009).

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I'd like to thank Matthew Hilger and Dimat Enterprises for the opportunity to produce this book under the Dimat label and help grow what has quickly become one of the top poker book brands in the business. When I set out to find a publisher for this project, I was looking for a publisher who understood what I was trying to do and shared my vision for the future of the game of pot-limit Omaha. Matthew scored on both counts. Moreover, Matthew is serious about building his company and the Dimat brand, and I am excited about the opportunity to help him build it.

I encourage anyone out there with an interest in writing poker books -- particularly on Omaha poker -- to contact Matthew and Dimat Enterprises.

I'd like to thank Card Player magazine for providing a forum from which to promote the game, as well as establish some key ideas prior to the publication of this book. Most of Part I of this book first appeared in Card Player magazine as part of a seven-part series on "Floating." Some pieces from the latter half of the book -- most notably "The Bankroll Schedule" and much of Part IX: Growing the Game of the Future -- also have appeared in Card Player magazine.

I'd like to thank Lou White and PokerTek for giving me the opportunity to host the weekly small-stakes PLO game on their electronic poker tables at Excalibur in Las Vegas, and providing a platform from which to promote small-stakes PLO in Las Vegas and beyond. I'd also like to thank the Excalibur Hotel & Casino for accommodating the game.

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I'd like to thank Jason Hughes for his fantastic cover artwork. Jason is responsible for the cover of Professional No-Limit Hold'em Volume I by Matt Flynn, Sunny Mehta, and Ed Miller, as well as the cover of Heads-Up No-Limit Hold'em by Collin Moshman. When Matthew held a cover contest for this book on his site, InternetTexasHoldem.com, I reached out to Jason, pulled him away from his studies and made sure that he made a submission; what you see on the cover of this book is one of a couple of phenomenal ideas that Jason had for the cover of this book.

I'd like to thank Luke Van Cleve, Bob Ciaffone, and Randy Ohel for their review and feedback of my initial manuscript for this book. I spent about a year playing various forms of Omaha with Luke virtually every day at stakes ranging from \$1-\$2 to \$5-\$10-\$25. Luke is one of the better players you will find at these stakes anywhere. I learned a lot about LAG play in PLO from our conversations about poker, from sitting with him at the table, and from constantly getting 3-bet by him.

Anyone who has read my first book Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy should have an idea about the impact that Bob's work has had on my own game and starting me off in the right direction. When you're learning about poker, it is extremely valuable to be able to learn from someone who has a playing style and a thought process that you can identify with. I highly recommend reading anything and everything written by Bob, including his book Omaha Poker.

I met Randy while playing \$2-\$5-(\$10) PLO at the Rio during the 2008 World Series of Poker. When I first moved to Las Vegas in August 2008, I played PLO with Randy virtually every day for about a month while trying to getting the game off the ground in the poker room at the Wynn. We wound up playing a lot of short-handed PLO. At any rate, his feedback has been invaluable.

I'd like to thank the posters on the 2+2 Forums, whose unyielding support for my first book encouraged me to move ahead with this project. I'd also like to thank 2+2 for accommodating my presence on their site in regard both to discussion of the first book in their Books and Publications forum, and in promoting the game at the Excalibur in their Brick and Mortar forum.

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Last but not least, I'd like to thank everybody who took a chance on me in picking up my first book, and everybody who has taken a chance on me by opening the pages of this book.

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Introduction

In *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy*, we dissected big-pot science and laid out the core basic strategy for full-ring, deep-stacked pot-limit Omaha (PLO), where pots tend to be contested multi-way. By now, most of you reading this are probably already familiar with the strategy - and simply put, our goal is to be on the dominant end when the big pots get played, while utilizing the positional advantage to win our fair share of the small pots as well.

The next step is to learn how to utilize the positional advantage even further, in order to:

1. Maneuver in short-handed pots in general, regardless of whether two people or ten people were dealt a hand before the flop.
2. Become proficient in short-handed play in particular.
3. Uncover additional opportunities to exploit your opponents in full-ring play.
4. Become a more complete player.

I listed four items, but they all come down to just one thing. Because once you've mastered the core basic strategy, you should already know how and when to bet when everybody has checked to you on the flop. You should also know when you want to play a big pot when facing a bet and a raise, or when facing a legitimate bet (i.e. a non-steal bet) in a multi-way pot. The main thing left is to figure out how to respond to and take advantage of an opponent who may be on the steal or is otherwise betting light himself, which occurs most frequently whenever the pot is contested short-handed after the flop.

In other words, not only do you use your positional advantage to win pots when everybody has checked to you and shown weakness on the flop, but you also use it to steal the pots your opponents are trying to steal. Doing so comes down to one major skill -- albeit one with many variations -- which is far subtler and more elegant than some might expect.

And that skill is the subject of Part I of this book: Floating.

Short-handed Play, Small Ball, and 3-Betting Before the Flop

As should be apparent by now to those who have read the first book, post-flop play dictates pre-flop strategy in PLO, and thus starting hand selection as well. Once you figure out how to use position to control your opponents, it should become clear that there will be times when your hand selection range will widen considerably from your core full-ring strategy. This occurs most notably whenever you have the positional advantage and expect a short-handed pot after the flop -- and preferably heads up.

And so we get to short-handed play.

We have two main strategies for exploiting our opponents in short-handed pots in general, and in short-handed play in particular: Small Ball and 3-betting before the flop. Both strategies involve utilizing the positional advantage, and both strategies also apply to both live games and online 6-max games.

Small Ball -- the subject of Part IV -- is a loose-passive pre-flop playing approach, and our core basic strategy for utilizing the positional advantage to exploit our opponents in short-handed pots after the flop in general, and in short-handed play in particular. The basic idea is to deliberately engage in small-pot warfare in situations where you can't be getting the worst of it -- namely, when you are heads up with the positional advantage after the flop. This generally means smooth calling raises with a much wider range of hands than normal when you have a chance to be heads up with the positional advantage (i.e. there is a raise in front of you, and everybody folds to you in late position), and then using the positional advantage to control both your opponents and pot size via the float.

It also entails open limping at times from late position, although we will also talk about blind stealing and playing with the initiative.

Our second, alternative strategy to exploiting our opponents in short-handed pots after the flop is 3-betting before the flop, which is the subject of Part V. 3-betting before the flop is a situational LAG (loose-aggressive) tactic in which we take a more proactive approach to isolating the pre-flop raiser before the flop when we have the positional advantage.

We will actually discuss two different versions of the play: (1) the Pump-and-Shove, where we 3-bet to build the pot and create a low SPR (Stack-to-Pot Ratio) situation such that there are only two bets left after the flop; and the Isolation Play, in which we 3-bet in order to isolate the pre-flop raiser in a deep stack situation.

That said, implementing these strategies requires the understanding of a new set of concepts, and the acquisition of a new set of skills.

Before you start reading Part IV on Small Ball, you first need to read Part I on floating -- the key concept on which our Small Ball Strategy is based. And then you need to read Part II on advanced concepts, which include the Stack-to-Pot Ratio (SPR). SPR is a concept crucial to the understanding and application of both Small Ball and the two variations of our 3-betting pre-flop play. And then after that, you need to read Part III on advanced skills -- the skills needed to become a complete player and make full use of the strategies presented in this book.

Once you have completed Parts I through V – and only once you have completed Parts I through V – you will be ready for Part VI on short-handed play, which includes 128 hand walk-throughs demonstrating the implementation of our Small Ball and 3-betting strategies in both live and online settings.

Using This Book

This book assumes that you have read my first book, *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy*, and that you have a solid understanding of the most fundamental ideas of pot-limit Omaha. If you have read the book, then you should already have a fair comprehension of big-pot science and the “Big Play Objectives” (the nut straight freeroll, the nut full house freeroll, set-over-set, flush-over-flush, overfull vs. underfull, top-set plus, and dominating draws). You should also have a good grasp of the straight draws, and thus proper starting hand construction as well.

If you already have that foundation, then you are ready to tackle the advanced concepts, skills, and strategies presented in this book.

Having covered short-handed play in Part VI, we will talk a bit about bankroll management in Part VII: Managing Your Bankroll and Yourself. Part VIII: Miscellaneous Topics, will cover a wide range of topics including Good Players vs. Bad Players, Playing With Idiots, the Mississippi Straddle, Game Selection in Live Play, Seat Selection, and The Evolution of the Game. We will then talk about structuring sustainable small-stakes games in Part IX: Growing the Game of the Future. And finally, I will walk you through a session in the \$5-\$10-(\$20) game in St. Louis in Part X: The Final Session.

Without further ado, let’s take the first step to the next level.

Pot-Limit Omaha: Small-Ball Concepts

PLO Small-Ball Concept #1: The word “check” in a short-handed pot is a fairly strong indicator that you can win the pot with a bet.

PLO Small-Ball Concept #2: A weak bet is a fairly strong indicator that -- if called -- the next word out of the bettor’s mouth will be “check.”

PLO Small-Ball Concept #3: A continuation bet on the flop is often suspect, especially in a short-handed pot.

PLO Small-Ball Concept #4: In a heads-up confrontation, the first bet often doesn’t mean much of anything; you should frequently make your opponent bet twice, particularly when you have the positional advantage.

PLO Small-Ball Concept #5: In a short-handed pot, position is everything.

Part I: Floating

The key to advanced play.

Technically speaking, floating is an advanced bluffing technique in which you call a bet on one street with insufficient hand values, but with the intention of taking the pot away with a bet on a later street. In no-limit hold’em (NLHE), this can often be done without having much of a hand or draw. In pot-limit Omaha (PLO), however, you should usually have at least some piece of the board or some kind of draw, even if it is as little as one pair or a gutshot. But the basic principle is the same: You are calling not because your hand is necessarily worth a call on its own merits, but rather because you have some reason to believe that the bettor may not have a strong enough hand to make it to showdown.

At its core, the float is a stopping call designed to steal the initiative, either from the pre-flop raiser or another player on the possible steal. What you are doing by calling is representing a hand or draw stronger than you actually have, hoping to freeze your opponent into checking -- thus showing weakness -- and giving up the pot on the next betting round. By calling, you are threatening to call if he bets again, thus forcing the bettor to decide just how far he wants to take the hand if he is, in fact, betting light.

Meanwhile, the turn may bring a useful scare card to help encourage your opponent to shut down.

The vast majority of the time, floating requires having the positional advantage on your opponent, as the information gained by having your opponent check to you on the next betting round is really what makes this play tick. The float is also most effective in short-handed pots^[1] -- especially hands contested heads up after the flop -- though you will see that this play has application in multi-way pots as well.

The Indicators

There are three primary indicators that a float has a decent chance at success:

1. A weak stab. Generally speaking, unless the board is paired or a possible flush is present, the standard bet on the flop and turn is a full pot-sized bet. That said, more often than not, a bet in the neighborhood of half- or three-quarters of the pot in these spots is a sign of weakness, amounting to little more than a weak attempt to pick up the pot. This is especially true when the bet is made as a continuation bet on the flop (i.e. the flop bettor also raised before the flop).

2. A continuation bet (c-bet). Even a pot-sized continuation bet is a candidate for a float, particularly in a short-handed pot, and especially if the pot is contested heads up after the flop.

3. A possible steal bet. In a heads-up pot after the flop, the first bet is always suspect, and as such is a strong candidate for a float. In multi-way pots, a possible steal bet -- usually from late position -- may also be a potential candidate for a float.

It's a bit like baseball. When you step into the batter's box, you look down to the third base coach to see if a play is on. A touch of the cap or a brush of the arm might not mean anything by itself, but if he touches his ear -- the indicator -- and then touches the brim of his cap, it may signal a bunt. Or if he touches his ear and then brushes his arm, it might be the signal to steal.

Similarly, in PLO, you don't try to float any time someone bets -- you need the indicator first to signal that the play is on. And for the most part, your opponents will tell you exactly how to play them. If they bet light, you call light. If they make a weak stab and/or a continuation bet (the indicator) in a short-handed or heads-up pot, you should often make them bet twice. If they follow up by checking the next street, it usually means that the coast is clear to bet.

The Target

The float is a powerful tool in and of itself, and one that you will probably wind up using at some point against many of the players you come across. That said, you are going to be far more liberal floating some players than others.

In general, you are looking for weaker players -- the kind that take weak stabs, the kind that are willing to take one shot and give up if called, and/or the kind that scare easily at every turn of the card. Naturally, you should be less apt to go after strong players.

Let me show you the difference.

Let's say the flop comes 9♠ 6♣ 2♦, and two players see the flop. The first player, holding J♦ T♥ 9♦ 7♥ for top pair and a gutshot, leads out with a pot-sized bet and his opponent calls. The turn is the A♠.

Now here is where a strong player differs from a weak player: A strong player will bet the pot again as if he has a set of nines, probably thinking of the A♠ as a good scare card that may encourage his opponent to fold. In contrast, a weak player is more likely to shut down and check-and-fold in this spot, thinking either that he is already beat or that the A♠ may have beaten him.

Clearly, we will be eager to call the weaker player with a far wider range of hands than we would against the stronger opponent simply because the weaker player is more likely to hand us the pot on the turn.

Let's look now at how it's done, and then we'll come back and discuss the play in greater depth. The following hands are from real-world play, both live and online, and both short-handed and full-ring. We'll start with the more basic floats, and then work our way up to the more complicated variations of the play.

The Basic Floats

Note: The hands are from live play unless otherwise noted, as in the first hand.

Hand #1: Naked Float

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max, deep)

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds around to the small blind (\$196.50), who raises to \$6. I (\$535.70) call.

Heading to the flop, this is a pretty favorable situation, as I am heads up with the positional advantage.



Flop (\$12): The SB bets \$12, and I call (the float).

The 9-2-2 flop is not a typical floating flop, as it is more difficult to represent a deuce on this flop than it is to represent a nine if the flop were instead 9-9-2. And if, by some chance, my opponent has what he says he has (AA, 99 or a deuce), I also have no real hand or draw whatsoever, and as such am running naked in the hand. As a result, the float depends almost entirely on the probability that my opponent doesn't have something like AA, 99, or a deuce himself.

The key is that a lot of players would play any four cards the same way from his position, and so he doesn't have to have AA here. I mean, if you were the small blind, what would you do with something like 9-8-7-6 or K-Q-J-T? You'd probably play it about the same way. In fact, I think most players would prefer to make a smaller bet on the flop with AA, as it is difficult to catch up with on this kind of flop with an open pair.



Turn (\$36): My opponent checks.

The A♠ on the turn is pretty good scare card if it didn't hit my opponent. And even if it did, your call on the flop appears strong to him. Either way, his check is an invitation to bet. If, by some chance, I get called, I can shut down then.

Action: I bet \$22 and my opponent folds.

Indicators: Continuation bet/first bet in heads-up pot on flop, check on turn

Hand #2: Weak Stab Float

The Game: \$5-\$10

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: An early player (\$700) limps in. The next player (\$5,000), a loose and frequent raiser pre-flop, raises to \$50. It gets folded to the player in front of me (\$1,500), who calls. I (\$3,500) call.



Flop (\$215): It gets checked to the player in front of me, who bets \$150.

I flopped an overpair and a gutshot on a board with a possible straight out. The first two players likely would have bet out if they had the straight. The next player makes a weak \$150 bet into a \$215 pot, where I'd expect him to bet the full pot if he actually had the straight.

Action: I call (the float), and the other players fold.



Turn (\$515): My opponent checks.

Now I've got an open-ended straight draw. I could just as easily check behind and take the free card. That said, the fold equity I gained by calling on the flop is high enough that it would be a mistake not to bet the pot and take it down here rather than wait until the river and give up the chance to faithfully represent the straight.

Action: I bet \$515 and my opponent folds.

Indicators: Weak stab on flop, check on turn

Hand #3: Semi-Bluff Float

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in (\$500 max)

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two players limp in for \$5, and the hijack (\$600) raises to \$30. The cutoff folds. I (\$1,300) call. Both blinds fold, and only one of the limpers (\$700) calls.

In a full-ring game, a somewhat experienced player who almost never raises before the flop but suddenly comes out with a pot-sized raise pre-flop - signaling AA -- is a pretty strong candidate for a float if you can see the flop short-handed with the positional advantage. These players tend to be conservative by nature, and try not to get too involved with unimproved AA after the flop. As such, these are often exactly the kind of players you are looking for -- the one-shot-and-done type.

So if there is a good chance that we are going to be short-handed (preferably heads up) after the flop, I will call raises from this kind of player with a wider-than-normal range of hands.

The pre-flop raiser in this hand is someone I had played with several times, and who had rarely ventured a pre-flop raise up until this point. His pot-sized raise here most likely signals AA. Meanwhile, one of the interesting things about the structure of the game we were playing is that the small size of the blinds relative to the action sometimes promotes short-handed pots. I called here, anticipating a short-handed pot with the positional advantage.



Flop (\$98): The first player checks. The pre-flop raiser bets \$100. I call, and the other player folds.

I've got a weak 13-card wrap with only seven nut outs -- five if I give the pre-flop raiser credit for AA. I am also dominated by a hand like A-K-Q-T and in poor shape against something like K-Q-J-T or K-K-Q-T. This hand is not really worth a call on its own merits, and raising could be a disaster if I am wrong. Plus, there is a third player in the hand who could be trapping.

All in all, this is a fairly marginal situation. But in this case, I went ahead and called the pot-sized continuation bet to see if the pre-flop raiser was serious about the hand.



Turn (\$298): My opponent checks. I bet \$300 and he folds.

As planned.

Indicators: Continuation bet on flop, check on turn

Hand #4: Semi-Bluff Float

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online, eight-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The next player (\$120.65) raises to \$2.25. The next two players fold. I (\$259.30) call. The button (\$111.65) calls. The small blind (\$39.50) calls. The big blind folds.

This is another spot where I called with a marginal suited-Ace hand, anticipating a short-handed pot. Ideally, I would have liked to have been able to see the flop heads up with the positional advantage against the pre-flop raiser, but this outcome is OK.



Flop (\$10): The small blind checks. The pre-flop raiser bets \$5.

I've got the bare nut flush draw facing a weak stab/c-bet. If I call, however, I do run the risk of getting raised. That said, I am more likely either to attract a caller or two (which would give me better odds on the draw) or to have both of the other players fold, leaving me heads up against a player that doesn't rate to have much.

Action: I call. The button and small blind both fold.



Turn (\$20): My opponent checks. I bet \$20 and my opponent folds.

I picked up a nut gutshot draw on the turn as well, though I would typically have bet the turn even if I didn't improve.

Indicators: Weak stab on flop, check on turn

Hand #5: Naked Float with a Double Barrel Bluff

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in (\$500-max)

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: A middle player (\$900) -- a tough player and a fairly loose raiser -- opens with a raise to \$20, and it is folded to me. I make a loose call. The small blind folds, but the big blind (\$700) calls.



Flop (\$61): The blind checks. The pre-flop raiser bets \$40.

A paired board combined with a c-bet in a short-handed pot presents a decent floating opportunity.

Action: I call (the float), and the blind folds.



Turn (\$141): My opponent checks. I bet \$75 and he calls.

That's not what I had in mind.



River (\$291): My opponent checks.

Now I can check and give up -- or I can fire a desperation shot. At this point, I think it's pretty clear my opponent has at least an eight. But at the same time, I think he'd probably have bet the turn and/or river with hands as strong as K-K-x-x or A-A-x-x for the overfull, and probably A-8-x-x as well. Moreover, he doesn't know that I called him with nothing -- nor does he know yet that I even have that play -- and so he has to give me credit for at least an eight.

Action: I bet \$175.

Now my opponent goes into the tank. He puts his hand on the table and places a chip on it to protect it, and he ponders.

"How lucky did you get?" he asks rhetorically.

I have to admit to being a little surprised by the question, because it means that he has a real hand. But what he's actually asking is if the ace hit me or if he was already beat. In his mind, if I had a bare eight or even K-8-x-x, I would probably check behind on the river. And so there are three possibilities -- (1) I have either A-8-x-x or A-A-x-x and the ace hit me; (2) I have K-K-x-x and flopped the overfull; or (3) I called him with nothing and fired two shots.

I give him credit for K-8-x-x here.

The problem for him is that he doesn't know yet that I could or would do #3. And so, assuming that I had something with which to call him on the flop, for me to bet the river here, he has to give me credit for either K-K-x-x, A-8-x-x, or A-A-x-x, all of which beat him. Note that I made this bet on the river against an experienced opponent whom I consider to be a relatively tough player, and therefore capable of laying down a fairly big hand like K-8-x-x in this spot. Against an inexperienced player incapable of folding even bare trips, I would more likely have given up.

Action: My opponent folds.

Indicators: Continuation bet on flop, check on turn, check on river

The Combo Float

You will often find yourself floating with part made hand, part draw, and part air. For example, maybe you flop a pair, and you call a bet on the flop, looking to steal the pot later in the hand from a player whom you suspect might be betting light. If your opponent has anything -- like AA -- you are probably behind, but you might also have draw outs (to two pair, trips, a flush, and/or a straight). I call this the combo float.

Hand #6: Combo Float

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two players limp in front of me. I (\$3,500) call. The cutoff (\$2,000) raises to \$50. The button and small blind fold. The big blind calls. Both limpers call. I call.

9-7-6-5 with a suit is a fairly marginal hand with the gap at the top; had the 9♦ been the 8♦, I probably would have put in the raise myself. By the time it got back to me, it was probably too late to fold.



Flop (\$255): The first player checks. The next player (\$12k) -- a very aggressive player -- bets \$200. The next player folds. I call (the float), and the other two players fold.

The flop gives me top pair with a gutshot, though on a board with a possible straight out. It helps to know your opponents a bit, but the \$200 bet into a \$255 pot looks like an attempt to pick up the pot on a flop that doesn't rate to hit anyone -- including the pre-flop raiser still left to act behind me, and probably the blind as well. By calling, I can represent a set or the straight and slow the bettor down. If, by chance, I am wrong about the strength of the bettor's hand, I still have the gutshot straight draw to fall back on. In PLO, you should rarely float without outs.



Turn (\$655): My opponent checks. I bet \$650 as planned, and he folds.

Indicators: Weak stab/possible steal on flop, check on turn

Hand #7: Combo Float

The game: \$1-\$2 online, six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$245.15) limp in. The three players behind me all fold. The small blind (\$200) calls. The big blind (\$271.75) raises to \$8. I re-raise to \$14. The small blind folds. The big blind calls.

I would ordinarily fold T-9-8-4 UTG in a tough game with aggressive players behind me, but this was a pretty soft game. I could just as easily have flat-called the raise from the big blind, but I elected to put in a min re-raise to try to knock out the small blind and isolate the big blind, while keeping the pot small enough to leave room to maneuver after the flop. 3-betting pre-flop for isolation itself is the subject of Part V.



Flop (\$30): The big blind bets \$30. I call (the float).

This is a loose call, and maybe a bit cavalier, but I do have a pair and position. Let's play a game of chicken...



Turn (\$90): My opponent checks. I bet \$90 and my opponent folds.

Well, my opponent put on the steal sign, and I took it.

One of the keys to this play is that most of my opponents don't know that I have it, or that the play even exists. One of these days I am going to run into a monster.

Indicators: Continuation bet/first bet in heads-up pot on flop, check on turn

Hand #8: Combo Float

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle (button posts \$10 straddle, and small blind acts first pre-flop)

My position: Button straddle

My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind calls. An early player limps. A middle player (\$1,200) raises to \$40, and the player behind him calls. I (\$2,200) call. The big blind and limper both call.

Loose call.



Flop (\$202): It gets checked to the pre-flop raiser, who bets \$150. The next player folds. I call (the float), and the other two players fold.

I didn't necessarily put the bettor on Aces when he raised before the flop, but that is what his somewhat weak continuation bet now looks like to me. The two players in early position didn't look all that interested in the hand, so I decided to take a card off with my pair of threes and three overcards with the intention of betting unimproved if my opponent checks on the turn.



Turn (\$502): My opponent bets \$400.

My opponent takes another weak stab, and now I am reasonably positive that he does, in fact, have Aces. This \$400 bet into a \$500 pot is the kind of bet that someone makes where they aren't really comfortable betting, yet don't want to just check and give up the pot. In contrast to the previous examples, this is an example of a combo float where I improved my hand.

I think my two pair is good here.

Action: I raise and set my opponent all-in. He folds.

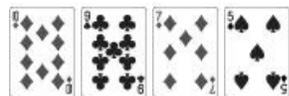
Indicators: Weak stab/continuation bet on flop, weak stab on turn

Hand #9: The Double-Barrel Combo Float

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with a Mississippi Straddle

My position: Middle position

My hand:



Pre-flop: It gets folded to the player in front of me (\$1,200), who raises to \$40. I (\$1,500) call, and everybody else folds.

This is a somewhat standard call pre-flop with a medium-sized speculative wrap hand and position on the pre-flop raiser; I've 3-bet in this spot as well. I had been at the table for a few rounds; the pre-flop raiser had been fairly loose but also mostly passive pre-flop. This was the first time he had raised, and so the first hand I put him on is AA. It doesn't hurt to have a few tight players behind you, either.



Flop (\$97): My opponent bets \$100. I call (the float).

The flop call with middle pair and a ten-high flush draw is not really standard, and a lot could go wrong; I may be way behind a set and/or up against bigger diamonds, or the player may have a king and some of my cards, meaning that I could improve to two pair and still lose.

Generally speaking, I like to have top pair rather than middle pair, but I went ahead and called the continuation bet anyway.

 **Turn (\$297):** My opponent bets \$200. I call (the second float).

The turn card put a possible straight out, which is a good scare card. My opponent then followed up his pot-sized continuation bet on the flop with a weak stab on the turn; this is the indicator I was looking for. I called.

 **River (\$697):** My opponent checks. I bet \$200 and he folds.

The river gave me two pair, and my opponent checked. Now I have an interesting decision as far as bet sizing is concerned, because the reason I called on the turn was that I didn't think my opponent had anything to call me with. I have enough to show down here, but I opted to make a small value bet, hoping he might find a call with AA. He didn't.

Indicators: Continuation bet/first bet in heads-up pot on flop, weak stab on turn, check on river

The Re-Steal Float

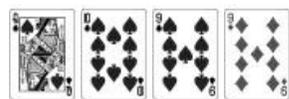
Occasionally when you bet from late position, a player who suspects a steal may try to float you from out of position by calling your bet and then betting out on the turn. In this spot, if you suspect that your opponent is making a play, you can often float him back. This is the Re-Steal Float.

Hand #10: The Re-Steal Float

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$4,000) opens with a raise to \$35 and three players call in front of me. I (\$2,700) call. The button and small blind fold, and the big blind calls.



Flop (\$215): Everybody checks to me. I bet \$215, and only the pre-flop raiser calls.

Everybody checked to me on the flop, and so I bet the 12-card nut wrap despite the two hearts on the board, hoping to take the pot down. Only the pre-flop raiser called. At this point, I figure him for something like the nut heart draw, maybe with AA (though I would expect him to bet that himself).

 **Turn (\$645):** My opponent now bets \$300. I call.

I know this opponent to be a fairly sophisticated player, though one with some major leaks (such as constantly drawing to second-best hands). That said, the sudden turn bet is extremely fishy, as I would expect him to bet the flop with something like J-T-9-8 or Q-J-T-9, or a jack with the nut flush draw. The only way he bets here is if he puts me on a button steal (which is half true); it looks to me as if he is just taking a stab at the pot.

At any rate, I don't give him credit for a jack -- much less a full house -- and my decision is between either raising, or calling and betting the river unimproved. Raising is unnecessarily risky because he might have a jack and still call. Calling is actually a much stronger play because it says the same thing that raising does -- that I have at least a jack myself, if not 8-8 for the underfull -- and for a much better value for the bluff. And so if I call, he is probably not going to bet the river again if he can't beat a jack, at which point I can bet and represent a full house.

 **River (\$1,245):** My opponent checks. I check.

As it turned out, I ended up making the straight. My opponent checked and I checked behind, as there is little value in betting in this particularly spot

-- my opponent doesn't rate to call unless he can beat a jack. He showed KK with the K♥, so I imagine he had the king-high flush draw to go with it.

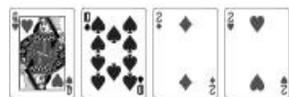
Indicators: Check/call on flop, stab on turn, check on river

Hand #11: Re-steal Combo Float (The Bailout)

The game: \$5-\$10, five-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: UTG player folds. CO (\$1,000) limps in. I (\$2,500) limp in on the button. The small blind (\$1,500) raises to \$50. The big blind folds. The CO calls, and I call.

With the two gaps on the top and an absolute dangler, this is an extremely marginal hand, even short-handed. I much prefer having at least two of the top cards connected (as in Q-J-9-2 or Q-T-9-2). But I played the hand, so now I've got to go with it.



Flop (\$160): Both players check to me. I bet \$160, and only the small blind calls.

I couldn't help myself.



Turn (\$480): Small blind bets \$300. I call.

This could end badly.

The turn card gave me the middle two pair and a queen-high heart draw, which I would have been prepared to check behind. Instead, the small blind leads out with a weak stab -- a \$300 bet into a \$480 pot. This is somewhat suspect, though I have neither a strong hand nor a strong draw myself. If he has anything, it probably beats me, but then again he may not have much, as he probably puts me on a steal himself. But at this point I figure my heart draw may be good, and my full house draw may be live. Plus I have the button. So I call the weak bet.



River (\$1,080): Small blind checks.

The river gave me a bigger two pair, but also put out a possible club flush and straight. My first thought was that it gave my opponent the flush, but then he checked. And to me it looks like the reason he checked was because he thought I had the clubs. In this spot, I can't figure that my two pair is enough to show down.

Action: I bet \$500 and he folds.

This just shows the power of the positional advantage. I made three extremely marginal (at best) plays in the hand -- calling the raise pre-flop, betting the flop with two Broadway cards on the board, and calling the weak bet on the turn -- and ended up being bailed out by the positional advantage.

Indicators: Weak stab re-steal on turn, check on river

The Reverse Float: Floating Out of Position

The last item of discussion is the **reverse float**, or the term I use for floating out of position. The reverse float is far more risky than the basic positional float because doing so from out of position sacrifices the benefit of the information gained from having your opponent check in front of you. As such, you need to have a much stronger initial read in order to execute the play out of position.

A few basic guidelines for floating out of position:

1. If you float out of position on the flop, you should tend to bet the full pot on the turn. If you do choose to float out of position, you should almost always bet the full pot on the turn, unless the board is paired or a flush is possible. Because if you bet less than the pot on the turn, you are setting yourself up to get re-floated -- even when you are right and your opponent was weak (see Hand #11).

2. Unless you have some kind of draw or some outstanding read, you should tend to avoid floating out of position against pot-sized bets on the flop. If you are facing a pot-sized bet and plan on betting the full pot on the turn, you are risking four bets to win two, in which case you have to win two out of three times. The problem is that not only don't you get the benefit of seeing how your opponent reacts to the turn card, you also don't get the benefit of him taking a weak stab on the flop -- the high-percentage float indicator. Therefore, in the absence of a very strong read, you may have very limited float equity when playing out of position, which means that the value of the play is highly dependent on any draw you might have.

3. The three best spots for a reverse float are (1) against a possible weak stab on the flop; (2) when the board is paired on the flop, and (3) when the play is made on the turn-river rather than the flop-turn. These are the three spots where you get the best bang for the buck, because you don't have to call a full pot-sized bet and then make a full pot-sized bet on the next street in these spots in order for the play to work. Moreover, weak stabs and paired boards yield higher-percentage floating opportunities to begin with.

Hand #12: Reverse Float

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max, deep), four-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$344.90) raises to \$4. The button folds. The small blind (\$266.65) calls. I (\$397.90) call.



Flop (\$12): The small blind checks. I check. The pre-flop raiser bets \$6. The small blind folds. I call.

I have bottom pair and the bottom end of an open-ended straight draw (which really isn't good), but I'll take a shot against the weak continuation bet, which signifies a weak hand or draw. I will bet a blank on the turn.



Turn (\$24): I bet \$24. My opponent folds.

Indicators: Continuation bet/weak stab on flop, blank turn

Hand #13: Reverse Float on Paired Board

The game: \$5-\$5, five-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The cutoff raises to \$20. The button folds. I call. The big blind calls.



Flop (\$60): I check. The big blind checks. The pre-flop raiser bets \$40. I call (the float). The big blind folds.



Turn (\$140): I check. My opponent checks.



River (\$140): I bet \$50 and my opponent folds.

I actually could have played this a few different ways: I could have check-raised on the flop, or I might have bet out on the turn; or I could do as I did in this hand and let my opponent check behind on the turn and then bet out on the river instead.

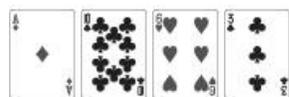
Indicators: Continuation bet on flop, check on turn

Hand #14: Reverse Semi-Bluff Float

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Five players limp in, the small blind limps in, and I check.



Flop (\$70): The small blind checks, I check, and it gets checked around.



Turn (\$70): The small blind checks. I check. The next player, a tight, relatively conservative player, bets \$70 and everybody folds back to me. I call.

I have a double-gutter and a weak flush draw, which by itself adds up to a marginal call at best.



River (\$210): I bet \$150 and my opponent folds.

The 3♠ is a good card in that it fills an obvious straight, and it helps to have an opponent that can recognize the straight. Also note that the fact that this sequence occurred on the turn-river rather than the flop-turn allowed me to make a bet less than the full size of the pot, giving me better odds on the play.

Indicators: None on turn, possible scare card on river

Hand #15: The Reverse Bluff-Overcall Float

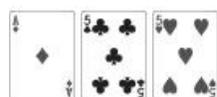
The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two early players limp in. A middle player (\$5,000) -- a loose and frequent pre-flop raiser -- raises to \$60. Two players call behind him. The small blind folds. I (\$3,200) call. The limpers call.



Flop (\$365): I check, and it gets checked around.



Turn (\$365): I check, and it gets checked to the pre-flop raiser, who bets \$140. It gets folded to the button (\$6,000) -- a tough player -- who calls. I call (the float), and the other two players fold.



River (\$785): I bet \$400, and both opponents fold.

This is a more complicated hand where it helps to know the players a bit.

After the flop got checked around, the pre-flop raiser took a stab on the turn, where he probably would have bet AA or A-5 on the flop. I also think the button would have bet those hands on the flop as well, and I think he knows the pre-flop raiser would have bet the flop with those hands and either has a bare ace or was just calling to try to take the pot away on the river himself.

I actually do have four possible outs to full house draws (two sevens, two sixes) plus the 4♣ for a straight flush draw and three more possible straight outs, but that is really secondary here. My overcall is going to look strong, possibly as if I had quad fives or AA myself.

The downside to being out of position is that I don't get the benefit of having my opponents check on the river; the plus-side to being out of position is that if my read is correct, I have first right to bluff on the river. I suppose I could just as easily have bluff-raised on the squeeze on the turn, but in the event that I am wrong and happen to be facing quads, by calling I at least have a chance to hit the straight flush.

Indicators: Check on flop, weak stab on turn

Calling vs. Raising

Q: "If I think my opponent may be stealing, why not raise instead of call?"

That's a fair question. The answer is that calling is usually superior to raising simply because it's less risky due to the extra information gained by having your opponent check or bet again on the next street.

Think about it as an investment. When you are right and your opponent is weak, your risk and reward is going to be the same whether you raise and your opponent folds or whether you just call and bet the turn when your opponent checks. For example, let's say there is \$100 in the pot. If your opponent bets \$100 (the size of the pot), you raise to \$400 (a pot-sized raise) and your opponent folds, you will have put in \$400 to win \$200. Alternatively, if your opponent bets \$100, you call, your opponent checks the turn and you bet \$300 (the size of the pot), you will have invested the same \$400 to win the same \$200.

The difference is in what happens when you are wrong.

When you are wrong -- your opponent bets the \$100 pot, you raise the full pot to \$400, and your opponent re-raises -- you surrender your \$400 bet, while sacrificing any equity you had in the pot (presumably, you are not strong enough to call the re-raise). Compare this to when you are wrong when you float. In many cases when you float, you will call the \$100 bet on the flop and fold when your opponent bets out on the turn. In this case, you've lost \$100 as compared to \$400 while also being able to take a draw, however weak it may be. Granted, your opponent might check-raise you on the turn, but this costs the same as trying to steal the pot on the flop with a raise. It's a relatively small error to call a pot-sized bet with the bare nut flush draw on the flop and then fold to a pot-sized bet on the turn when you miss, but a relatively large error to raise with the bare nut flush draw on the flop and have to fold to a pot-sized re-raise and give up the draw.

In addition, calling also reduces the risk of getting sandbagged in a three-way or multi-way pot. For example, let's say that three players see the flop, there is \$100 in the pot, and you all have \$1,000 stacks. The first player checks on the flop, and the next player -- the pre-flop raiser -- bets, and the action is up to you on the button. You don't have much, but you suspect that the pre-flop raiser is just putting in a c-bet. By calling (floating) here rather than raising, you will lose less when the first player is sandbagging and comes back over the top with a check-raise.

You can see that the value of the float is derived largely from its value as an investment for information -- that is, the information gained from having your opponent (the flop bettor) check the turn and surrender the pot when weak and continue to bet when strong, as well as information gained when you get sandbagged by another opponent in a three-way or multi-way pot at the cost of only one bet rather than two.

Anatomy of the Call:

Draw Equity and Float Equity

Let's examine the anatomy of the call in its entirety. As noted in the preceding section, when your opponent makes a bet and you call that bet, you are making an investment. And when you make an investment, you are looking to get a return on that investment. The question is: What do you get in return for your call?

In deep-stack play, the answer is that the total value of the call is derived from a combination of draw equity and float equity.

Draw Equity

Draw equity is simply your share of the pot derived from tangible hand value -- such as a flush or straight draw, or even, in some cases, a draw to two pair or trips -- and is a combination of direct and implied equity.

Let's say, for instance, you are heads up with position after the flop, there is \$100 in the pot and you have \$2,000 stacks. You hold A♠ K♠ Q♦ 3♣, and the flop is 8♠ 7♣ 2♣, giving you the nut flush draw, for nine probable outs (for illustrative purposes, we will discount any overcard outs; let's say your opponent has AA or maybe two pair, but you don't really know). If your opponent bets \$100 (the size of the pot), then you must have at least 33% equity on the call in order to justify the call, simply because you are putting in one-third of the money.

However, your flush draw only gives you 20% direct equity, because you will only make the flush one out of five times (you have nine outs, and there are 45 unknown cards). This yields a return of only \$60 on your \$100 call (20% of the \$300 total pot is \$60), leaving a \$40 (13%) gap in expected value between your direct share of the current pot and break-even value. And so in most cases, you rely on implied odds -- the payoff when you hit -- in order to fill the gap. Since you are 4 to 1 to hit your flush on the turn, you need to win \$400 on your investment of \$100 to break even. Given that there is \$200 in the pot, your implied odds tell you that you need to win more than \$200 on the turn or river to make this draw profitable. In this case, your opponent must, on average, pay off with a \$200 bet (\$40 x 5) -- or an additional two-thirds pot-sized bet on the turn -- those times when you hit in order to make up for the gap between the 33% equity that you need and the 20% direct equity you have.

	Component	Expected Value	Equity
Draw Equity	Direct Value	\$60	20%
	Implied Value (\$200)*	\$40	13%
Total		\$100	33%

Break Even Draw Equity, Nut Flush Draw

*Opponent pays off with \$200 bet when you make flush

For the most part, poker players on the draw thus far have been trained to think almost entirely in terms of pot odds and implied odds. However, the problem with the bare nut flush draw in PLO is that you often don't have any implied value if your opponents shut down when the flush card hits, and so your implied equity with the bare nut flush draw is often closer to 0% than 13%. As such, it is often difficult to justify a call with the bare nut flush draw in circumstances where your opponent rates to have a hand, such as when a player bets into a field in a multi-way pot.

But as we know, tangible hand value is not the only value to be gained from the call, particularly in situations where your opponent either rates to be weak -- those situations outlined earlier in this chapter. And under these circumstances, your opponents are far more likely to give up and check-and-fold on the turn, either because a scare card hit -- whether or not it actually helped you -- or because they had nothing to begin with.

This value has to be accounted for somehow, which brings us to float equity.

Float Equity

Float equity is your *intangible* value derived from a combination of fold equity and the value of the *information* your opponents give you when they check with the intention of giving up to a bet. It's not important to actually calculate float equity at the table, but it is important to be able to conceptualize it. That said, there are two basic things you need to know about float equity:

1. Float equity has real -- sometimes considerable -- value that can potentially make it profitable to call on otherwise thin hand values.
2. The value of float equity is highly dependent on your opponents.

Point #1: Float Equity has real value

Let's start with point #1. Going back to the previous example, you are heads up with position after the flop, there's \$100 in the pot and you have \$2,000 stacks. You hold A♠ K♠ Q♦ 3♣, and the flop is 8♠ 7♣ 2♣. Again, your opponent bets \$100. This time, your opponent will check-and-fold every time a spade hits the turn (nine cards). But in addition, your observant opponent notices that a jack or six also completes a potential open-ended nut straight draw, and will also check-and-fold to a pot-sized bet 100% of the time that a jack or six hits, giving you six float outs to go with our nine flush outs.

The result is that your opponent will check-and-fold on 15 of the 45 possible cards -- or 33% of the cards that hit the turn. Now in this case, you don't have any implied equity because your opponent shuts down when you make the flush, but you do effectively have the 33% pot equity you need to justify calling a pot-sized bet due to the six float outs.

	Component	Outs	Equity	Expected Value
Draw Equity	Direct Value	9	20%	\$60
	Implied Value	-	0%	\$0
Float Equity	Fold Equity/Info	6	13%	\$40
Total		15	33%	\$100

Nut Flush Draw Plus 6 Float Outs, No Implied Value

And if you increase your thinking opponent's 100% check-and-fold range to include any straightening card that completes the 13-card nut wrap (J-T-9-x on a 8-7-2 board), then he will also check-and-fold if a ten or nine hits the turn, yielding six more float outs, for a total of 12. Now he will check-and-fold on 21 of 45 unknown cards or nearly 47% of the time. Now all of a sudden you have \$140 of expected value on your \$100 call for a net gain

of \$40, and float equity has made it quite profitable to call the bare nut flush draw against your lone opponent.

	Component	Outs	Equity	Expected Value
Draw Equity	Direct Value	9	20%	\$60
	Implied Value	-	0%	\$0
Float Equity	Fold Equity/Info	12	27%	\$80
Total		21	47%	\$140

Nut Flush Draw Plus 12 Float Outs, No Implied Value

Point #2: Float Equity is highly player-dependent

Now on to the second point, which is that the value of float equity is highly player-dependent, and sometimes wildly so. This is because the float is dependent on the information gained when your opponent checks the turn. The problem is that two players holding the same hand may react differently to the same scare cards.

Let's say you are still heads up with position after the flop, there's \$100 in the pot and you have \$2,000 stacks. Again, you hold A♠ K♠ Q♦ 3♣, and the flop is 8♣ 7♣ 2♠. However, this time, your opponent has specifically A♦ A♥ K♦ K♥. He bets \$100 on the flop and you call.

Now let's make your opponent about the weakest player in the world, and say that he will check-and-fold on any turn card except the A♠ or K♠, the two cards that give him the nuts. In this case, you effectively have 95% equity on the call, as your opponent will now check-and-fold on 39 of 41 cards. 9 outs are attributable to the flush draw for 9/41 or 22% direct equity, while the other 30 outs are attributable to the float, giving you 30/41 or 73% float equity on your call.

While that might seem like a fairly extreme case, it's actually not as far from reality as it might seem, as many players -- and not just extremely weak ones -- holding A♦ A♥ K♦ K♥ for one dry pair would shut down unimproved on the turn out of fear that they are already behind something like a set or two pair. From their perspective, they are either already behind or are not far ahead of a draw.

I mean, if you are holding A♦ A♥ K♦ K♥, bet the pot, and get called on a 8♣ 7♣ 2♠ flop, how far are you going to go with this hand? That said, a lot of players would rather give up a small pot than risk losing a big pot with just one pair.

Against Weakest Opponent with A♦ A♥ K♦ K♥: Check/folds turn 95% of time

	Component	Outs	Equity	Expected Value
Draw Equity	Direct Value	9	22%	\$65.85
	Implied Value	-	0%	\$0
Float Equity	Fold Equity/Info	30	73%	\$219.51
Total		39	95%	\$285.36

However, some players don't bet only when they are strong; they also continue to bet when they are weak.

Let's say your opponent is, instead, at the other end of spectrum. If he is a maniac who always bets the pot on the turn, we will have gained implied value on your draw, but lose float equity because you won't know when he is weak strictly from the betting. A straightening card like the T♦ or 9♥ may create fold equity -- your opponent with AAKK would likely fold to a raise -- but that fold equity has no useful value unless your opponent tells you that he is weak by checking (or taking a weak stab).

In this matchup, you will again have 22% direct equity on your \$100 flop call, but also have an additional 22% in implied equity. This is easy enough to figure, because you will make the flush and get back \$300 from the pot 22% for an expected value of \$65.85, and you will get an additional \$300 from your opponent at the same time for an additional gain in expected value of the same \$65.85, which equates to 22% in implied equity.

The result is draw equity of 44% and expected value of \$131.70 (\$31.70 net of your \$100 investment on the flop). But in this case, you also have zero float equity because your opponent never checks when weak. As such, draw equity comprises total equity against this opponent.

	Component	Outs	Equity	Expected Value
Draw Equity	Direct Value	9	22%	\$65.85
	Implied Value	-	22%	\$65.85
Float Equity	Fold Equity/Info	0	0%	\$0
Total		9	44%	\$131.70

Against Maniac with A♦ A♥ K♦ K♥ Who Always Pots Turn

The bottom line is that the weaker your opponents, the more valuable the float becomes, and the higher your float equity. In contrast, the stronger, or more aggressive, your opponents are, the less valuable the float becomes in and of itself, and the more dependent your call will be on actual hand values.

PLO Small-Ball Concept #6: The value of float equity is dependent on the information your opponent gives you when he checks with the intention of folding on the next betting round.

PLO Small-Ball Concept #7: The weaker your opponent, the more valuable the float becomes, and the higher your float equity.

PLO Small-Ball Concept #8: The stronger, more aggressive, or otherwise maniacal the opponent, the greater your implied equity on the draw, but the less float equity you have.

Float Equity: Other Considerations

Floating requires a high rate of success because you are often risking four bets to win two for a 2:1 ratio, assuming your opponent bet the full pot on the flop and that you are planning on betting the pot when checked to (as you usually should). However, your risk/reward ratio improves as the size of your opponent's bet on the flop gets smaller. For example, if your opponent bets half the pot on the flop or \$50 into a \$100 pot, then you will be risking \$250 to win \$150 for a 1.67 to 1 ratio rather than 2 to 1.

Floating also has another drawback in that it carries the risk of reverse implied odds. As you may have noticed from the hands in the playbook in this chapter, you will often be on the float with draws to what could be second-best hands, such as small flushes or middle two pair. In these instances, you may wind up hitting that hand and paying off additional bets when your opponent makes a bigger flush or bigger two pair. These possibilities may severely dampen the value of the float.

However, several factors serve to counterbalance the risks:

1. The size of any draws you have. The bigger your draw -- and the bigger your draw equity -- the less dependent the value of the call is on the information gained via the float and vice versa. For example, if you have a 16-card nut wrap and your lone opponent bets the pot into you, you are already getting value from the pot to call on a pot-odds basis alone, as the pot is offering you 2:1 odds to call, but you are better than 2:1 to make the nut straight on the turn. In this case, the value of the call is not dependent on the float whatsoever. On the other hand, if all you have is a gutshot, then the value of the call becomes highly dependent on the float.

In other words, you need your opponent to check-and-fold far more often in order for it to be profitable to call with a gutshot than you do with a 16-card nut wrap.

2. The assumption that your opponents' checks represent reliable steal signs. The risk is also counterbalanced by the reasonable assumption that your opponent checking the turn (for example) is a fairly reliable indicator that he will actually fold to a legitimate bet.

3. Weak bets are fairly high-percentage float indicators. Not only do weak bets on the flop give you better odds on the play, but they are also fairly high-percentage indicators that your opponent will check-and-fold on the turn.

The key is that by using the indicators, you are cherry-picking the high-percentage, high-value floating opportunities -- spots where your opponent is presumably weak to begin with. Moreover, having draws while floating reduces your reliance on float equity when making the play. In aggregate, assuming you stick to the high-percentage opportunities, the value gained from the float should more than offset the value loss those times when you do make a second-best hand and pay off.

PLO Small-Ball Concept #9: The weaker your draw, the more dependent the value of your call is on the float.

The Next Level

Our study of the float certainly has value on its own merits, as this is a useful play for any sophisticated poker player's arsenal. But more importantly, the ability to properly execute the play opens the door to a world of opportunities, allowing you to profitably play a far wider range of hands in short-handed pots where nobody rates to hit the flop hard.

Because the thing to realize about pot-limit Omaha is that in a short-handed pot, the flop is mostly just foreplay. And once you figure out just how strong the positional advantage is in PLO -- and how to fully utilize the positional advantage via the float -- the next step is to deliberately engage in small-pot warfare with an increasingly wide range of hands in situations where you can't be getting the worst of it.

This sets the stage for Small Ball -- our core strategy for using the positional advantage to exploit our opponents in short-handed pots in general and in short-handed play in particular -- which will be discussed in Part IV.

Pot-Limit Omaha Small-Ball Concept #10: In a short-handed pot, the flop is mostly just foreplay.

Part II: Advanced Concepts

General concepts for advanced players

Let's get something out of the way: The true mark of an expert player is not the ability to maneuver in tight spots, but rather the ability to avoid

putting himself into tight spots to begin with.

If you picked a person at random and asked them what skills he thought separate professional poker players from stark amateurs, my guess is his answer would invariably involve two things:

1. The ability to make impossible, mind-bending bluffs
2. The ability to see into opponents' souls and make unbelievable calls.

This is easy enough to figure, as impossible bluffs and unbelievable calls represent tangible, extraordinary displays of poker skill that both make for exciting TV and are easy enough for the casual observer to appreciate, if not comprehend. And yet these skills are not at all what make an expert poker player an expert.

The truth is that the mark of an expert poker player is far more subtle than the average person would expect. It is not in the bluffs or the calls, but rather in the fundamentals and basic strategy -- the stuff you might not get much of a sense of from watching poker on TV. Because all the fancy plays in the world won't make you a consistent winner if you don't have a solid foundation to rely on. Moreover, if your game is fundamentally sound to begin with, you won't have to make a lot of difficult decisions, and you will find by default that this game is easy to play.

It's like the shortstop in baseball who can make all the spectacular plays but leads the league in errors -- he might look good on the highlight reel, but he will cost you some games in the process.

So while I can show you what it takes to take your game to the next level, only first having a solid fundamental understanding of the game will make it possible. And the most important thing in pot-limit Omaha is how you think about the game.

Thinking About the Game Correctly

When I set out to write *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy*, the one thing I didn't want to do with the book was say "Play X in scenario A, fold Y if B, and always pot Z or else." Because the truth about PLO is that there may be a lot of different ways to play the game and win; some winning players tend to play very aggressively pre-flop -- constantly raising and 3-betting before the flop -- while others may prefer to play more passively. That said, my goal with the first book was to establish a *framework* for thinking about the game.

You see, the secret to starting hands in Omaha isn't actually in any point count system or magic formula -- the secret is in understanding that *post-flop play dictates pre-flop playing strategy*.

What's important is that you have a plan with specific objectives to win money after the flop. Once you know what you are trying to accomplish after the flop and what skills you have at your disposal, a proper starting hand isn't necessarily J-T-9-8 double-suited or A-A-K-K double-suited, but rather *any hand that helps you meet those objectives utilizing that skill set*.

That said, certain things hold true no matter how nitty or maniacal you plan to be.

For example, the physical laws of the straight draws apply to all players no matter what. The fact is that if a player routinely draws at sucker wraps in multi-way pots, he will tend to get got by somebody drawing at the nut wrap. This will be true no matter how brilliant either player is.

Meanwhile, it doesn't make much sense to play a hand strongly before the flop if you can't play it strongly when you catch your flop (i.e. the biggest draw you can hit is a sucker wrap).

I read a thread on an Internet website where the poster -- holding 8-6-4-3 suited -- had raised before the flop behind a couple of limpers in a deep stacked live full-ring game. Not to single him out -- I see this a lot -- but this is a bad idea, especially in full-ring play. What ended up happening was that the player flopped a 16-card sucker wrap when the flop came Q-7-5 rainbow. It got checked to the player in front of him, who bet the pot.

The debate was whether the player should have called or raised. In the actual hand, the player just called, fearing either a better wrap (9-8-6-x) or that the bettor wouldn't fold to a raise. Everybody else folded, the 2♣ hit the turn, giving him a 20-card wrap and a club draw, the other player checked, and he checked behind him.

Here's the fundamental problem with the hand: The player raised before the flop, caught about as good a flop as he could have hoped for, but didn't feel comfortable enough to play the hand strongly after the flop.

The truth is that a fold on the flop probably wouldn't have been much worse than calling. But if you are going to fold, then why play the hand to begin with?

The real answer is that the player would have been better off folding this hand *before* the flop, as opposed to raising and building the pot with what is at best a marginal drawing hand (limping in from late position might be acceptable once you have mastered all of the concepts and post-flop skills presented in both this book and *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy*; otherwise, you are probably better off folding this hand altogether).

The key to all of this is that -- as those who have read the first book should know -- the 8-6-4-3 structure (two single gaps on top of the hand) produces a non-nut 16-card wrap. In contrast, 9-8-6-4 (with the two gaps on the bottom) produces a 16-card *nut* wrap, which the player would have been much more comfortable playing strongly after the flop.

And so we get to the point of the discussion, which is “Thinking About the Game Correctly.” And what it comes down to is this: Once you figure out the difference between 8-6-4-3 and 9-8-6-4, and the difference between hands like Q-9-9-2 double-suited and A♠ 8♥ 8♦ 2♣, you will be on the right track.

On Raising Before the Flop: Deception

There’s another key element to the 8-6-4-3 hand in the previous section, and that is the fundamental decision to raise before the flop. Clearly, the raise wasn’t done for value (or the hand would have been played more strongly after the flop), nor was it done to clear the field (I think seven players ended up seeing the flop in the actual hand). The only other reasonable motivation I can think of for raising, then, is deception.

Well, we know that raising before the flop with 8-6-4-3 in full-ring play is generally a bad idea. But let’s change the hand to 9-8-6-4, which will yield a 16-card nut wrap if the flop comes Q-7-5. Meanwhile, nobody will be able to put you on those four cards because you raised.

Is a raise with 9-8-6-4 for deception worthwhile?

Almost definitely not.

Sure, it is one of my favorite hands, and I will play it under most circumstances if at least single-suited. But the problem with 9-8-6-4 is that catching 7-5-x is a longshot at about 25:1 against.

There are two basic benefits of deception when raising before the flop:

1. When you hit the flop hard and surprise your opponents, you may get more action on the present hand.
2. On future hands, your opponents won’t be able to think that you missed a flop just because you “don’t play those cards,” and thus you may be able to steal a few more pots later on.

The thing about raising with 9-8-6-4 (or 8-6-4-3 for that matter) in what will certainly be a multi-way pot is that there is absolutely no good reason to do it. If you follow the guidelines laid out in the “Before the Flop” section of the first book, you will already be raising at times with premium or near-premium-class hands such as 9-8-7-6 and 10-9-8-6 -- and maybe even 9-8-6-5 -- all of which will hit the flop hard more often than 9-8-6-4, and all of which hit the same 7-5-x flop hard.

The bottom line is that it doesn’t make much sense to raise before the flop with speculative drawing hands -- or at least not for the purpose of deception in a full ring game where pots are generally contested multi-way after the flop.

J-J-8-6 Before the Flop: Limping vs. Raising

I was watching a friend of mine play in a full-ring \$5-\$10 PLO game when he was dealt J♣ J♦ 8♣ 6♣ in the cutoff seat. A couple of players limped in front of him, and my friend proceeded to raise the full pot. Four players saw the flop, which came T♥ 7♦ 4♠, giving my buddy an overpair and a double-gutshot nut straight draw.

The other three players in the hand checked. My buddy then checked behind, which surprised me a bit, as this is a pretty clean flop, and about as good a flop as you can hope for when you raise before the flop with J-J-8-6.

After the hand, I asked him why he checked; his response was “Do you know how often I get check-raised?”

This much is true; in addition to being one of the bigger winners in this particular game, my buddy was also a certifiable maniac (at least at the time) who had been known to raise the full pot pre-flop basically every time he played a hand from late position. Meanwhile, the vast majority of check-raises on the flop in PLO occur when someone puts in a raise pre-flop, and his opponents check to him on the flop with the expectation that he will follow through with a continuation bet.

But then the question is this: Why even raise at all with J-J-8-6 in a multi-way pot if you are only going to bet when you flop a set or a straight, both of which are long shots even when combined?

As in the previous discussion, deception can’t be the answer. You might be tempted to say “Now when I raise pre-flop, they can’t say that I never raise with jacks.” But this isn’t true, because you should already be raising with hands like Q-J-J-T suited or Q-Q-J-J.

It also doesn’t make much sense to raise to thin the field if you don’t plan on betting the flop without a set due to the fear of being check-raised.

That said, I think if you are going to play a hand like J-J-8-6 from the cutoff, you should usually limp in. One of the advantages of limping in over raising is that it keeps your opponents predictable -- when they check to you, it will usually be because they don’t have anything, rather than because they expect you to bet. In addition, limping keeps the pot small where you are most likely going to want to play a small pot when you flop something like an overpair, anyway.

The main idea here isn’t so much that you should never raise with a hand like J-J-8-6, but rather that when you decide to raise with a given hand pre-flop, you should lend some credence to how the hand will actually play out after the flop before you do so.

We will discuss some specific reasons why you might raise or even re-raise before the flop with some fairly marginal hands (though probably not a

hand like J-J-8-6 specifically) later on, as there are legitimate reasons for raising with certain kinds of hands in certain spots. However, the problem is that most players play hands strongly for the wrong reasons.

Following Through: The Betting Machine

Newton's First Law: *An object in motion tends to stay in motion, and an object at rest tends to stay at rest unless acted upon by an external unbalanced force.*

Or as it pertains to pot-limit Omaha, once you set the betting machine in motion, you should tend to keep betting until somebody plays back at you.

Here's a hypothetical situation: It's a \$5-\$5 blind game with \$1,000 stacks and typical opponents, and you are on the button. Two players limp in front of you. You limp, and both blinds check. There is \$25 in the pot.

Flop (\$25): J♥ 7♦ 2♥. Everybody checks to you. You bet \$25, and only the big blind calls.

Turn (\$75): K♣. Your opponent checks. You bet \$75 and he calls.

River (\$225): 7♠. Your opponent checks. You bet \$125.

The question: Which of the following hands might you have played this way?

- A. J♠ J♣ T♥ 5♠
- B. A♥ T♥ 9♦ 4♦
- C. J♦ T♦ 9♣ 6♥
- D. T♦ 9♥ 8♠ 5♥
- E. All of the above except for maybe C, with which you might check the river and show down.

The best answer is (E), or all of the above except for maybe C, with which you might check the river and show down.

When everybody checks to you on the button, an average player will far too often make the error of taking one stab at the pot and then shutting down, even with a strong draw. Much of the time, the thought behind stopping is that "the other player called the flop and may call again on the turn," or that "the other player may be trapping and planning on check-raising me."

What's missing, however, is that when everybody checks to you on the button, *it is usually because they don't have anything*. This is especially true in a pot that was unraised pre-flop, because in that case there is little reason for your opponents to expect you to bet. And oftentimes, even if a player checks and then calls your bet on the flop, the other player may not be strong enough to call another bet on the turn. And even if the other player does call on the turn, he may not be able to call another bet on the river. This is particularly true if your opponent is on the draw himself, which will be the case far more often than not.

And so we get to...

Hwang's Corollary: Once you decide to start betting at a pot, you should play virtually every hand as if you flopped the nuts until your opponents play back at you.

More specifically, you should bet as if you've flopped top set until your opponent bets into you or you get raised; if that happens, then you can reevaluate your options. And you do this whether you flop top set, a wrap, the nut flush draw with a gutshot, or something weaker like top pair or an open-ended straight draw (or even just plain air).

Now this doesn't mean that you should always bet weak draws or weak hands when everybody checks to you on the button; it just means that when you do choose to make a play at the pot, you need to follow through. The obvious exceptions to the rule are when a flush or straight is possible on the flop, or when the board is paired; you also might slow down if you have an extremely weak hand or weak draw and you pick up multiple callers on the flop.

The Stack-to-Pot Ratio (SPR)

In *Professional No-Limit Hold'em*, authors Matt Flynn, Sunny Mehta, and Ed Miller introduced the stack-to-pot ratio (SPR), which is simply the ratio of the effective stacks to the current size of the pot. For example, if you have a \$1,000 remaining stack and there is \$100 in the pot, then your SPR is \$1,000/\$100 or simply 10. Alternatively, let's say there's \$100 in the pot, you have a \$1,000 stack (for an SPR of 10) and are heads up with an opponent who only has a \$300 stack (for an SPR of \$300/\$100 or 3); in this case, the *effective* SPR is the SPR of the smaller stack -- which is 3 -- because the size of the smaller stack is all you are playing for.

As it happens, the SPR is a quite useful tool for thinking about PLO. In fact, the SPR is perhaps an even more useful concept for PLO than NL hold'em due to the bet-size restrictions of pot-limit play, as well as the relatively standard (pot-sized) bet sizing used in PLO; both of these aspects serve to make the application of the SPR more rigid.

What Does SPR Actually Mean?

So what does SPR actually mean to you, and how should you use it?

The first thing you need to know is that an SPR of 1 means that there is one pot-sized bet left; an SPR of 4 means there is enough left for two pot-sized bets heads up or a pot-sized bet and a pot-sized raise; an SPR of 13 is the equivalent of three pot-sized bets heads up.

In other words, if there is \$100 in the pot on the flop, and we have \$100 effective stacks, then there is enough money left to make exactly one pot-sized bet. If, instead, we have \$400 stacks, then there is enough to make \$100 pot-sized bet and a pot-sized raise to \$400; alternatively, if we make a pot-sized bet on the flop and get one caller, then we have enough to make second pot-sized bet (\$300) on the turn all-in. Meanwhile, if we have \$1,300 stacks, there is enough money left to make a \$100 pot-sized bet, a pot-sized raise to \$400, and a pot-sized re-raise all-in for \$1,300 total; this is also enough to bet the pot on the flop and get a single caller, bet the pot on the turn and get called again, and then make one last pot-sized bet on the river all-in.

Note that if the effective SPR is over 13, and only two players contest the pot after the flop, *the only way for all the money to go in is if somebody puts in a raise at some point in the hand.*

With that in mind, we'll categorize an $SPR \leq 1$ to be an ultra-low-SPR situation, and an $SPR \leq 4$ to be a low-SPR situation. We will also categorize an SPR between 4 and 13 as a mid-SPR situation, and an $SPR > 13$ as a high-SPR situation. The distinction is important, because as we'll see, SPR has a dramatic effect on post-flop playing decisions.

PLO Tip: When the effective SPR is over 13 and only two players put money in the pot after the flop, the only way for all the money to go in is if someone puts in a raise at some point in the hand.

Conceptualizing SPR: Heads-Up Action After the Flop

SPR	Breakeven Equity All-in on Flop	Pot-Sized Bets	Category	Category II
0.5	25.0%		Ultra-Low	Pot Odds
0.75	30.0%		Ultra-Low	Territory
1	33.3%	1	Ultra-Low	
1.5	37.5%		Low	Shove-or-Fold
2	40.0%		Low	Territory
3	42.9%		Low	
4	44.4%	2	Low	
5	45.5%		Mid	Judgment
6	46.2%		Mid	Territory
7	46.7%		Mid	
8	47.1%		Mid	
9	47.4%		Mid	
10	47.6%		Mid	
11	47.8%		Mid	
12	48.0%		Mid	
13	48.1%	3	Mid	
>13	>48.1%	>3	High	Big-Play (Implied Odds) Territory

*Assuming only two people contest pot after flop

High-SPR Situations (SPR > 13): Big-Pot Hands vs. Small-Pot Hands

When the SPR is greater than 13, there are more than 3 pot-sized bets left to play, and you are in a high-SPR situation and in **Big Play (Implied Odds) Territory**. And when the stacks are this deep, it is most crucial to distinguish between big-pot and small-pot hands.

In *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy*, my main focus was on the hands that are capable of winning the big pots, namely the nut straight with re-draws, the overfull (such as A-A-x-x on a A-K-K flop, or A-K-x-x on a A-A-K flop), top set (especially with re-draws), the nut flush, and dominating draws (such as the 16-card nut wrap on a rainbow flop, top pair and a 13-card nut wrap on a rainbow flop, or any of the above combined with a flush draw). These hands are universally strong in that they tend to do well no matter how deep you are.

In other words, you will be about as comfortable putting four bets in on the flop with these hands as you will one. And so generally speaking, you will ram and jam with these hands in an effort to get the money all-in on the flop against any amount of action. The key with these hands is that it is hard to be a big dog with them -- a 16-card nut wrap is almost a coin flip against even a set -- while you will often have your opponents smashed.

The nut straight with re-draws
The overfull (A-A-x-x on A-x-x board, or A-K-x-x on A-A-K board)
Top set for the nuts (especially with re-draws)
The nut flush
Dominating draws

Big-Pot Hands: High-SPR/Universal Hands

But what do you do in a high-SPR situation when you aren't that strong?

Let's say it's a \$5-\$5 game. There are five players and \$25 in the pot on the flop, and everybody has \$1,000 stacks for an SPR of 40, which equates to four pot-sized bets. You are last to act. The first player leads out with a \$25 bet, and everybody folds to you.

As you know from our previous study, it would be a disaster to commit your stack on the flop here with hands like the bare nut straight with no re-draws, the underfull (as in A-7-x-x on a A-7-7 flop or 7-7-x-x on a A-A-7 flop), middle set or bottom set, bare top two pair, undertrips (as in 8-7-6-5 on a Q-7-7 board), the second-nut flush, or a sucker wrap or draw. Because with an SPR of 40, it would take four pot-sized bets in order to get all-in heads up on the flop (your opponent bets \$25, you make a pot-sized raise to \$100, your opponent re-raises the max to \$325, and you re-raise the max to \$1,000 total).

Now this might seem obvious, but there are only three betting rounds after the flop in Omaha (the flop, the turn, and the river). And so, as noted earlier, the only way a fourth bet can physically go in is if someone at some point in the hand puts in a raise. In this case, with your opponent leading the betting, it is probably going to have to be you. But sitting this deep, you are going to have trouble finding opponents who are willing to stick four bets in on the flop with a hand worse than yours. And so as a general rule, you should basically never (if ever) raise with any of these small-favorite/big-dog holdings when the SPR > 13. In fact, unless you are on a stone bluff (and can justify it), you should tend to refrain from raising on the flop in this spot unless you have a hand with which you actually want to put a fourth bet in of any kind.

Small-Pot/Low-SPR Hands

The bare nut straight
The underfull
Middle or bottom set
Undertrips (i.e. 8-7-6-5 on A-7-7 flop)
The second-nut flush
Big non-nut wraps

PLO Tip: When the SPR > 13 (i.e. there are more than three pot-sized bets left to play), you should tend to refrain from raising on the flop unless you have a hand strong enough to justify putting in a fourth bet; this generally means smooth-calling on the flop with small-pot hands when facing a bet.

Low-SPR situations (SPR ≤ 4) and Ultra-low-SPR situations (SPR ≤ 1)

Often, the effective SPR won't be that high, either because there was one raise or multiple raises before the flop, or because you are playing with shorter stacks to begin with (some opponents prefer to play small stacks before the hand even starts, while others might wind up short-stacked by losing a hand or two). And when the SPR is less than or equal to 4 -- a **low-SPR situation** -- you are in **shove-or-fold territory**. That is, if you face a bet and the SPR ≤ 4, you should generally shove all-in if you contest the pot at all.

Let's say there's \$1,000 in the pot on the flop and everybody still has \$1,000 stacks, for an SPR of 1. Again, you are last to act, the first player leads out with an all-in bet for \$1,000, and everybody else folds to you. In this situation, you can't fold hands like middle set, the underfull, undertrips, top two pair, the bare nut straight with no re-draw, or the second-nut flush, because there are a lot more hands you can beat for one bet, such as one pair (like AA), a draw, or a smaller flush.

Moreover, if your SPR is in the 1-4 range, you should raise and commit your stack when facing a bet when holding a small-pot hand like the bare nut straight, middle or bottom set, top two pair, a weaker wrap like 9-8-6-5 on a T-7-2 board, undertrips, something like KK with the king-high flush draw on a J♣ 7♦ 2♣ board, or even top pair with re-draws (something like T-9-8-7 on a T-5-2 board, especially with a flush draw to go with it). Note

that these are all hands you should rarely (if ever) raise with when the effective SPR is high ($SPR > 13$).

The key is that when the SPR is low -- when the pot is already big compared to the effective stack size -- the range of hands you should be willing to commit with on the flop will widen dramatically. In fact, when the SPR gets down to 1 or less -- **ultra-low-SPR territory** -- you almost can't fold if you catch any piece of the flop whatsoever, especially as the SPR dips lower and lower.

Note from the "Conceptualizing SPR" table that you only need 33.3% equity to justify an all-in confrontation with an SPR of 1, and only 25% equity when the SPR is down to 0.5. For this reason, I classify an ultra-low-SPR as **pot-odds territory**, since you are essentially playing for pot odds.

That said, the gist of it is that the deeper the stacks and the higher the SPR, the bigger a mistake it is to commit to small-favorite/big-dog hands; meanwhile, the shorter the stacks and the lower the SPR, the more aggressive you should be with the small-favorite/big-dog hands, and the more willing you should be to commit with some weaker holdings (such as undertrips or one pair) as well.

PLO Tip: The deeper the stacks and the higher the SPR, the bigger a mistake it is to commit your stack to the small pot (small-favorite/big-dog) hands such as a bare nut straight, middle or bottom set, bare two pair, or undertrips.

PLO Tip: In a low-SPR situation ($SPR \leq 4$), you should generally shove all-in if you contest the pot at all.

PLO Tip: In ultra-low-SPR situations ($SPR \leq 1$), you are virtually pot-committed if you catch any piece of the flop.

The Gray Area: Mid and Mid-High-SPR Situations ($4 < SPR \leq 13$)

So from what we've gathered so far:

1. If you have a big pot hand (the nut straight with re-draws, the overfull, top set for the nuts, the nut flush, or a dominating draw), you are generally good to go no matter what, and should ram-and-jam.
2. If you have a strong small pot hand (like a bare nut straight, middle or bottom set, the underfull, undertrips, or top two pair), the default play is to smooth call a bet if the $SPR > 13$ (a high-SPR situation and big-play territory), but shove all-in if the $SPR \leq 4$ (a low-SPR situation and shove-or-fold territory).
3. If the $SPR \leq 1$ -- an ultra-low-SPR situation and pot-odds territory-- you are essentially pot-committed if you catch any piece of the flop whatsoever, with very few exceptions.

And so the next question is: What do you do with a small-pot hand if the SPR is in the mid-range between 4 and 13?

The answer is that you are pretty much on your own. The mid-SPR range is gray area -- judgment territory. Naturally, if the SPR is in the low-mid range (closer to 4), then you should lean towards treating the situation as a low-SPR situation, and if the SPR is in the high-mid range (closer to 13), you should lean towards treating it like a high-SPR situation and proceed more cautiously (i.e. by smooth calling rather than raising). But otherwise, generally speaking, your play in this area is going to be more read dependent than in the other SPR ranges.

SPR Considerations: The Table

What follows is a table with SPR considerations for committing your stack on the flop with various holdings in the four representative SPR ranges. The "1 Bet" column represents the ultra-low-SPR range ($SPR \leq 1$). The "2 Bets" column represents the low-SPR range ($SPR \leq 4$). The "3 Bets" column represents the mid-SPR range ($4 < SPR \leq 13$) -- the gray area -- while the "4 Bets" column represents the high-SPR range ($SPR > 13$).

An "OK" means that it is generally OK to commit your stack on the flop; in other words, you can raise against any bet. "Iffy" means that it is a marginal decision. "No" means that if you commit your stack in this situation, you are probably doing something wrong. "No Way" means that it is not a close decision; raising in these spots is a bad idea.

"OK/Iffy" means that it is generally OK to commit at the lower end of the SPR range for that box, but "Iffy" towards the higher end of the SPR range. "Iffy/No" means that it is a marginal decision at the low end of the SPR range for that box, but a clear no-raise towards the high end.

So if you flop a king-high flush, for example, you can't fold for one bet, and you probably can't fold for two, especially if the SPR is closer to 1 than 4. But for three bets, you need to start thinking small pot, and should tend to smooth call as the SPR creeps towards 13. But for four bets, you are in clear smooth call territory, as you are unlikely to be able to put in four bets with a king-high flush and expect to come out getting the best of it.

	1 Bet	2 Bets	3 Bets	4 Bets
Hand on Flop	SPR ≤ 1	SPR ≤ 4	SPR ≤ 13	SPR > 13
Dry AA on K-7-2 rainbow board	OK	OK/Iffy	No	No Way
AA plus nut flush draw on K♠7♦2♠ board	OK	OK	OK/Iffy	Iffy/No
Top pair with re-draws (T-9-8-7 on T-5-2 flop)	OK	OK	Iffy/No	No Way
The bare nut straight (no re-draw)	OK	OK	Iffy/No	No Way
Nut straight with set or flush re-draw	OK	OK	OK	OK
King-high flush	OK	OK/Iffy	Iffy/No	No Way
Nut flush	OK	OK	OK	OK
Bare top two pair	OK	OK	Iffy/No	No
Bare middle set	OK	OK	Iffy/No	No
Bare nut flush draw on unpaired board	OK	OK/Iffy	No	No
Non-nut wrap (such as T-9-7-5 on J-8-3 board)	OK	OK	Iffy/No	No
Sucker wrap (such as 9-8-7-6 on J-T-2 board)	OK	Iffy/No	No	No Way

SPR Considerations: All-In Confrontations on the Flop

	1 Bet	2 Bets	3 Bets	4 Bets
Hand on Flop	SPR ≤ 1	SPR ≤ 4	SPR ≤ 13	SPR > 13
13-card nut wrap on rainbow flop	OK	OK	OK/Iffy	No
16-card nut wrap on rainbow flop	OK	OK	OK	OK/Iffy
16-card nut wrap with nut flush draw	OK	OK	OK	OK
16-card nut wrap, no flush draw on two-flush board	OK	OK/Iffy	Iffy/No	No Way
Top set for the nuts	OK	OK	OK	OK
Overfull	OK	OK	OK	OK
Underfull (such as A-7-x-x on A-7-7 board)	OK	OK	Iffy/No	No Way
Under-trips (such as A-7-6-5 on T-7-7 board)	OK	OK	Iffy/No	No Way



Using SPR: Practice Situations

1. A \$1-\$2 game with a \$5 bring-in. You (\$600) are dealt 8♠ 7♣ 6♦ 6♥ in the big blind. Three players limp in. The small blind limps. You call. The flop comes Q♣ Q♦ 6♠, giving you the underfull. The small blind checks. You bet \$25. The next player folds. The player behind him (\$350) calls. The next player (\$550) raises to \$125. The small blind folds. What do you do?

Answer: Fold. This is both a re-raise or fold situation and a classic small-favorite/big-dog scenario in which you are up against two players with at least trip queens. The effective SPR is 22, as it will likely cost you \$550 (the size of the aggressor's stack) to see the hand through, and \$550/\$25 (the size of the pot on the flop) equals 22, making this a high-SPR scenario.

If neither opponent has Q-6 for the overfull, you might be a small equity favorite if you re-raise all-in and one or both opponents call. However, one

opponent -- most likely the raiser -- may have Q-6, in which case you are drawing dead.

2. A \$1-\$2 game with a \$5 bring-in. You (\$100) are dealt 8♦ 7♣ 6♦ 6♥ in the big blind. Three players limp in. The small blind limps. You call. The flop comes Q♣ Q♦ 6♠, giving you the underfull. The small blind checks. You bet \$25. The next player folds. The player behind him (\$350) calls. The next player (\$550) raises to \$125. The small blind folds. What do you do?

Answer: Call. Again, both opponents rate to have at least trip queens, and one may very well have Q-6. But in this case, you only had a \$100 stack on the flop for an SPR of 4, and so the penalty for being wrong (that neither player has Q-6) is not nearly as steep.

3. A \$1-\$2 game with a \$5 bring-in. You (\$100) are dealt 8♦ 7♣ 6♦ 6♥ on the button. Two players limp in front of you. You limp. Both blinds call. The flop comes Q♣ Q♦ 6♠. It gets checked to the player in front of you (\$500), who bets \$25. What do you do?

Answer: Raise. It's a low-SPR scenario, you probably have the best hand, and the penalty for being wrong isn't steep.

4. A \$1-\$2 game with a \$5 bring-in and \$500 stacks. You are dealt 8♦ 7♣ 6♦ 6♥ on the button. Two players limp in front of you. You limp. Both blinds call. The flop comes Q♣ Q♦ 6♠. It gets checked to the player in front of you, who bets \$25. What do you do?

Answer: Call. With a high SPR (~20), you should be less inclined to raise, as you don't want to play a big pot with the underfull.

5. A \$1-\$2 game with a \$5 bring-in. You (\$480) are dealt A♠ K♣ J♠ 8♣ in middle position. Two players limp in front of you. You raise to \$25. Two players call behind you. The small blind calls the \$25 all-in. The big blind calls. Both limpers call. The flop comes K♦ J♣ T♣, giving you top two pair, a gutshot, and the second-nut flush draw. Everybody checks to you. What do you do?

Answer: Bet the pot. You may have the best hand with two pair, and your flush draw may very well be live as well. And with an SPR of 2.6, the penalty for being wrong (i.e. getting raised by a player with a straight) isn't steep. The required equity to justify an all-in confrontation here is 41.9%; you are actually a 57.5%/42.5% favorite over a bare A-Q-x-x and a 43.9%/56.1% dog against A♥ Q♥ J♥ J♦ (in which case you are behind, but still profitable), but about 3:1 dog against A-Q-x-x with the nut clubs. Basically, it would be difficult for it to be wrong to commit here.

In the actual hand, I bet \$175 and everybody folded, leaving me heads up with the small blind. The small blind actually had Q-9-9-4 for a straight -- against which I was about a 3:2 favorite -- and a club hit the turn to give me the flush.

6. \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in, six-handed. You (\$480) are dealt A♠ A♦ Q♠ Q♣ UTG. You open with a raise to \$20, and only the two blinds call. The flop comes 9♠ 7♠ 4♦, giving you two overpair and the nut flush draw. The small blind (\$1,200) checks. The big blind (\$500) bets \$60. What do you do?

Answer: Raise. With a mid-range SPR < 8, you should lean towards raising with an overpair and the nut flush draw. At this price, there are plenty of hands worse than yours that will play for stacks, and you have any drawing hand smashed with your nut flush draw and overpair (plus a second overset draw with the queens). You might get a hand like two pair to fold, and you can't be in bad shape even if called.

In the actual hand, I raised to \$240 and both opponents folded.

7. \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in. You (\$475) are dealt A♥ Q♥ J♠ 8♣ in second position. The UTG player limps. You raise to \$15. The player behind you -- a very loose player -- re-raises to \$50. One player calls behind. The small blind calls. The big blind folds. The UTG player calls. You call. The flop comes 9♥ 7♠ 6♥, giving you a gutshot and the nut flush draw. The first two players check. What do you do?

Answer: Bet the pot. With an SPR < 2, you aren't going anywhere with the nut flush draw and a gutshot, and so you might as well bet it yourself and give everybody a chance to fold.

In the actual hand, I bet \$250 and everybody folded.

8. \$2-\$5-\$10 PLO with a Mississippi Straddle. You (\$2,400) are dealt A♠ T♠ 7♦ 2♠ on the button straddle. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$2,100) raises to \$30, and three players call in front of you. You call (semi-loose call). The flop comes 7♥ 6♠ 2♦, giving you top-and-bottom two pair. The first two players (\$2,070 and \$600, respectively) check. The next player bets \$50 all-in. The next player folds, and it is up to you. What do you do?

Answer: Raise. So far, the only player to show interest in the pot is the one who bet all-in for \$50, for an effective SPR of 1/3. Normally, top-and-bottom pair is not a good hand, but there are plenty of hands you can beat for one-third of a bet. In this spot, you should consider putting in a raise to try to isolate the bettor.

In the actual hand, I raised to \$125, and the other players folded. The bettor had 6♠ 5♦ 5♠ 3♥ for middle pair and a gutshot, and my two pair held up.

9. \$2-\$5 PLO. You (\$1,500) are dealt Q♠ Q♥ 5♠ 5♣ in the big blind. A player in early position limps in. The cutoff limps in, and the button (\$340) raises to \$25. The small blind calls. You call, and the limpers call. The flop comes T♦ 8♠ 5♦, giving you bottom set. The small blind checks. You bet \$125. The next player folds. The cutoff (\$900) calls. The button raises all-in for \$315. The small blind folds. What do you do?

Answer: Re-raise. The button is all-in for \$315, for an SPR < 3. You can't fold against him alone, as there are plenty of hands he could have at that price that you can beat, such as two pair and/or some kind of draw. Your main concern is the cutoff's hand -- he could be slow-playing a bigger set, but it is far more likely that he has some kind of draw himself. With a \$900 stack for an SPR of 8, you are in judgment territory. And in this case, you should go ahead and re-raise to try to isolate the button.

In the actual hand, I re-raised to \$1,000, and the cutoff folded. My set held up against what my opponent said was two pair with "all kinds of draws."

10. \$1-\$2 PLO with a \$5 bring-in. You (\$700) are dealt T♥ 8♥ 7♣ 6♦ in the cutoff. Four players limp in front of you. You limp. The button (\$600) limps. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$2,100) raises to \$40, and everybody folds to you. You call. The button now re-raises to \$180. The big blind calls. You call. The flop comes K♥ 9♥ 7♥, giving you a flush with a straight-flush draw. The first player checks. What do you do?

Answer: Bet your \$520 all-in. With \$560 in the pot, you have an SPR < 1. At this price, you are not folding. Alternatively, if you think the button will bet his likely pair of Aces, then you might check and give him a chance to bet with a worse hand. Either way, you are essentially pot-committed.

11. \$2-\$5 PLO, nine-handed. You are dealt A♥ Q♣ T♥ 6♣ in middle position. The first two players fold. You call. The next two players fold, and the cutoff raises to \$25. Both blinds call. You call. The flop comes A♠ Q♦ 8♠, giving you top two pair. It gets checked to you. You bet \$100. The button folds. The small blind (\$400) now raises all-in for \$400. The big blind folds. What do you do?

Answer: Call. Top two pair is enough to commit with a low SPR of 4; in a higher-SPR situation, I would be more inclined to fold. In this hand, I called. My opponent had K-Q-J-T for a wrap. The 9♣ fell on turn to give him a straight, and the 4♥ on river changed nothing. I lost.

12. \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in. The UTG player (\$1,700) posts a \$10 straddle. You (\$1,060) are dealt A♠ J♦ T♠ 9♠ in the cutoff, and open with a raise to \$40. It gets folded to the straddler, who re-raises to \$120. You call. The flop comes T♦ 7♠ 5♠, giving you top pair and a gutshot. Your opponent bets \$240. What do you do?

Answer: Raise all-in for \$920. In a lowish-SPR scenario (< 4), the only hand you are in really bad shape against is a set. You are in a virtual coin toss against dry AA (a slight favorite, even, depending on what else your opponent has to go with them), with the \$240 pre-flop pot as an overlay. You can go ahead and commit here with a raise and give your opponent a chance to fold.

In the actual hand, my opponent did, in fact, have AA, and called. I failed to improve.

13. \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in. The UTG player straddles for \$10. You (\$500) are dealt A♠ A♦ T♠ T♥ in the small blind. A middle player (\$1,200) opens with a raise to \$50, and a player behind him calls. You re-raise to \$200, and only the middle player calls. The flop comes 9♠ 4♦ 4♠, giving you Aces up. What do you do?

Answer: Bet all-in in the dark. With \$450 in the pot and a \$300 stack for an SPR well under 1, you are committed to the hand and should bet any flop.

14. \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in. The UTG player posts a \$10 straddle. You (\$1,200) are dealt Q♥ J♥ T♠ 8♥ in middle position, and open with a raise to \$30. The small blind calls. The big blind (\$250) re-raises to \$130. The straddler folds. You call. The small blind folds. The flop comes 9♦ 8♦ 6♠. Your opponent bets \$120 all-in. What do you do?

Answer: Call. In an ultra-low-SPR situation (SPR 0.4), it is an auto-call with the 13-card nut wrap (plus a pair) despite the presence of the two diamonds on the flop. You only need 22.2% equity to justify a call. Even against a monster like J♦ T♦ 9♣ 7♠ for the nut straight with both straight and flush re-draws, you have 19.0% equity, so calling is a small mistake at worst. But against the more likely hands, you are about a 2:1 dog against a hand like A♦ A♠ 2♦ 2♠ for AA with the nut diamonds, and a 3:2 favorite against A♥ A♠ 2♦ 2♥ for dry Aces.

15. \$0.50-\$1 (\$100-min/\$200-max) on the electronic poker tables at Excalibur in Las Vegas. You (\$350) are dealt A♦ A♠ Q♦ 4♠ on the button. Three players limp in front of you. You raise to \$6.50. Both blinds fold. The three limpers call. The flop comes 9♦ 8♥ 4♦, giving you an overpair and the nut flush draw. The first player (\$180 remaining stack) -- a relatively loose bettor -- bets \$27.50, and the other two players fold. What do you do?

Answer: With an SPR under 7, this is judgment territory. The real key is that the bettor is relatively loose. So long as he doesn't have to have a set here, then you should go ahead and raise and play for stacks if it comes to it, because you are going to be well ahead of any draw -- AA and the nut flush draw is about a 2:1 favorite against a pair with a 13-card nut wrap -- and you aren't in bad shape against two pair, either. So unless the bettor is a complete nit, you should go ahead and raise with the overpair and the nut flush draw in judgment territory SPR scenarios.

Deep-Stack Leverage

Playing a deep stack has a couple of built-in advantages. The more obvious one is that in pot-limit Omaha -- a game where most of a player's advantage comes *after* the flop -- playing with deeper stacks allows you to maximize the value of your big hands, while adding implied value to speculative pre-flop hands. The less obvious one has to do with leverage, a concept first introduced by Bob Ciaffone in *Improve Your Poker* (1997) and also discussed by Howard Lederer in his section of the *Full Tilt Poker Strategy Guide* (2007).

Generally speaking, to use **leverage** is to use the threat of further bets to magnify the effective size of a bet on the current betting around, which results in creating fold equity. By creating fold equity, leverage adds considerable value to the big draw (such as a 13-card nut wrap with a flush draw, or a 16-card nut wrap on a rainbow board), as well as the dry-Ace bluff -- the kinds of hands you can comfortably bet three streets with from any position on the table.

Leverage has another effect in that it discourages you and your opponents from raising and check-raising with marginal hands in deep stack situations.

This concept is best explained using SPR. Let's start with a few examples illustrating the effect of leverage. Then we will talk about float leverage, after which point we can define more accurately what, exactly, constitutes a deep stack.

Example #1: Second-Nut Flush

It's a \$5-\$5 game. You are on the button with a \$1,000 stack, holding $K\heartsuit Q\clubsuit J\spadesuit 8\clubsuit$. A middle player opens with a raise to \$20, and it gets folded to you. You call. Both blinds call, so there are four players and \$80 in the pot. The flop comes $T\spadesuit 6\clubsuit 2\heartsuit$, giving you the second-nut flush.

Scenario A: The small blind bets \$80 all-in. The other two players fold. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call
- c. Raise

Here, with an effective SPR of 1, you have an easy call with the second-nut flush. You can't fold the second-nut flush for one bet against what could easily be a smaller flush -- or maybe even less.

Scenario B: The small blind (\$320 stack) bets \$80, and the other two players fold. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call
- c. Raise

With an effective SPR of 4, this decision is a little more ambiguous. The probability is that the small blind either has the nut flush or the dry $A\heartsuit$. Raising is probably a bad idea, as your opponent will call with the nut flush, but fold the dry $A\heartsuit$. However, if you call, you will do so knowing that you are going to have to call another pot-sized bet on the turn in order to show this hand down.

In this scenario, the small blind has effectively used leverage to turn an \$80 bet into a \$320 decision.

Scenario C: Everybody has \$980 remaining stacks. Both blinds check. The player in front of you bets \$80. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call
- c. Raise

With an SPR over 12, raising is out of the question, as you don't want to play a big pot with the second-nut flush, and there are also two other players left to act. That said, you can beat a possible steal bet, and so you probably can't fold for one bet.

Action: You call. Both blinds fold. The turn is the $5\clubsuit$. Your opponent now bets \$240, with another \$660 behind. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call
- c. Raise

Now this is a much trickier situation. The first bet was a possible steal bet, but there is little question about what your opponent is representing now: It is pretty clear that your opponent either has the nut flush or the dry Ace. Again, raising is a no-no as you don't rate to get called by a hand worse than yours. But if you call, you again do so knowing that your opponent is going to bet his last \$660 all-in whether he has the nut flush or just the dry Ace.

This turns the \$240 call into a \$900 decision, making it much more difficult to call. And in this case, leverage adds considerable weight to the dry-Ace bluff.

PLO Tip: Leverage adds considerable weight to the dry-Ace bluff.

Example #2: Top Pair

It's a \$5-\$5 game, and you are on the button with a \$1,000 stack, holding $Q\heartsuit J\clubsuit 9\heartsuit 7\clubsuit$. The UTG player opens with a raise to \$20, and it gets folded to you. You call and both blinds fold. The flop comes $J\heartsuit 6\clubsuit 2\heartsuit$, giving you top pair.

Scenario A: Your opponent bets \$50 all-in. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call

With an SPR of 1, this is an easy call with top pair and with probable live draws to two pair and trips.

Scenario B: Your opponent (\$200 stack) bets \$50. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call
- c. Raise and set your opponent all-in for \$200.

With an SPR of 4 -- a low-SPR situation -- raising all-in is the clear best play with top pair and probable live draws to two pair or better.

Scenario C: Your opponent (\$500 stack) bets \$50. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call
- c. Raise

Now with an SPR of 10, you no longer have an easy shove with top pair, because you can't physically raise all-in. Raising is out of the question, as you don't rate to get action from hands that you want to get action from, and you don't want to have to fold to a re-raise. But at the same time, you can't fold this hand for one bet heads up with the positional advantage. The default play this deep is to call (combo float) and see what develops on the turn.

PLO Tip: Leverage discourages you and your opponents from raising with marginal hands.

Example #3: Bottom Set

It's a \$5-\$5 game, and you are on the button with a \$1,500 stack, holding A♠ A♣ 3♠ 3♣. One player limps in front of you. You raise to \$25. Both blinds call, and the limper calls, so there are four players and \$100 in the pot. The flop comes T♦ 9♦ 3♥, giving you bottom set.

Scenario A: The small blind bets \$100 all-in, and the other two players fold. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call

With an effective SPR of 1, this is a pretty easy call, as there are a lot of hands that you can beat for one bet, including one or two pair or some kind of draw.

Scenario B: This time, the other three players have \$400 stacks. The small blind bets \$100. The big blind raises to \$400 all-in, and the other player folds. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call

With an effective SPR of 4 facing a bet and raise, this is much more marginal situation. But for two bets, you could be up against something like top two pair or a pair with the nut flush draw. Moreover, the penalty for calling and being wrong (that is, you are up against top or middle set) isn't so steep. As such, you can probably still find a call, though folding wouldn't be terrible, either.

Scenario C: Everybody has \$1,500 stacks. The small blind bets \$100. The big blind raises to \$400, and the other player folds. Do you:

- a. Fold
- b. Call
- c. Re-raise the max to \$1,400

Now with an SPR of 15, the picture has changed considerably. Note that at this point, if you choose to contest the pot at all, you are essentially committed to playing for stacks. Calling is out of the question, and a small re-raise for information accomplishes nothing, as you are probably going to get re-raised by one of your opponents whether they have top set or a big draw like A♦ K♠ Q♦ J♣ for a 13-card nut wrap with the nut flush draw. That said, your choice here is really between re-raising the max and committing or folding, and the clear best choice is to fold.

As such, by making the raise to \$400, the big blind has employed leverage by effectively putting you to a decision for your \$1,500 remaining stack. This adds considerable value to the big draws after the flop by creating fold equity.

PLO Tip: By creating fold equity, leverage adds considerable value to the big draw in deep stack play.

Example #4: Check-Raising Marginal Hands

It's a \$5-\$5 game, and you are in the big blind with a \$1,000 stack, holding Q♠ J♣ T♠ 9♦. The UTG player raises to \$20, and everybody folds to you. You call. The flop comes J♦ 6♠ 5♣, giving you top pair.

Scenario A: Your opponent has \$45 left. Do you:

- a. Bet \$45 and set your opponent all-in
- b. Check with the intention of folding to a bet
- c. Check with the intention of calling

In this case with an effective SPR of 1, the clear best play is to bet \$45, set your opponent all-in, and give your opponent a chance to fold and give up whatever equity he has in the pot.

Scenario B: Your opponent has \$180 left. Do you:

- a. Bet \$45
- b. Check with the intention of folding to a bet
- c. Check with the intention of calling
- d. Check with the intention of raising

With an effective SPR of 4, betting is OK, but so is check-raising with top pair and probable live draws to two pair and trips.

Scenario C: Your opponent has \$980 left. Do you:

- a. Bet \$45
- b. Check with the intention of folding to a bet
- c. Check with the intention of calling
- d. Check with the intention of raising

Now with an SPR near 22, leverage has a different effect, in that it should discourage you from check-raising with this marginal hand. Because in this situation, you have enough to check-and-call (which we will talk about in Part III: Advanced Skills) with top pair and re-draws. But if you check-raise, you don't rate to get action from hands you can beat, and you don't want to get re-raised and have to fold when there are a lot of cards that could come on the turn to improve your hand considerably (such as probable live draws to two pair or trips, or a number of cards that could hit the turn that would give you a wrap).

PLO Tip: Deep stack leverage discourages you and your opponents from check-raising with marginal hands.

Float Leverage

So far, we've discussed leverage largely in terms of how it benefits the aggressor. However, the benefit of leverage is not limited to the aggressor on the flop; in fact, leverage is also what gives power to the float. Recall from Part I that it is the threat of further action that encourages our opponents to shut down on the turn when they bet the flop light.

Let's take a look at the effect of float leverage from the perspective of the aggressor.

Example #5: Float Leverage

It's a \$5-\$5 game. You have a \$1,000 stack, and you are in the small blind holding $A\clubsuit A\spadesuit K\clubsuit J\spadesuit$. The UTG player limps in, and everybody folds to you. You raise to \$20. The big blind folds, but the UTG player calls. The flop comes $Q\heartsuit 7\clubsuit 6\heartsuit$.

Scenario A: The UTG player has a \$45 remaining stack. Do you:

- a. Check
- b. Bet

With an SPR of 1, this is an easy all-in bet.

Scenario B: The UTG player has a \$180 remaining stack. Do you:

- a. Check
- b. Bet

With an SPR of 4, you will have little problem betting your bare Aces here. It's not ideal -- you'd much rather be able to bet all-in. However, you can probably commit without getting the worst of it in aggregate, as you will often get all-in action from one pair. The play here is to bet the pot on both the flop and turn if called, or bet and call if you get raised all-in.

Scenario C: Your opponent has a \$980 remaining stack. Do you:

- a. Check
- b. Bet

Now with an SPR near 22, you are in a tough spot. On one hand, you don't want to bet out and build an unwieldy pot with just an overpair, or have to fold to a raise of any kind; on the other hand, you don't want to give a free card, either. Neither choice is particularly appealing.

Action: You bet \$45, and your opponent calls. The turn is the $3\spadesuit$. Do you:

- a. Check
- b. Bet

Now your problem is magnified. You have no idea what your opponent called with -- it could have been a straight draw, a flush draw, one pair, two pair, a set, or some combination of pairs and draws -- and your opponent is threatening to call again if you bet. Moreover, if you do bet again and get called, you are unlikely to be able to check and showdown the river and win. And if a scare card comes on the river (such as a straight or flush card), you check and your opponent bets, you will be left guessing whether your opponent hit his hand or is on the bluff.

And so betting again isn't all that attractive an option. Checking-and-calling any bet instead isn't appealing, either, in that you will probably have to call two bets in order to show the hand down -- and if you aren't already behind, then you are probably easily outdrawn.

It'd be nice if you could just bet \$180 and be done with the hand, but there is a lot more money left to play. There's not a whole lot you can do here but check-and-fold. And in this case, your opponent used float leverage to discourage you from betting again, and to encourage you to check-and-fold.

What Constitutes a Deep Stack?

The Third Bet.

The discussion of deep-stack leverage brings us to an important question: What exactly constitutes a deep stack? The answer is not necessarily a 150BB or 200BB stack, but rather a stack that is deep enough to fire a third bet.

The reason for that is simply because leverage tends to get its power from the *threat* of the third bet.

If you've followed the discussion this far, it is easy to see why this is so: For one bet ($SPR \leq 1$), you are basically pot-committed with marginal hands like one pair and small flushes; and for two bets ($SPR \leq 4$), you are still shoving with marginal hands like one pair with re-draws and combo draws, as well as small pot hands like middle set or top two pair. You kind of get the impression that low-SPR situations don't really scare anybody.

But it's when you get to three bets -- mid-to-high-SPR territory -- that leverage comes into play. Here, you might call light (float) for one bet, but give up on a marginal hand on the turn to the second bet because you don't want to have to call a third bet on the river. You also start folding hands like middle and bottom set to raises on the flop, because while you are comfortable playing these hands for two bets, you don't like your chances putting in three.

That said, a deep stack is one that is deep enough to fire a legitimate third bet. The third bet doesn't have to be a pot-sized bet; it really only needs to be big enough to be a legitimate threat -- big enough to fire about a half-pot-sized bet on the river in a pot/pot/half-pot sequence.

This equates to an SPR of about 8 or 9, though 8 is probably adequate; an SPR of 8.5 would be exactly enough for a pot/pot/half-pot betting sequence (e.g. if there is \$100 in the pot on the flop and you have a \$850 stack for an SPR of 8.5, you have enough to bet \$100 on the flop, \$300 on the turn into a \$300 pot, and \$450 on the river into a \$900 pot).

Note that the key determinant here is SPR, as opposed to starting stack size in terms of big blinds. If you're playing in a \$0.50-\$1 game online with \$100 or 100BB stacks, a 100BB stack may constitute a deep stack if there is little pre-flop raising. If five players with \$100 stacks all see the flop for \$5, then the SPR will be $\$95/\25 or under 4; but if, instead, five players all see the flop for the minimum, the SPR is going to be $\$99/\5 or nearly 20. And if the latter case is the norm, then a 100BB stack is plenty deep enough to constitute a deep stack.

Also note that this is a *generalization* -- an SPR of 7 is enough to fire a river bet that is the same size as the turn bet, and sometimes you don't even need to be that deep to utilize leverage.

That said, for our purposes, we will define a deep stack as one that is deep enough that you can consistently expect to see the flop with an SPR of about 8 or 9 or higher. In an aggressive game, this might be 150BBs to 200BBs; but in a passive game, 100BBs may be enough to qualify as a deep stack.

The next page shows a new SPR chart, splitting the mid-SPR range into two subcategories. We will now classify an SPR above 8 to be in Deep Stack Territory, and an SPR between 8 and 13 to be mid-high-SPR range.

The New SPR Chart

SPR	Pot-Sized Bets	Category	Category II
0.5		Ultra-Low	Pot Odds Territory
0.75		Ultra-Low	
1	1	Ultra-Low	
1.5		Low	Shove-or-Fold Territory
2		Low	
3		Low	
4	2	Low	
5		Mid	Judgment Territory
6		Mid	
7		Mid	
8		Mid-High	Deep Stack Territory
9		Mid-High	
10		Mid-High	
11		Mid-High	
12		Mid-High	
13	3	Mid-High	
>13	>3	High	Big-Play Territory

PLO Tip: The source of leverage tends to be threat of the third bet.

PLO Tip: A deep stack is one that is deep enough to fire a legitimate third bet, or about a half-pot sized bet on the river.

PLO Tip: An SPR of 8.5 is enough to run the pot/pot/half-pot sequence.

PLO Tip: A deep stack is not necessarily a 150BB or 200BB stack, but one that is deep enough to consistently see the flop with an SPR of about 8 or 9 or higher. In a passive game, a 100BB stack may be enough to constitute a deep stack.

The Positional Disadvantage vs. The Positional Advantage

In this day and age, when the average poker player is far better educated in the game than he was just a few years ago, the average player “knows” that having the positional advantage is good, and that playing out of position is not so good. And yet, the discrepancies between playing in position and playing out of position remain both poorly understood and understated. And the primary reason for this is that the average player tends to overlook and understate the disadvantages of playing out of position.

The positional advantage/disadvantage manifests itself in many different ways:

1. Basic Hand Value
2. Scare Card Play
3. Pot Control
4. Free Cards
5. Showdown

1: Basic Hand Value

Many players understand on a fundamental level that any given hand increases in value in late position and decreases in value in early position. A player in early position might need two pair or a big draw to bet into a field, while the player who acts last may only need one pair or no pair to comfortably find a bet when the opposition has checked to him.

This has a fairly dramatic effect on basic hand value both before and after the flop. After the flop, one pair is more valuable when you are on the button than when you are in early position. And obviously, if you are more likely to find something to bet at on the flop when you act last, then more hands are going to be playable pre-flop from the button than from early position.

2: Scare Card Play

Scare cards also have an effect on the value of position. In fact, as we saw in Part I: Floating, the positional advantage is often the difference between winning and losing pots, particularly in short-handed confrontations.

Here's an example. It's a \$5-\$5 game with \$1,000 stacks, and you are in the small blind holding 8♣ 7♦ 2♣ 2♠. Three players limp in. You check and the big blind checks. The flop comes 8♦ 7♠ 3♦, giving you top two pair on a flop with possible straight and flush draws. You bet \$25, and only the button calls. The turn is the K♦, putting out a possible flush. What do you do?

There is no easy answer. If you bet again, you are giving implied odds for those times your opponent is on the flush draw; but if you check and fold, you are giving float equity to your opponent whenever he is on the straight draw. And if you check and contemplate calling, you probably can't do much better than guess about what your opponent's holding.

The only sure thing is that this is not a good situation for you, as you are probably giving up some value in aggregate whichever decision you make.

3: Pot Control

One of the key features of the positional advantage is the ability to exercise some control over the size of the pot in deep stack play. In fact, the ability to control pot size is probably the least appreciated aspect of the positional advantage, while the inability to control pot size is probably the most overlooked deficiency of the positional disadvantage.

Let's take a look at a couple of examples to illustrate the discrepancy.

Example #1: The Bare Nut Straight

Scenario A: It's a \$5-\$5 game with \$1,000 stacks. You are in the small blind holding J♣ T♣ 7♦ 6♠. Three players limp in. You check. The big blind checks. The flop comes Q♦ 9♦ 8♥, giving you the bare nut straight. You bet \$25. It gets folded to the last player, who raises to \$100. Do you:

- Fold
- Call
- Re-raise

The probability is that you are getting freerolled. And sitting this deep with an SPR near 40 -- or about 4 pot-sized bets deep -- you are probably best off giving up the bare nut straight to the raise.

Now let's reverse positions.

Scenario B: It's a \$5-\$5 game with \$1,000 stacks. You are on the button holding J♣ T♣ 7♦ 6♠. Two players limp in front of you. You limp. Both blinds check. The flop comes Q♦ 9♦ 8♥. The small blind bets \$25, and everybody else folds to you. Do you:

- Fold
- Call
- Re-raise

The SPR is still about 40 -- or about 4 pot-sized bets deep -- but the dynamic of the hand has changed completely. This is because this time, you have the positional advantage. Note again that the only way the fourth bet can go in is if somebody puts in a raise at some point in the hand -- and this case, with your opponent leading the betting, it is probably going to have to be you.

This time, you don't have to give up the straight. Instead, you can smooth call and keep the pot size down. Doing so may enable you to steal the pot if, for example, the board pairs or a flush hits and your opponent checks to you.

Example #2: Top Two Pair

Scenario A: It's a \$5-\$5 game with \$1,000 stacks. You are in the small blind holding J♣ T♣ 7♦ 6♠. Three players limp in. You check, and the big blind checks. The flop comes J♥ T♦ 2♥, giving you top two pair. You bet \$25. The big blind raises to \$100, and everybody else folds back to you. Do you:

- Fold
- Call
- Re-Raise

You have top two pair and no re-draw on a board with possible straight and flush draws, and in a deep stack situation with an SPR near 40. Even if your opponent doesn't have a set, he probably isn't far behind with whatever draw he has. There's not much you can do here but fold.

Let's reverse positions again.

Scenario B: It's a \$5-\$5 game with \$1,000 stacks. You are on the button holding J♣ T♣ 7♦ 6♠. Two players limp in front of you. You limp in. Both blinds check. The flop comes J♥ T♦ 2♥, giving you top two pair. It gets checked to the player in front of you, who bets \$25. Do you:

- Fold
- Call
- Raise

Now you can smooth call with top two pair and see what develops on the turn and perhaps the river as well. If everybody else folds, the board doesn't change, and your opponent bets again, then you can call; if he checks, then you can safely bet. If a straightening card hits the turn and your opponent bets again, you can give up the pot. But if he checks, you can bet and perhaps bluff him off the same two pair or maybe even a set.

4. Free Cards

A function of the inability to control pot size from out of position is the free card problem.

As we just saw, the problem with flopping a small pot hand like the bare nut straight or top two pair out of position is that if you bet out, you risk getting raised out of the pot, while giving up the bet you just put in. But if, instead, you check and try to play a small pot, you risk giving a free card that is liable to beat you.

The fact is that when playing out of position, you cannot take a free card -- you can only give one. But when you have the positional advantage instead, you can make sure that every street gets bet.

PLO Tip: When playing out of position, you cannot take a free card -- you can only give one.

PLO Tip: When playing with the positional advantage, you can ensure that every street gets bet.

5. Showdown

Another element of pot control is the ability or inability to check and showdown the river. When you are last to act on the river and your opponent(s) has checked to you, you determine whether or not to check and showdown the hand or whether to put in a last bet. But when you are playing out of position and have a marginal hand like one pair, dry trips, or a small flush on the river, you really only have a couple of choices: put in a small blocking bet, or check and hope your opponent(s) show the hand down.

Either way, you risk facing a large raise or big bet, either of which could be a bluff in response to your perceived weakness. This puts you in a guessing situation, one in which you will often make a mistake one way or another.

The Positional Disadvantage

So you can see some of the problems associated with playing out of position. For one thing, it takes a bigger hand to bet into a field than it does to bet when everybody has checked to you on the button, which automatically devalues your hand when playing out of position. For another, playing out of position sets you up to get outplayed whenever a scare card hits, which also devalues your hand both before and after the flop. And finally, one of the most important -- yet probably the most overlooked -- deficiencies of the positional disadvantage is the inability to control pot size from out of position, which also yields the free card problem and the showdown problem.

In contrast, when you have the positional advantage you can bet lighter, exercise some control over pot size, and make sure that every street gets bet. You can also check and showdown your marginal hands, which leads to fewer tough decisions, making the game easier to play. Meanwhile, you will also have additional opportunities to outplay your opponents.

The Positional Advantage:

The Ambiguity of the Bet

Another one of the built-in features of the positional advantage lies in the ambiguity of the bet. When you bet into five people from out of the blinds, you usually have either a strong made hand or a strong draw, but you are rarely bluffing. In contrast, when you are on the button, everybody checks to you, and you bet, your bet is a lot more ambiguous, as every bet you make will be viewed as a possible steal bet.

This creates a natural deception that keeps your opponents off balance. In fact, just routinely playing with the positional advantage and utilizing the button yields plenty enough deception, because if most of your bets come from late position where you are naturally betting light much of the time, then your opponents will get the impression that you never have anything.

And yet, a lot of players mistakenly believe that they need to raise every hand pre-flop and look like maniacs in order to create deception and get paid off, when all you really need to do to create deception is to play your button.

Here are a few examples of the kind of action that a player with a relatively passive pre-flop playing style can generate simply by betting constantly from late position. After a while, if you bet the button enough, your opponents will sometimes just stop believing you.

Hand #1: Straight on Flush and Paired Board

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle



My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$2,200) post the \$10 straddle on the button. Both blinds fold. An early player (\$700) -- a very tight player who rarely raises pre-flop -- raises to \$25. A middle player (\$750) calls, and it is folded to me. I call.



Flop (\$82): Both opponents check to me. I bet \$80. The first player folds, but the other player calls.



Turn (\$242): My opponent checks. I bet \$150, and my opponent calls.



River (\$542): My opponent checks. I bet \$300 and my opponent calls, showing $K\heartsuit Q\clubsuit 5\spadesuit 4\clubsuit$ for the nut straight.

That strikes me as one hell of a parlay. First, my opponent had to call a pot-sized bet on the flop out of position with a bare open-ended straight draw on a two-flush board. And then he had to call with the straight when the flush card hit, and then call another bet on the river after the board paired.

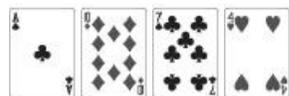
Granted, by the river, there aren't too many hands that I could have legitimately bet all three streets with, but damn.

Hand #2: Aces

The game: \$2-\$5

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: Only a middle player limps in front of me. I call. The small blind calls, and the big blind checks.



Flop (\$20): Everybody checks to me. I bet \$20.

A perfectly reasonable bet from the button with a double-gutter.

Action: Both blinds fold, but the other player calls.



Turn (\$60): My opponent checks. I bet \$60.

A perfectly reasonable follow through bet.

Action: My opponent calls.



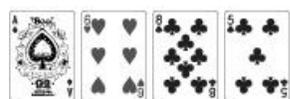
River (\$180): My opponent checks. I bet \$100. My opponent hems and haws, and finally calls with $A\spadesuit A\clubsuit T\heartsuit 4\heartsuit$ for a pair of Aces.

Hand #3: Aces

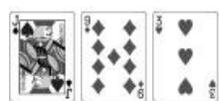
The game: \$5-\$5, 3-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$2,700) open with a raise to \$15. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$1,500) re-raises to \$30. I call.



Flop (\$65): My opponent bets \$50. I call.

I can't help myself sometimes. This is a naked float against a standard c-bet, and probably pushing it a little bit.



Turn (\$165): My opponent checks. I bet \$165. My opponent hems and haws, and finally calls.



River (\$495): My opponent checks. I bet \$350. My opponent hems and haws, and finally calls with $A\clubsuit A\spadesuit 3\clubsuit 5\heartsuit$ for a pair of Aces.

Note that had I actually caught any piece of that flop, there's not much I could have had by the river that doesn't beat a pair of Aces.

Adjustments: Cutting Back

The first two hands were from my "Bet the Button Every Time" phase, while the third was from my "Float Every Time" phase. That said, there probably is such a thing as *too* much action.

What it comes down to is taking what your opponents give you. If your opponents are willing to give up the pot every time they check to you, then you keep firing away until they start looking you up or otherwise start playing back at you. If they start calling you down light every time, then you cut back, take advantage of your loose image, and starting showing them a hand. Instead of betting every time, maybe you settle on betting top pair or better from the button in multi-way pots. And maybe you restrict your float attempts to when you actually have some piece of the board or some kind of draw.

But you can see how much action a reasonably tight player like me can generate simply by playing the button, where every bet is liable to be construed as a possible steal bet. Simply playing from the button makes your bets ambiguous, which causes your opponents to make mistakes. Eventually, you will catch your opponents making a mistake in a big pot.

The Nut Flush Draw

In *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy*, we noted that the presence of a two-flush on the board significantly devalues a wrap when you don't have a flush draw yourself (pg. 50, "When There Is a Two-Flush on the Flop"). On a $T\spadesuit 9\spadesuit 2\heartsuit$ flop, for example, $Q\clubsuit J\clubsuit 8\clubsuit 7\clubsuit$ for a 20-card wrap is nearly a 3:2 dog to $A\spadesuit A\spadesuit 4\clubsuit 3\clubsuit$ for a pair of aces and the nut flush draw. As such, you should tend to play more cautiously when you are holding a bare wrap when a flush draw is possible, especially as the effective SPR reaches the 3-bet (mid) range.

But let's reverse roles for a second. Let's say that you have the nut flush draw; running through a few hand matchups, it is quite clear that the nut flush draw is pretty strong against an opponent who is also on the draw, even when your opponent has a flush draw himself. On a $Q\clubsuit 6\clubsuit 5\clubsuit$ board, for example, $A\spadesuit K\heartsuit T\heartsuit 2\spadesuit$ for a dry nut flush draw and ace-high is about a 2:1 favorite over $T\spadesuit 9\spadesuit 8\heartsuit 7\heartsuit$ for a 13-card nut wrap with a flush draw, and is only a slight dog against $9\spadesuit 8\spadesuit 7\heartsuit 6\heartsuit$ for a pair plus a 13-card nut wrap with a flush draw. Meanwhile, AA plus the nut flush draw is going to be pretty strong against even the biggest draws against it.

What this means is that you can play the nut flush draw pretty strongly in situations where your opponent doesn't have to have a set to play with you for stacks -- namely, low-SPR situations, as well as some mid-SPR situations when you have AA, another pair, or some other kind of draw to go with it.

You	Opponent	Flop	Equity (You/Opp.)
A♠ 2♠ 3♥ 4♥	J♠ T♠ 9♥ 8♥	Q♠ 7♠ 6♦	(57.0%/43.0%)
A♠ 2♠ 3♥ 6♥	J♠ T♠ 9♥ 8♥	Q♠ 7♠ 6♦	(59.15%/40.85%)
A♠ A♥ 2♠ 3♥	J♠ T♠ 9♥ 8♥	Q♠ 7♠ 6♦	(62.8%/37.2%)
A♠ K♥ T♥ 5♠	T♠ 9♠ 8♥ 7♥	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(65.98%/34.02%)
A♠ K♥ T♥ 5♠	9♠ 8♠ 7♥ 6♥	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(49.88%/50.12%)
A♠ K♥ T♥ 2♠	9♠ 8♠ 7♥ 6♥	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(47.20%/52.80%)
A♠ A♥ K♥ 2♠	9♠ 8♠ 7♥ 6♥	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(56.83%/43.17%)
A♠ A♥ K♥ 2♠	T♠ 9♠ 8♥ 7♥	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(63.78%/36.22%)
A♠ K♥ T♥ 2♠	T♠ 9♠ 8♥ 7♥	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(66%/34%)
A♠ K♥ T♥ 2♠	T♠ 9♠ 8♥ 7♥	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(71.10%/28.90%)
A♠ K♥ T♥ 5♠	T♠ 9♠ 8♥ 7♥	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(71.10%/28.90%)
A♠ K♥ T♥ 5♠	9♠ 8♥ 7♥ 6♠	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(57.71%/43.29%)
A♠ A♥ K♥ 2♠	9♠ 8♥ 7♥ 6♠	Q♠ 6♠ 5♦	(64.15%/35.85%)

*Source: Cardplayer.com calculator

In fact, the nut flush draw doesn't even do all that bad against an opponent holding A-A-x-x in a low-SPR situation -- a situation that comes up a lot in pots that are 3-bet pre-flop, particularly against novice opponents who only 3-bet pre-flop with A-A-x-x.

Recall that when the SPR is 4, you only need 44.4% equity to justify an all-in confrontation on the flop, and that with an SPR of 2, you only need 40% equity -- a 3:2 dog or better -- to justify an all-in confrontation. Well, it turns out that the bare nut flush draw is better than a 3:2 dog against bare A-A-x-x -- on a 7♦ 6♥ 5♦ flop, A♦ K♦ Q♥ T♠ is a 41.7%/58.3% dog against A♠ A♠ 9♠ 2♠. With a backdoor heart draw, a hand like A♦ K♦ Q♥ T♥ improves to a 47.0%/53.0% dog to A♠ A♠ 9♠ 2♠.

With a backdoor wrap, the nut flush draw does better than 44.4%; on a J♦ 6♥ 5♦ flop, A♦ K♦ Q♥ T♠ has 45% equity against A♠ A♠ 9♠ 2♠. And with a backdoor wrap *and* a backdoor flush draw on a J♦ 6♥ 5♦ flop, a hand like A♦ K♦ Q♥ T♥ improves to 49.9% equity -- a coin-flip -- against A♠ A♠ 9♠ 2♠. (Note: If the percentages seem higher than you might expect, it is because backdoor two pair and straight draws are much more likely to hit in Omaha than in hold'em).

That said, the dry nut flush draw has better than 40% equity against dry A-A-x-x, so it is hard to be wrong to shove with the bare nut flush draw when the SPR is 2, even when you know your opponent has A-A-x-x. In fact, percentages are close enough that you should be OK shoving with the nut flush draw in low-SPR situations as a general rule.

The Nut Flush Draw: Against AA

Me	You	Flop	Equity (Me/You)
A♦ K♦ Q♥ T♠	A♠ A♠ 9♠ 2♥	7♦ 6♥ 5♦	(41.7%/58.3%)
A♦ K♦ Q♥ T♥	A♠ A♠ 9♠ 2♠	7♦ 6♥ 5♦	(47.0%/53.0%)
A♦ K♦ Q♥ T♠	A♠ A♠ 9♠ 2♠	J♦ 6♥ 5♦	(45.0%/55.0%)
A♦ K♦ Q♥ T♥	A♠ A♠ 9♠ 2♠	J♦ 6♥ 5♦	(49.9%/50.1%)

PLO Tip: In a low-SPR situation, you are essentially pot committed when holding the nut flush draw. Shove.

The Pivot Card

One unique feature of Omaha that hasn't been discussed much in poker literature thus far is the pivot card. The pivot card is the board card that fills a gap in your hand to give you multiple backdoor wrap possibilities. For example, if you hold Q-J-9-8 and the flop comes T-3-2, then you hit the pivot card, which in this case is the ten. And now a seven, eight, nine, jack, queen, or king can come on the turn to give you either a 13-card or 17-card wrap.

While the pivot card hasn't been discussed much yet (probably due in part to the stigma associated with backdoor draws), the pivot card actually has a fairly material impact on post-flop hand valuation at times.

One thing to be noted is that you have to have a hand with a 13-card wrap possibility in it, with or without a gap. This includes hands such as J-T-9-x, J-T-8-x, or J-9-8-x, or a four-card rundown with or without a single gap. That said, there are two basic applications of the pivot card:

1. When you are thinking about shoving all-in in low-SPR situations.
2. As part of a float.

All-In Confrontations

I was playing in the \$1-\$2 blind, \$5 to bring-in (\$500-max) game in St. Louis when the following hand occurred. I had just bought in for the \$500 maximum, and was dealt 9♣ 8♣ 7♠ 5♦ early position. I thought I'd mix things up, and opened with a raise to \$15. It got folded to my buddy AI, who re-raised to \$50. Everybody folded back to me and I called.

The flop came A♣ 6♣ 2♣, giving me a flush draw -- plus I hit my pivot card to give me some backdoor wrap possibilities. I checked to AI, who bet \$100. It is now my turn to act; I have \$450 left, and AI has me covered.

At this point, I thought "Well, maybe AI doesn't have to have Aces here, in which case I might be able to make him fold if I raise. He probably doesn't have a bigger flush draw (unless he has an ace to go with it), otherwise he probably (but not necessarily) would have checked behind. And even if I am wrong, I hit my pivot card, which has gotta be worth a couple of outs."

I thought "Let's try it." I raised to \$400, and AI insta-shoved for \$50 more with his set of Aces and I called. I made the flush and won.

Now I gotta be honest: I actually kind of knew AI had the Aces, because I had played a lot of PLO with AI, and I don't remember him ever 3-betting me without them. I just figured I'd shove it in and see if the play worked, and then figure out how close the play is later. And against AI's hand, I was actually only about a 37%/63% dog, and so it was a relatively small mistake where I put in about 44% of the money. And if there is any chance that AI doesn't have Aces and will fold to a raise, I think check-raising here figures to be a pretty close play in aggregate.

As it turns out, the pivot card on this flop is actually worth about 3 outs; according to Mike Cappelletti in *Best of Cappelletti on Omaha*, I will make a straight 13.5% of the time in this situation. This compares to a 4-out gutshot, which completes 17.2% of the time.

That said, the implication here is that the value of the pivot card should be accounted for in low-SPR situations. For another example, note that on an A-7-3 flop, 9-8-6-5 for a gutshot plus a backdoor wrap is only a 31.2%/68.8% dog against A-K-Q-J, ignoring suits. At a little worse than 2:1 against, you probably shouldn't fold this hand in an ultra-low-SPR situation, whereas you might be inclined to fold if you only counted the gutshot as your outs.

Below is a table summarizing the completion percentages of various rundowns when their respective pivot cards hit the flop. The completion percentages are taken from Cappelletti's *Best of Cappelletti on Omaha* (Note: Cappelletti refers to it as an "eye-card holding" when you hit the pivot card). It is worth noting that a four-card rundown has a higher completion rate than a three-card rundown when the pivot cards hits the flop.

The Pivot Card: Straight Completion Percentages

Hand	Type	Flop	Completion %*
Q-J-9-8	Rundown with Middle Gap	T-3-2	14.3%
Q-J-T-8	Rundown with Bottom Gap	9-3-2	13.5%
Q-J-T-9	4-Card Rundown	8-3-2	9.9%
J-T-8-x	3-Card Rundown with Gap	9-3-2	8.9%
J-T-9-x	3-Card Rundown	8-3-2	8.1%

*Source: *Best of Cappelletti on Omaha* by Mike Cappelletti

The Float

The other practical application of the pivot card is in regard to the float, as the backdoor wrap possibilities when you hit a pivot card adds real draw value to the float. Let's say you are heads up with position after the flop. You hold Q-J-T-8, the flop comes 9-3-2, and your opponent bets into you. Now, in addition to whatever float equity you have (based on the probability that your opponent will check-and-fold to a bet on the turn), you also have four sevens, three eights, three tens, three jacks, three queens, and maybe even four kings -- 20 cards total, or nearly half the deck -- that will give you enough draw to call if your opponent instead bets again on the turn.

And that's just if you flop the pivot card -- if you also flop a gutshot or a flush draw, then hitting the pivot card will add considerable value to your draw. Moreover, you will also have some implied odds if you hit your backdoor draw, as your draw will be well disguised.

Part III: Advanced Skills

Completing your arsenal of advanced post-flop skills.

In Part I, we took an in-depth look at the float, the advanced technique that is the platform for our core Small-Ball strategy for exploiting our opponents in short-handed pots. But before we get to Small Ball, we will complete our arsenal of advanced post-flop skills. Here in Part III, we will cover:

- Check-Raising
- The Bluff Raise
- Checking-and-Calling
- 3-Betting After the Flop (Without the Nuts)
- Value-Betting the River
- Bluffing
- Picking Off Bluffs at the River

Check-Raising

“Everybody here loves to check-raise. Nobody in Ireland check-raises; we just bet the crap out of everything.”

– Irish bloke at the Rio during the 2008 WSOP

As a general rule, giving free cards is a big no-no in PLO. As such, you should tend to bet your own hands and employ the check-raise sparingly, particularly in multi-way pots. However, in short-handed pots -- and especially in heads-up pots -- there are more good opportunities to check-raise as a bluff or semi-bluff, simply because it is far more likely that your opponents will bet light in a short-handed pot than a multi-way pot. That said, check-raises tend to fall into one of two basic categories:

1. Standard (planned)
2. Non-Standard (improvised)

Standard (Planned)

A standard (planned) check-raise is when you check with the *intention* of raising. Because we are not in the practice of giving free cards, this means that you must have some reason to expect someone else to bet; that reason is usually because there was a raise before the flop.

In fact, raised pots account for the vast majority of check-raising opportunities in PLO.

In a mid-high-SPR situation (or deeper) in a multi-way pot, this is typically done for value when you flop a strong hand (like top set) or a big dominating draw and you want to get more money into the pot. In a low to low-mid-SPR situation in a multi-way pot, this can be done with some weaker hands (like top two pair or bottom set), weaker draws (like an open-ended straight draw), or multi-way hands (like a pair and a flush or straight draw).

That said, the texture of the board should play a big role in your decision as to whether or not to attempt a check-raise.

For example, a disparate board such as $K\heartsuit 7\heartsuit 2\spadesuit$ is a stronger candidate for a check-raise than a highly coordinated flop, such as one with two big cards like $K\heartsuit Q\clubsuit 6\clubsuit$. There are a couple of reasons for that: The main one is that it is more likely that someone else will take a stab with one pair or less on the $K\heartsuit 7\heartsuit 2\spadesuit$ flop than the $K\heartsuit Q\clubsuit 6\clubsuit$ flop; the other reason is that a free card is more likely to beat you on the more highly coordinated $K\heartsuit Q\clubsuit 6\clubsuit$ flop.

The one thing you don't want to do is give free cards to players with hands that they won't bet themselves, that would fold if you would bet, and have draws to hands that can beat you (such as a gutshot or a weak flush draw). Meanwhile, if an opponent has a weak draw that they would call a bet with but wouldn't bet themselves, it would be a mistake not to make them pay up.

And so, generally speaking, if I call a raise out of the small blind holding $K\heartsuit K\heartsuit 8\heartsuit 8\heartsuit$ and four players see the flop, I am more likely to go for a check raise on the $K\heartsuit 7\heartsuit 2\spadesuit$ flop than I am on the $K\heartsuit Q\clubsuit 8\clubsuit$ flop. I would also be more likely to lead out than go for a check-raise with a big, dominating draw such as $A\heartsuit J\clubsuit T\clubsuit 9\clubsuit$ on a $K\heartsuit Q\clubsuit 6\clubsuit$ flop.

In a heads-up pot, you might also check with the intention of raising as a bluff or semi-bluff. For example, if you defend your blind against a raise pre-flop and find yourself heads up out of position (a situation that you should tend to avoid), you can sometimes check-raise as a bluff or a semi-bluff quite liberally. This is especially true against opponents who are incapable of taking a free card (i.e. they c-bet roughly 100% of the time). Note that your opponents are a dog to hit the flop hard, so check-raising can be quite effective against such aggressive opponents.

Non-Standard (Improvised)

A non-standard -- or improvised -- check-raise scenario occurs when you have a hand that is not strong enough to bet into a field, but is strong enough to play against a possible steal bet. This can be done for value -- for instance, you may not have a hand strong enough to bet into a field, but your hand may look good against a possible steal bet after everybody checked to the button -- or it can be done as a semi-bluff or a pure bluff against a possible steal bet.

For example, let's say it's a \$5-\$5 game with \$700 stacks and you are in the small blind holding $A\heartsuit 9\heartsuit 8\heartsuit 7\heartsuit$. The UTG player opens with a raise to \$20, and two players call behind him. You call, and the big blind calls, so there are five players and \$100 in the pot.

The flop comes $7\clubsuit 6\clubsuit 2\heartsuit$, giving you top pair and the nut open-ended straight draw -- a good shoving hand in low-SPR/2-bet situations, but not a hand you necessarily want to play for 3 bets. With an SPR just under 7 -- judgment territory -- you are not really comfortable betting this hand into four opponents, so you check. It gets checked to the player on the button, who bets \$75.

Now the situation is a little different, as nobody else has shown any interest in the pot, and you are facing a possible weak stab from a steal position. Basically, in this spot, you can't be in too bad shape so long as your opponent isn't so tight that he has to have a set here. And as such, you can exercise judgment and put in a pot-sized check-raise.

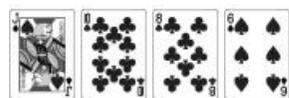
The majority of the time, you will be right and the bettor won't have enough to call raise, and he and everybody else will fold. But even if you are wrong and the bettor or someone else happens to be strong, you still have the nut open-ended straight draw to fall back on, as you will be priced into the pot.

Hand #1: Check-Raise Bluff (Planned)

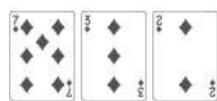
The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to the button (\$200), who raises to \$7. I (\$331.95) call. The big blind folds.



Flop (\$16):

I expect my opponent to follow through with a c-bet here if I check, and if he does bet, I also expect him to fold to a raise if he doesn't have a flush, which will be the vast majority of the time. This is a good spot for a check-raise bluff.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$8. I raise to \$30, and my opponent folds.

Hand #2: Bottom Pair Plus Nut Flush Draw (Improvised)

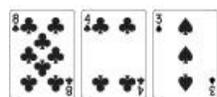
The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in (\$500-max)

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$1,100) limp in. Two players limp in behind me. The hijack (\$900) raises to \$20. The cutoff (\$1,200) and button (\$570) both call. The small blind calls. The big blind folds. I call, and the other two limpers call. Seven players see the flop.



Flop (\$142): The small blind checks.

This is not a bad flop: I have bottom pair, the nut flush draw, and three overcards. But it's not a big enough hand that I necessarily want to bet into a field sitting this deep.

Action: I check. It gets checked to the cutoff (\$1,180) -- a very aggressive player -- who bets \$125. The button (\$550) -- a very loose player -- calls. The small blind folds.

Now the scenario's changed a little bit. The cutoff has taken a weak stab, betting \$125 into the \$142 pot. It helps to know your opponents a bit, but a bet like that is usually indicative of one of two things: either a super-strong hand like a set with the nut flush draw, or just an attempt to pick up the pot.

Well, I have the nut flush draw myself, so my take is that the bettor is not that strong. Now the question is about the player on the button, who I have to think is drawing (otherwise he probably would have raised to put himself basically all-in). That said, if he is on the draw, then I am probably ahead with my pair and nut flush draw.

Given that I have the nut flush draw myself, the only hand I really don't want to be up against is a set, and it doesn't appear that anyone has one.

The play here is to put in a raise. If I knock everybody out, then fine. If I knock out everybody but the button -- who presumably has a strong enough

draw to call the raise with the remainder off his stack -- then fine. And if I am wrong, the bettor actually has a set, and I end up all-in against both the bettor and the button, then it can only be a small mistake at worst, since I still have outs to the nut flush draw.

Action: I raise to \$600. Everybody folds back to the cutoff, who folds. The button calls all-in for \$550 total.

I didn't actually see my opponent's hand, but a king peeled off on the turn and a blank hit the river, and I won the pot with two pair, kings up. But you see the basic idea: the estimated value of my hand improved when the action behind me suggested that I wasn't up against a set. At that point, I was able to put in a raise, isolate the drawing hand, put the initial bettor's dead money in the pot, and play for stacks as the likely favorite.

Hand #3: Check-Raise Bluff (Improvised)

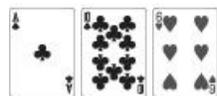
The game: \$5-\$10-\$20

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Four players call the \$20 straddle. I call. The big blind calls. The straddler checks. Seven players see the flop.



Flop (\$140): I check, and it gets checked around.



Turn (\$140):

This is not a good spot for a steal, because it's entirely plausible for someone to have checked an ace on the flop.

Action: I check. It gets checked to the cutoff, who bets \$100. The button folds.

This is a good spot for a bluff raise against a probable steal. If the bettor had A-T-x-x, A-6-x-x, T-T-x-x, or 6-6-x-x, he most likely would have bet the flop from late position.

Action: I raise to \$400 and everybody folds.

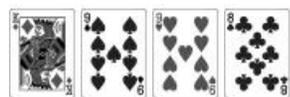
A textbook example, if I might say so. The bettor actually showed an ace as he folded, but I was right that he didn't have A-T-x-x, and that's really the bottom line, and why the play worked.

Hand #4: Check-Raise Semi-Bluff (Improvised)

The game: \$2-\$5, five-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The cutoff and button both limp. The small blind calls. I check.



Flop (\$20): The small blind checks. I check, and it gets checked around.



Turn (\$20): The small blind checks.

The turn card gives me an open-ended straight draw, but only the bottom half is to the nuts. I'd prefer to get a free card than to bet this.

Action: I check. The cutoff now bets \$20, and the other two players fold.

This is kind of a fishy bet. That said, unless the cutoff turned a set, he might not be able to stand a raise.

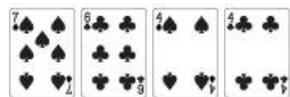
Action: I raise to \$80 and my opponent folds.

Hand #5: Bottom Set (Improvised)

The game: \$5-\$10-\$25 with a Mississippi Straddle

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind folds. I (\$2,050) call. The next player folds. The player behind him (\$2,000) raises to \$75. A middle player (\$1,500) calls, and the button (\$2,200) calls. I call. Four players see the flop.

7♠ 6♣ 4♠ 4♣ isn't really a good hand with the gap at the bottom, particularly from out of position. I am about to get what I deserved -- a marginal situation.



Flop (\$305):

I have bottom set, which may very well be the best hand in this low-mid-(6.5) SPR situation. However, I don't want to bet out here and have to fold to a raise on this coordinated board. I could bet, but my preference is to check and see what the opposition does.

Action: I check, and it gets checked to the player on the button, who bets \$250.

The button makes a weak stab, which, especially on this coordinated flop, is more likely to signify a weaker hand/draw than a stronger one. With an SPR of 6.5, this is judgment territory. I decide to go ahead and commit here.

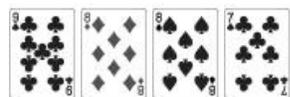
Action: I raise to \$1,055, and everybody folds.

Hand #6: Middle Set (Improvised/Planned)

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$1,500) limps in. An early player (\$2,000) raises to \$45. A player (\$4,500) calls in late position, and it is folded to me. I (\$3,200) call. The UTG player calls. Four players see the flop.



Flop (\$185):

I have middle set and a non-nut gutshot. It is probably the best hand, but I figure that somebody will bet this flop, and I don't want to bet out and get raised by a player with something like Q♠-T♥-9♠-x (a 13-card nut wrap and a flush draw) and have to fold.

Action: I check, and it gets checked to the last player, who bets \$180.

I most likely have the best hand here, but the bettor and I have an SPR of about 17.5 between us, so I don't want to play for stacks here. If my opponent has something (either a set of jacks or a draw), I raise and he re-raises, then I will have to fold. And if instead I raise and get called

Instead of re-raised, I will be in a bad spot which card hits the turn. So if my opponent has J-J-x-x or any kind of draw to call with, then raising is bad.

But what if the bettor is betting light? In that case, if I raise, then he will simply fold, whereas he may bet again light if I just smooth call and check the turn.

Sitting this deep, I will choose the more circumspect route and keep the pot size down.

Action: I call, and the other two players fold.



Well, now I have an open-ended straight draw plus a flush draw, and as such I am much more comfortable with my hand. I could bet out, but my opponent has the initiative and I have to figure that he will bet again if I check to him. I will then raise him and virtually commit myself to the pot. If I am against JJ, the only hand I don't want to see, I still have a lot of outs.

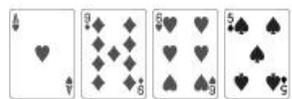
Action: I check. My opponent bets \$540. I raise to \$2,165 and my opponent folds.

Hand #7: Pair Plus Nut Flush Draw (Improvised)

The game: \$.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$95.10) limp in. The next two players fold. The button (\$122.30) raises to \$4.50. The small blind (\$70.70) calls. The big blind folds.

Maybe a little loose pre-flop action UTG, I suppose.



Flop (\$14.50): The SB checks. I check. The button bets \$9. The SB folds. I call.

I have bottom pair and the nut flush draw, and the button has made a sort of weak-stab continuation bet. However, this is not a good spot for a check-raise, as I don't want to re-raise off my draw when I can see the turn card relatively cheaply.



As a general rule, the turn bet is far more indicative of the strength of the bettor's hand than is the flop bet, and this weak half-pot sized turn bet signals, well, weakness.

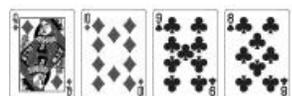
Action: I raise to \$81.25. My opponent folds.

Hand #8: Overtrips with Flush Draw (Planned)

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Early Position

My hand:



This is a hand from the \$5-\$10 PLO game in St. Louis. The button is Little Mike, a wealthy engineer and one of the biggest gamblers in St. Louis -- as well as a certifiable maniac. By most accounts, Mike has been a winner in the game over the years, but at the same time is known for his

legendary ability to consistently put down some of the baddest beats St. Louis has ever seen. I've played a few short sessions with Mike to this point, but this is my first real head-to-head encounter with him.

Mike is on the button.

Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$4,000) open with a raise to \$25.

I gotta be honest: As noted in *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy*, Q-T-9-8 double-suited is a somewhat speculative hand in deep-stack full-ring play, given the top-gap, but part of the reason I put in a small raise was in an attempt to discourage someone -- namely Mike, who for the most part has respected my pre-flop raises up to this point -- from putting in a bigger raise behind me.

It didn't work.

Action: Two players (\$1,500 and \$1,200, respectively) call behind me. Mike (\$5,000) re-raises to \$145. Both blinds fold. I (\$4,200) call, and both players behind me call.



Flop (\$595):

Bingo. This is a pretty good flop -- I have trip nines with three overcards plus a diamond draw. I expect somebody to bet this flop, and if nobody else, then it will probably be Mike.

Action: I check. The next two players check. Mike bets \$595. I put in five orange (\$500) chips to signify a pot-sized raise to \$2380. The other two players fold.

Mike studies me for a minute. He looks me up and down, trying to gauge the strength of my hand.

Finally, Mike says "I put you all in."

I say "OK!" and push out my \$4k in chips.



Turn (\$8,705):

I announce my flush, and produce my hand to no response.



River (\$8,705): Mike says "Nut diamonds" and turns over A♦ A♣ T♠ 6♦.

Mike, among other things, is also a legendary slow roller.

A lot of people in St. Louis think Mike is just extremely lucky, but my take is that if you get the money in bad an extraordinary number of times, you are going to dish out an extraordinary number of bad beats. What I mean is, we don't see the hands in which Mike sticks it in bad and loses -- we only see the hands in which he sticks it in bad and wins, and there happen to be a lot of those.

And well, I guess it wasn't that bad a beat -- I wasn't even a 3:1 favorite (71%/29% to be exact) on the flop. I guess maybe Mike just wanted to make sure I had the nine before sticking his money in just to see if he could do it.

The Bluff Raise

We saw a couple examples of the bluff raise in the previous discussion on check-raising, but let's talk a bit more about the play, particularly as it pertains to those times you face a bet when you have the positional advantage. Bluff raises fall into two basic categories:

1. Semi-bluff raises
2. Naked bluff raises

The Semi-Bluff Raise

The semi-bluff raise is when you raise on the draw not necessarily to build the pot for value, but with the intent of taking down the pot without further action. This implies that you need to have some reasonable expectation that the bettor will actually fold, which means that the best candidates for a semi-bluff raise are the usual suspects: weak stabs, c-bets, or any other possible steal bets.

In low-SPR situations, there are only two bets to play, the semi-bluff raise takes precedence over the float. In other words, if you choose to contest the pot at all, the default play is to shove.

But in mid- to high-SPR situations, the semi-bluff raise is more of an alternative to the float. And, much like the float, the weaker your draw, the more the play is dependent on your read of your opponent. In other words, you don't need as strong a read on your opponent to raise with a 13-card nut wrap with a flush draw as you do to raise with a bare open-ended straight draw with a two-flush on the board.

As a general rule of thumb, the bare 13-card nut wrap is the cutoff point between floating and semi-bluff raising because it is only about a coin flip against pair.

Let's say it's a \$5-\$5 game with \$1,000 stacks and five people see the flop for the minimum. If you are on the button with K-Q-J-3, the flop comes T-9-4 rainbow, the small blind bets the pot into five people and everybody folds to you, you should tend to call (float) rather than raise. But if instead you have K-Q-J-T for top pair and a 13-card nut wrap, K-Q-J-8 for a 16-card nut wrap, you can go ahead and put in at least one raise and build the pot for value. Or if instead you have a flush draw to go with the 13-card nut wrap (obviously not on a rainbow flop this time), you can also put in a raise. However, if instead everybody checks to the cutoff and he takes a weak stab on the T-9-4 rainbow flop, you can go ahead and raise him once on the semi-bluff with the K-Q-J-3 hand (and of course you slow down and just call if you get re-raised).

That said, the weaker the draw, the more you should lean towards floating or folding rather than raising.

It should also be noted that in mid- to high-SPR situations, the semi-bluff raise can be used in conjunction with the float -- that is, you float the flop with a weak draw, and then put in a semi-bluff raise on the turn when your opponent follows up a c-bet with another weak stab.

PLO Tip: In low-SPR situations, the semi-bluff raise takes precedence over the float.

PLO Tip: The weaker the draw, the more you should lean towards floating or folding rather than raising.

PLO Tip: In mid- to high-SPR situations, a semi-bluff raise on the turn can be used in conjunction with a float on the flop.

The Naked Bluff Raise

There isn't nearly as much naked bluff raising in Omaha as there is in hold'em, simply because there is a lot more to draw at in Omaha. Ideally, you don't want to raise with nothing, get called by a player on the draw, and then have to fire another shot; when you have nothing, you want to end the pot with the raise. And so if you are going to put in a raise with nothing, you are really looking for an either/or scenario where your opponent either has it or he doesn't. That said, the best times for a pure bluff are:

1. Paired boards. Paired boards probably represent the number one naked bluff-raising opportunity, particularly when the open pair is on the bottom (i.e. the flop is A-7-7 rather than the A-A-7), as there is a lot of stabbing; for the most part, you either have a full house or you don't.

2. Boards where a flush is possible. This is another virtual either/or scenario, where the bettor most likely either has the nuts or probably can't stand a raise. We discussed the dry-ace play in *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy* (p. 97, "The Dry-Ace Bluff"), but the bluff raise can sometimes be done without the key card.

3. Dry boards. Let's say you are on the button with any four cards, and the flop comes something like K♣ 7♥ 2♦ or A♣ 9♥ 4♦ -- a dry board with not much to draw at. It gets checked to the player in front of you, who takes a stab at the pot. Against a possible steal bet such as this one, this is a decent spot to put in a raise, as it is basically an either/or flop -- either your opponent has a strong made hand or he doesn't and will fold to raise. Some strong players will raise with top pair here and treat the king or ace as a blocker against top set; however, personally, I prefer to smooth call (combo float) with top pair against a possible steal bet in deep stack play. That said, this isn't a bad spot to put in a bluff raise with air from time to time.

4. At the river. This is another good spot for a bluff raise, primarily because all the cards are out, but also because the river is the one street where non-pot-sized bets are standard, thus yielding the best value for the bluff.

Hand #1: Paired-Board Bluff Raise

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle, five-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



This first hand came from a game down in Biloxi with players I had never played with before. I have a \$1,500 stack, and the other stacks are

between \$1,000 and \$3,000.

Pre-flop: The small blind calls. The big blind calls. I raise to \$35. The CO folds. The button and both blinds call. Four players see the flop.



Flop (\$140): Both blinds check.

Once upon a time, I would have bet here and tried to represent AA, but it doesn't work nearly as often as I would like. I've also got a backdoor nut flush draw and straight draws, so I am content if I can get a free card.

Action: I check. The button checks.



Turn (\$140): The small blind -- a somewhat competent player -- bets \$50. The big blind folds.

The small blind might have a nine or an ace (I suppose it's possible he has both), but it would be difficult for him to call a raise with either hand, and especially against an unknown opponent who might have slowplayed a set of aces on the flop. This is a good spot for a bluff raise.

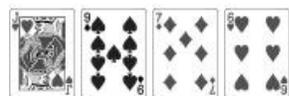
Action: I raise to \$150, and both the button and small blind fold.

Hand #2: Semi-Bluff Float/Semi-Bluff Raise Combo

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max)

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$196.10) and hijack (\$95) call. The cutoff folds. I (\$306.60) call. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$92.60) checks.



Flop (\$9): The big blind checks. The UTG player bets \$4.50. The hijack folds. I call. The big blind folds.

A semi-float against a possible weak stab. I am less inclined to raise than float for a couple of reasons. The first is that this is a multi-way pot, and so the bettor is more likely to bet weak, but have something really strong like top set with a flush draw than he is in a heads-up pot, and I don't want to raise when I have outs. The second reason is that I have a fairly weak draw with just an open-ended straight draw on a two-flush board (I do have bottom pair, though!).



Turn (\$18): My opponent bets \$9.

One weak stab and I am open to the idea that he has a hand. But two weak stabs and I am probably going to raise you until you prove me wrong.

Action: I raise to \$40, and my opponent folds.

Hand #3: Semi-Bluff Raise

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), four-handed, only one blind

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$176.90) calls. The cutoff (\$153.05) calls. I (\$441.65) call. The big blind (\$200) checks.



Flop (\$8): It gets checked to the cutoff, who bets \$5. I call, and the other two players both fold.

I've got the nut flush draw and a double-gutter, and I am definitely not folding. Raising is a viable option as well -- probably the better option -- particularly against a weak stab.



Turn (\$18): My opponent bets \$10.

Now a semi-bluff raise is almost certainly in order, as the weak turn bet is a much stronger indicator of weakness than the flop bet was.

Action: I raise to \$48, and my opponent calls.

Well, I've been wrong before.



River (\$114): My opponent bets \$98.05 all-in, and I call. My opponent shows J♠ T♠ 9♠ 6♣ for the sucker straight.

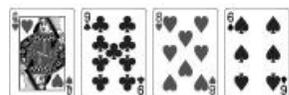
OK, so I was right that he was weak, anyway. I can't say I would have played his hand the same way.

Hand #4: Power Bluff Raise With the Initiative

The game: \$5-\$10, five-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player limps. The cutoff folds. I (\$2,700) limp. The small blind calls. The big blind checks.



Flop (\$40): Everybody checks to me.

I've got a weak-end 17-card wrap on a two-flush board. I do have both the button and the urge.

Action: I bet \$40, and only the big blind (\$600) calls.



Turn (\$120): My opponent bets \$100.

Now, this play doesn't make a lick of sense. The bottom-line question here is "What does he think I am going to call him with?"

If he had something as strong as J-2-x-x, you'd have to figure that he would check here. If he had J-J-x-x or T-T-x-x, he would have no reason to think I'd have anything to call him with, and my guess is that he probably would have bet out or check-raised on the flop with J-J-x-x if not T-T-x-x. And so there are only a couple of possibilities I can figure:

1. He has a deuce for trips or maybe something like AA for two pair, and he is just betting his hand.
2. He has a draw, but doesn't necessarily give me credit for J-J-x-x or T-T-x-x, having bet from the button, and he is just taking a stab at the pot.

I figure the second case is more likely, as there is no reason for him to bet \$100 into a \$120 pot if he actually had something. But either way, none of those hands figure to stand a raise.

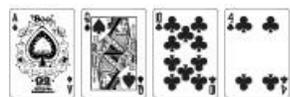
Action: I raise to \$300 and my opponent folds.

Hand #5: Float/Semi-Bluff Raise Combo

The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max)

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$61.90) raises to \$1.75, and it gets folded to me. I (\$61.15) call. Both blinds fold.



Flop (\$4.25): My opponent bets \$3.50. I call.

It's not really a good flop for me with the two diamonds, but it's good enough to float against a c-bet. I've got a gutshot wheel draw and hit one of my pivot cards to a bigger draw on the top end.



Turn (\$11.25): My opponent bets \$8.

Now I've got a 12-card wrap against a second weak stab. I can beat a weak stab.

Action: I raise to \$35.25 and my opponent folds.

Hand #6: River Bluff Raise

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max, deep), four-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$215.75) raise to \$3.50, and only the small blind (\$132.30) calls.

I don't normally raise with two hold'em hands, but the blinds were playing pretty tight up until this point in the session, and I thought I'd try something new. At least I'm double-suited.



Flop (\$8): The small blind checks. I bet \$8, and the small blind calls.



Turn (\$24): The small blind checks. I check.

I didn't want to bet and get check-raised by 9-8-x-x, though I kind of figure that he might have bet the flop if he had even that. I decided to take the free card and keep the pot small, hoping to check the hand down and showdown my pair.



River (\$24): The small blind bets \$12.

At this point, I can't really call him, as it would be embarrassing to call and lose to a seven, a bigger six, or small two pair. It's possible that my opponent has a straight, but it seems more probable that he was on a flush draw. Note that my raise doesn't make a whole lot of sense if I actually have something legitimate to raise with, as I would have bet the turn with the straight – I am merely betting that my opponent is taking a stab at the pot and has nothing to call me with.

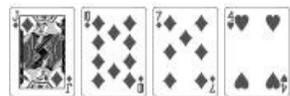
Action: I raise to \$40, and my opponent folds.

Hand #7: Semi-Bluff Float/Paired Board Bluff Raise

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max)

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$266.15) calls. The next two players fold. I (\$210.40) call. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$55.60) checks.

Loose call.



Flop (\$7): The big blind checks. The UTG player bets \$7. I call. The big blind folds.

A float against possible steal. I do have double-gutter.



Turn (\$21): My opponent bets \$10.50.

Alright, so I've preached the pot/pot/half-pot sequence (the "Betting Machine," or "bet it like you have it") thus far, and now I'm going to tell you how to play against it.

Here's a dirty little secret: When somebody bets the flop, the board pairs one of the undercards on the turn and they bet again, it's usually because they don't have anything.

Now it's not 100% or anywhere near it, but much of the time that somebody flops a set and fills up on the turn, they often check the turn to induce a bluff from a player who was on the draw, or otherwise earn a payoff on the river when the draw hits. So when you see this sequence -- particularly from a player who was on a possible steal on the flop -- there's a good chance that he can't stand a raise.

Action: I raise to \$36 and my opponent folds.

Hand #8: Delayed Bluff Raise

The game: \$5-\$10-\$20, UTG straddle

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: One player limps in front of me. I (\$2,500) call. The button calls. The small blind calls. The big blind (\$1,700) raises to \$140. Both players in front of me fold. I call, but everybody else folds.

I was kind of hoping everybody else would call, but I am always willing to play heads up with the positional advantage with any four cards that I would limp in with.



Flop (\$360): My opponent checks. I check.

Normally, this sequence would be a steal sign, but on a paired board like this, I am willing to give my opponent credit for A-A-x-x, as I think he would have put in a c-bet with virtually any other hand.



Turn (\$360): My opponent bets \$200.

At this point, I can mimic having slow-played the flop and faithfully represent a strong hand like T-T-x-x by putting in raise. In my opponent's mind, I would have been more likely to have bet the flop if I intended to steal. If I raise to \$600, I will still have about a \$1,000 bet left as leverage to make it extra difficult for my opponent to call if he does in fact have A-A-x-x as I suspect.

Action: I raise to \$600 and my opponent folds.

Hand #9: Blocker Bluff Raise

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind limps in. An early player limps in. A middle player -- a somewhat loose-aggressive player pre-flop -- raises to \$50. It gets folded to me. I call. The other two players both fold, and we are heads up.



Flop (\$122): My opponent checks. I check.

I normally bet this. I thought I'd try something different.



Turn (\$122): My opponent checks. I bet \$125, and my opponent calls.



River (\$372): My opponent bets \$150.

It's unlikely that my opponent has K-J-x-x for the nut straight, as he likely would have bet a hand like K-Q-J-x at some point. I also have KK myself for blockers. I don't see my opponent betting \$150 with J-8-x-x, either.

In addition, the fact that I checked behind on the flop makes it more likely that my opponent simply doesn't think I have anything and is attempting a steal (a reverse float). I think my opponent is just betting that I don't have anything to call him with.

I could call here, but I don't want to risk calling and losing to junk two pair.

Action: I raise to \$500 and my opponent folds.

Checking-and-Calling

When you have a marginal holding out of position, sometimes the best play may be to check-and-call rather than lead out or go for a check-raise. For example, when you flop a small-pot hand such as under-trips, bottom or middle set, the bare nut straight, a non-nut flush, or top pair, betting out may not be the best idea, because hands worse than yours will tend to fold, and you only rate to get significant action from hands better than yours. And so much of the time in mid- and high-SPR situations, your best bet with these types of hands is to check and try to induce a bluff and keep the pot small if possible.

Note that this idea is applicable on every street, including the river. Also note that a raised pot is a prime candidate for a check-and-call on the flop, particularly in a short-handed pot where you can expect the pre-flop raiser to follow through with a c-bet.

PLO Tip: In situations where you only rate to get action from better hands than yours when you bet but may be able to induce a bluff by checking, checking-and-calling may be the most viable option.

PLO Tip: Raised pots are prime candidates for checking-and-calling, particularly in short-handed pots where you expect the pre-flop raiser to follow through with a continuation bet on the flop.

Hand #1: Undertrips

The game: \$2-\$5

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$1,500) limp in. A middle player (\$1,200) raises to \$25, and two players call behind him. Both blinds fold. I call.



Flop (\$107):

I prefer checking over leading out in this spot. If I check, I can expect somebody -- probably the pre-flop raiser -- to take a stab at this flop, whereas if I lead out with a bet, those same players who might have bet would instead fold.

Action: I check, and it gets checked to the button (\$800), who bets \$80.

I probably have the best hand at this point. The problem with raising is that I don't rate to get more than one bet from a hand worse than mine (i.e. the button has trips and calls one more bet to pick off a possible bluff raise). The play is to call and keep the pot small, and possibly try to get my opponent to take another stab.

Action: I call, and the other two players fold.



Turn (\$267):

If my opponent was on the steal, he is going to fold if I bet (or put in a raise which I can't call). Meanwhile, if he has smaller deuce, he will probably bet again. My best bet is to stay in check-and-call mode.

Action: I check. My opponent checks.



River (\$267):

I am still checking. My opponent probably doesn't have a deuce, and so it is extremely unlikely that he has anything to call me with which I can beat. That said, there is little value in value betting. Again, my best bet is to check and hope to induce a bluff.

Action: I check and my opponent checks. I win.

Hand #2: Top Pair, Top Kicker

The game: \$0.50-\$1 on the PokerPro electronic table at Excalibur, six-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



This hand took place in November 2008, on the first night that we made a concerted effort to start the small-stakes PLO game on the electronic tables in the poker room at Excalibur in Las Vegas. Clonie Gowen happened to be in town, and is sitting on the button. The player in the big blind is playing PLO for the first time.

Pre-flop: Everybody folds to Clonie (\$230), who raises to \$3.50. I (\$360) call. The big blind (\$80) calls.



Flop (\$10.50):

This is a clear check-and-call situation. If I bet, I am not going to get action from anything less than another Ace. But if I check, I may be able to get Clonie to toss in a c-bet with less.

Action: I check. The big blind checks. Clonie bets \$7.

I can beat a weak stab.

Action: I call. The big blind calls.

The overcall is a bit of a surprise, and probably indicates at least another ace.



Turn (\$31.50):

Now I have top trips, top kicker. My problem is that while I may have the best hand, I don't want to bet out and get raised and have to fold, particularly when I have to figure the big blind for the other ace.

Action: I check. The big blind checks. Clonie checks.



River (\$31.50):

At this point, I figure the big blind for an ace, and unless she has a nine to go with it, then I probably have the best hand. I should put in a value bet here.

Action: I bet \$15. The big blind calls. Clonie folds.

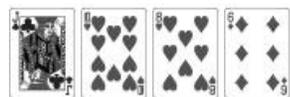
The big blind actually had A-3-7-J, having flopped top two pair and turned the nuts, thus beating me with a full house. She missed an opportunity to bet on the turn, probably hoping that Clonie would bet again.

Hand #3: Overtrips

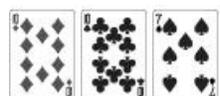
The game: \$5-\$10

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$3,500) limp in. A middle player (\$6,000) limps in behind me. The button (\$5,000) raises to \$60, and both blinds fold. I call. The limper calls.



Flop (\$195):

I have overtrips, which is significantly better than undertrips, because it means that I have a legitimate draw at the nuts. Betting out is a consideration, but if I do so, I only rate to get action from someone else with trips or better, whereas the pre-flop raiser might be willing to follow through with a c-bet in this short-handed pot.

Action: I check. The middle player checks. The button bets \$125.

Similar problem: If I raise, I am only going to get action from trips or better. Moreover, I don't want to play a big pot here with just trips.

Action: I call.



Turn (\$345):

Now I have a full house. This is an interesting spot in that I can beat dry trips. That said, I don't want to get raised here, and if my opponent actually has trips (or T-7-x-x or 7-7-x-x) he will probably bet himself anyway if I check. But if I bet and he doesn't have trips, he will fold.

Action: I check. My opponent checks.



River (\$345):

At this point, I almost certainly have the best hand, and my opponent also has to know that I have at least a ten. So basically, if my opponent has anything to show down, I have to bet; and if he doesn't, he is not going to bluff at it. One thing I have going for me is that the double-paired board and my passivity to this point make it unlikely that I have a full house.

My best bet is to make a smallish value bet that looks like a blocking bet, and hope my opponent puts in a bluff raise.

Action: I bet \$150. My opponent thinks (probably about raising), but eventually folds.

I might have bet too much. It's also possible that my opponent knows that I know that he doesn't have a ten, and that I would probably call him in this spot with a bare ten.

Hand #4: Top Two Pair on Flush Board

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack (\$248) calls. The next two players fold. The small blind (\$64.30) calls. I (\$100) raise to \$4, and only the hijack calls.



Flop (\$9):

This is an OK, but not great, flop for me. If I bet, I am unlikely to get action from any hands that I can beat, and I certainly don't have enough hand to play a big pot. However, I do have enough hand to pick off a bluff.

This is a check-and-call situation.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$9. I call.

As planned. At this point my opponent likely either has the nuts or nothing.



Turn (\$27):

Bingo. Now I almost certainly have the best hand. That said, if my opponent actually has a flush, he may not call if I bet. But if he doesn't, he may be willing to bluff.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$27.

Again, my opponent either has the nuts or nothing. I would lean towards nothing given that he bet the pot on both streets when the flush and full house were out. This bet makes my opponent look like he's trying to represent anything that will make me fold.

Calling is the best play, as if I raise, I am unlikely to get called by a worse hand (I still have just the underfull). Meanwhile, it gives my opponent another chance to bluff.

Action: I call.



River (\$81):

Same situation.

Action: I check. My opponent checks, showing A♣ 8♥ 6♦ 5♣ for air.

Hand #5: KK Out of Position

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to the button (\$55.40), who opens with a raise to \$3.50. I (\$99.35) call. The big blind folds.

Standard. It's not a good idea to 3-bet when out of position with a weak pair hand, even if I think my KK is the best hand at the moment.



Flop (\$8):

This is either good or bad. Either way, I want to play a small pot. That said, if I bet, I am unlikely to get action from any hands that I want to get action, while I may be able to induce a bluff if I check.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$5. I call.

At this point I don't know where I stand. I put in a call here; if my opponent bets again on the turn, I am probably beat.



Turn (\$18): I check. My opponent checks.



River (\$18):

No need to bet now.

Action: I check. My opponent checks, showing A♥ Q♦ 6♥ 5♣, and my KK is good.

You see how subtle poker often is. The call on the flop was enough to slow my opponent down.

Hand #6: Middle Set

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: UTG

My hand:



This is another hand from the \$5-\$10 PLO game in St. Louis, and once again involves Little Mike from Check-Raising Hand #8. In this hand, I

hopped middle set in early position in a high SPR situation with several players left to act, including Mike.

Mike, incidentally, has lost a few big hands and has only \$2k on the table -- far less than usual for him.

Pre-flop: I (\$3,000) limp in. Three players limp behind me. The small blind calls, and the big blind checks.



Flop (\$60): Both blinds check.

I have a bare middle set on a flop with two diamonds on it. I could bet out, but I may induce action from weaker hands (such as one pair or less) if I check.

Action: I check. The next player checks. Mike (\$2,000) bets \$60, and it gets folded back to me.

I probably have the best hand. But between Mike and I, we have an SPR of over 33, so if I raise, I am unlikely to get a worse hand to call me, whereas I may get continued action if I smooth call and check the turn.

Action: I call. The next player (\$1,500) calls.



Turn (\$240):

The board's gotten worse, and there is another player between us. I could bet out, but that would put me in a very uncomfortable position if I get called and the river comes, because now there are two possible flush draws and straight draws as well.

Action: I check. The next player checks. Mike bets \$240.

This is a very uncomfortable position regardless. Raising is a possibility, but I don't want to play a big pot and have to face a scare card. An alternative is calling and acting as if I am on the draw myself, which may discourage a bluff if a scare card hits but encourage another bluff if it doesn't. This is a tricky spot no matter what -- the only lesson here is that playing out of position sucks.

Action: I call. The other player folds.



River (\$720):

This is a great river card. However, my problem is that if I bet, I may not get called by a worse hand, particularly if Mike was on a draw (like a flush draw). Conversely, if he was, in fact, on the draw, he may finish the sequence with one last shot.

Action: I check. Mike bets \$720.

This looks like an either/or bet -- either Mike has the nuts or he was on the draw and he has nothing. I'm not folding, but it would be a mistake to raise if the two biggest possibilities are that he either has me beat or has nothing.

Action: I call. Mike announces two pair...I win.

I suppose it's possible I underplayed my hand against this particular opponent at the river. But most players don't make pot-sized value bets with two pair at the river.

Hand #7: Heads Up Out of Position in a 3-Bet Pot

The game: \$2-\$5

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$2,700) open with a raise to \$15. It gets folded to a middle player (\$1,600), who re-raises to \$50. Everybody folds to me. I call.



Flop (\$107):

Three things to consider:

1. I have top pair and a gutshot, a small pot hand (that could improve considerably) good enough to pick off a bluff.
2. I am heads up and out of position.
3. My opponent has the pre-flop initiative.

If I bet and my opponent has nothing to call me with, he will fold. But if I check, he will likely follow through with a c-bet with a lot of those nothing hands. I also don't want to bet out and get raised when I have a lot of ways to improve.

The play is to check and call any bet.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$60. I call.



Turn (\$227):

Well, now I either have the best hand or I don't. That said, I don't have enough hand to play for two more bets, and maybe not one, either.

Action: I check. My opponent checks.



River (\$227):

Nothing's changed from the turn. Ideally, I'd like to show this hand down, but I do have enough to pick off a bluff if need be.

Action: I check. My opponent checks, and I win.

Hand #8: Checking and Calling on the River

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in

My position: Early position

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$1,500) open limp from early position. Two players limp behind me. The cutoff (\$1,400) -- a maniac -- raises to \$30. The button calls. The small blind calls. The big blind folds. I call, and the other two limpers call. Six players see the flop.



Flop (\$182): The small blind checks. I check, and everybody checks behind.



Turn (\$182): The small blind checks. I check, and it gets checked around.



River (\$182): The small blind checks.

Now I've got a full house, but it's hard to figure that anybody has anything to call me with that I can beat -- you'd think an ace would have bet by now. I don't want to bet here just to get raised by the cutoff if he flopped quads.

Action: I check, and it gets checked to the cutoff, who bets \$100. The small blind folds.

All I can really beat here is a bluff.

Action: I call, and everybody else folds. The cutoff shows A-4-3-3 for a dry ace with no kicker.

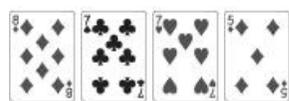
Wow. Maniacs will surprise you sometimes. I think even some of the most passive players I've come across would have bet at some point before the river.

Hand #9: Inducing a Bluff at the River

The game: \$5-\$10-\$20

My position: Early Position

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$2,500) open limp. Three players limp behind me, including the button. Both blinds fold, and the straddler checks. Five players see the flop.



Flop (\$115): The first player checks. I bet \$110, and it gets folded to the button (\$2,000), who calls. The other player folds.



Turn (\$335): I bet \$330 and my opponent calls.



River (\$995):

At this point, I have to figure I have the best hand. If my opponent was on the draw, then he likely missed (the A♠ did put a possible wheel out), and if he wasn't, then he is unlikely to have anything to call me with. My best bet is to check and try to induce a bluff.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$300, and I call. I win as planned.

Hand #10: The Third Nut Flush, Heads Up

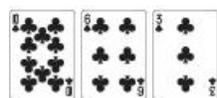
The game: \$2-\$4 online, heads up

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: SB/Button (\$611.90) raises to \$8. I (\$352.40) call.



Flop (\$16):

I've got the third-nut flush heads up. I want this hand to go to showdown, but at the same time I don't want to play a big pot. If I bet out here, I am unlikely to get a worse hand to call me down, while checking may induce a bluff. Moreover, a free card is unlikely to beat me. Checking with the intention of calling is the best play.

Action: I check. My opponent checks.

This is fine.



the image is missing **Turn (\$16):**

Same deal.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$16. I call.

As planned.



River (\$48):

Again, nothing's changed. If I bet, I am unlikely to get a worse hand to call me, while if I check I may get my opponent to fire a second bluff.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$48.

This is another either/or spot. And again, the key is that a worse hand probably will not call if I raise, even heads up.

Action: I call. My opponent shows $K\clubsuit Q\heartsuit J\clubsuit 7\spadesuit$ for the king-high flush.

There's not much I could do about that one. The one thing to be realized about short-handed Omaha is that the big-pot hands are still the big-pot hands, and that the small-pot hands are still the small-pot hands. The main difference between short-handed and full-ring play is that you are going to be in a lot more small-pot situations in short-handed play.

3-Betting After the Flop (Without the Nuts)

3-betting after the flop for isolation is another useful play. Mind you, I am not talking about 3-betting those times when you flop the stone nuts with platinum re-draws, but, rather, special situations where putting in a third bet may help you isolate a player and vastly improve your chances of winning the pot.

Usually, the idea is to knock out a player with a weak made hand -- which you may currently be losing to -- and isolate a player on the draw which you may have smashed.

Hand #1: Top Pair with Open-Ended Straight Draw

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack (\$155.50) calls. The cutoff (\$169.90) raises to \$9. I (\$267.60) call. The small blind (\$361.60) calls. The big blind folds. The hijack calls. Four players see the flop.



Flop (\$47): The SB bets \$19. The hijack folds. The cutoff raises to \$57, and it is up to me.

Here I have top pair/weak kicker with the nut open-ended straight draw, facing a weak stab and a weak stab raise. My guess is that I am up against a couple of weak aces. Calling is out of the question, as I am not that strong myself. However, a re-raise might force both opponents to fold, or it might otherwise knock out a weak made hand and put me heads up against a drawing hand which I can beat.

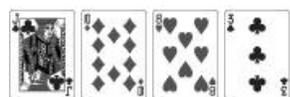
Action: I re-raise to \$228 and both opponents fold.

Hand #2: Top Two Pair with Flush Draw

The game: \$5-\$10, five-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$2,700) limp in. The cutoff folds. The button (\$800) limps in. The small blind (\$1,100) limps in. The big blind (\$585) -- a complete PLO neophyte -- raises to \$50. I call, and the other two players both call.



Flop (\$200): The small blind -- a very loose bettor -- bets \$200. The big blind raises all-in for \$535 total.

I have top two pair and a flush draw against a loose bettor and a PLO neophyte raiser who doesn't have to have much here to commit (maybe AA), especially in a low-SPR (2.7) situation. I probably have the raiser beat here. Ideally, I'd like to isolate the raiser and improve my chances of winning with my flush draw and or two pair, and the way to do that is to put in a re-raise.

Action: I re-raise to \$1,900 and set the table all-in. The button folds. The small blind folds, flashing a set of threes.



Turn (\$1,470):



River (\$1,470): The big blind shows $A\clubsuit K\clubsuit 8\spadesuit 4\heartsuit$ for a bigger two pair.

So the play worked. Unfortunately, the big blind actually had $A\clubsuit K\clubsuit 8\spadesuit 4\heartsuit$ -- a worse hand than AA pre-flop -- but good on this flop, especially against my hand. He's got draws to two pair, a bigger flush, and a gutshot, and is actually nearly a 2:1 favorite (64.0%/36.0%) against my hand on the flop.

I actually almost broke even equity-wise in the hand, as I only put in 36.4% of the money ($\$535/\$1,470$) after the flop. I also vastly improved by knocking out the set of threes -- in three-way action against both the big blind and the set of threes, I only have about 7% equity.

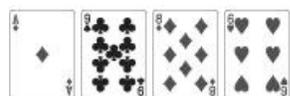
It's also worth noting that I am a 72.9%/27.1% favorite heads up against $A\clubsuit A\spadesuit 9\clubsuit 4\heartsuit$ for aces with a gutshot and a 78.8%/21.2% favorite against $A\clubsuit A\spadesuit 9\clubsuit 6\heartsuit$ for a dry pair of aces. I am even 49.8%/50.2% against $A\clubsuit A\spadesuit 9\clubsuit 6\clubsuit$ for aces with the nut club draw. And so basically, I figure to be well over 36.4% against the big blind's range, and he just happened to have the one hand that matched up well against mine.

Hand #3: Top Pair with Three Overcards, Nut Flush Draw, and Gutshot

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in (\$500 max)

My position: Second Position

My hand:



This is a hand from the \$1-\$2 blind, \$5 to bring-in game in St. Louis. The two blinds -- Ali and Vafa -- are best pals and all-around good guys. They are also pretty lousy card players, though maybe not quite as bad as they let on. Both occasionally play in the \$5-\$10 PLO game that runs twice a week.

Little Mike jokes that of the ten players at the table, Ali is ranked "zero" on a scale of 1 to 10 -- "10" being the best player at the table, and "1" being the worst. Vafa says that he doesn't care what his rank is, so long as it is higher than Ali's. Ali, however, is having a monster session, having run his \$500 buy-in up to about \$5,000. Vafa is in the big blind with about \$1,100.

In the UTG seat is Steve, a local pro who has a reputation as an ace limit hold'em player.

Pre-flop: Steve (\$1,000) limps UTG. I (\$1,035) limp. Three players limp behind me. Ali (\$5,000) limps in from the small blind. Vafa (\$1,100) limps in from the big blind.



Flop (\$35): Ali bets \$35. Vafa raises to \$140. Steve calls.

I have top pair, the nut flush draw and a gutshot, and so I am not folding. Moreover, neither Ali nor Vafa have to be all that strong. At this point, I figure Steve to be on the draw, against which I have to be ahead of with my pair, nut flush draw, and gutshot. I am also well ahead of two pair. Ideally, I would like to isolate one of the players, but I would be OK playing for stacks three-way.

Action: I re-raise to \$625. It gets folded back to Ali, who folds. Vafa calls. Steve folds.



Turn (\$1,460): Vafa checks.

The 3♣ paired the board, but I have to figure that Vafa is on the draw -- I would expect that he would have re-raised on the flop with a made hand. I should bet my last \$405 all-in and try to take down the pot without a fight.

Action: I bet \$405 all-in. Vafa calls.

OK.



River (\$2,270): I have the nut straight. Vafa shows Q♦ 8♥ 7♦ 6♣ for the same straight.

Steve is now steaming, saying that he folded three pair on the flop, with which he would have made a full house on the turn. But it's a good fold, because I am still about 3:2 favorite over his three pair with what I had, and he would have been drawing dead or near it against a set.

As it actually played out, I was about a 2:1 favorite (65.7%/34.3%) against Vafa on the flop, and a 72.5%/27.5% favorite on the turn. And so I would say mission accomplished, though we ended up splitting the pot (I did knock out the full house though).

Hand #4: Bottom Pair, Dual Second-Nut Flush Draws with Gutshot on Turn

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



This hand occurred at the Rio during the WSOP in 2008. The pre-flop raiser is Kirby, another professional player from St. Louis. Kirby has just lost a big pot in an all-in confrontation about a round earlier, and appears to be tilting a little bit. The UTG player is fairly non-descript.

Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind calls. The UTG player calls. Kirby (\$850) raises to \$20 from middle position. A player calls behind him. I (\$4,500) call. The big blind and UTG player both call. Five players see the flop.



Flop (\$102): Everybody checks to me. I check.

I've got bottom pair and the second-nut flush draw. I decide to take the free card here.



Turn (\$102): The big blind checks. The UTG player (\$1,650) bets \$100. Kirby now raises to \$400, and the next player folds.

Now I have bottom pair and dual second-nut flush draws, as well as a gutshot. I could fold. Calling is not really an option, because if I can at least knock a player out I can improve my chances of winning if I make two pair or trips, as well as with one flush or the other.

The first bettor -- the UTG player -- could have a set, two pair, and/or some kind of a draw. If I re-raise, I may be able to make him fold two pair, or a set of eights or fours; it helps that we have an SPR over 16 between us to give him something to think about. And if he is on the draw -- a hand such as K-Q-J-T with diamond or spades -- I am in pretty good shape (I am actually about a 2:1 favorite against K-Q-J-T with king-high spades), as he

can't physically have me covered in all directions.

As for Kirby, we can rule out a set of aces, eights, or fours -- otherwise he probably would have bet the flop. So what else could he have?

Now I've played a fair amount of poker with Kirby over the past few years, and he's a pretty decent player under normal circumstances (Kirby, incidentally, has a World Poker Open main event final table and a couple of WSOP cashes to his credit). But I've seen him tilt pretty badly before, and it's not clear to me at all that he's not messing around. He also only has an \$830 stack, so the pot gives me a little bit of an overlay even if I am wrong.

Note that if I can get heads up and play for stacks with Kirby, I only need about 45% equity (\$830/\$1,862) to break even. And so even if he's not messing around, here's how I fare against some of the stronger hands. I am a:

- 65.0%/35.0% *favorite* against $K\heartsuit Q\heartsuit J\spadesuit T\spadesuit$ for a 13-card nut wrap with the nut diamonds and third-nut spades
- 77.5%/22.5% *favorite* against $Q\heartsuit J\heartsuit T\heartsuit 6\heartsuit$ for 13-card nut wrap with dual flush draws
- 72.5%/27.5% *favorite* against $J\heartsuit T\heartsuit 7\heartsuit 6\heartsuit$ for 20-card wrap with dual flush draws
- 10.0%/90.0% *dog* against $A\heartsuit K\heartsuit J\heartsuit T\heartsuit$ for top pair, dual nut flush draws and the nut open-ended straight draw
- 35.0%/65.0% *dog* against $A\heartsuit J\heartsuit T\heartsuit 2\heartsuit$ for top pair, the nut spade draw, and the nut open-ended straight draw
- 40.0%/60.0% *dog* against J-T-9-9 for a set and open-ended nut straight draw but no flush draw
- 37.5%/62.5% *dog* against specifically $J\heartsuit T\heartsuit 9\heartsuit 9\heartsuit$ for a set with an open-ended nut straight and a jack-high diamond draw

- 52.5%/47.5% *favorite* against $Q\heartsuit J\heartsuit T\heartsuit 9\heartsuit$ for a pair of nines, a 13-card nut wrap and a smaller diamond draw
- 45.0%/55.0% *dog* against $A\heartsuit J\heartsuit T\heartsuit 9\heartsuit$ for top two pair, and open-ended straight draw and a smaller flush draw
- 50/50 exactly against $A\heartsuit K\heartsuit Q\heartsuit 9\heartsuit$ for bare top two pair
- 50/50 against $J\heartsuit T\heartsuit 9\heartsuit 8\heartsuit$ for two pair, the nut open-ended straight draw and diamond flush draw.

We can probably rule out anything that includes top pair and the nut spades, as you can figure that Kirby would have bet that on the flop. And if we can rule out specifically the $A\heartsuit K\heartsuit J\heartsuit T\heartsuit$ hand (as well as A-A-x-x, 8-8-x-x, and 4-4-x-x, with which Kirby probably would have bet the flop), then 3-betting looks to be a pretty profitable play against Kirby's range -- that is, I should have in excess of 45% equity on average -- *assuming that the original bettor folds*.

However, that the other player may still play probably pushes my hand back towards a fold, because it increases the probability that I will be up against two bigger flush draws, which would virtually kill my hand.

Action: I re-raise to \$1,200. The big blind folds. The UTG player now insta-shoves for \$1,650 total. Kirby calls.

Whoops?

Action: I call.

I am pot-committed now.



River (\$4,232): UTG player shows $7\heartsuit 7\clubsuit 6\heartsuit 5\heartsuit$ for the straight, which scoops the pot.

The UTG player said that he had "everything" -- what he actually had was more like a 12-card sucker wrap with a sucker flush draw. In fact, I was a 62.5%/37.5% favorite on the turn heads up against that hand. Kirby mucked his hand, saying he had J-T-9-9 for a set of nines and the open-ended nut straight draw, but no flush draw.

OK, so let's look at the numbers.

Actual percentages for the \$2,592 main pot, assuming Kirby had J-T-9-9:

- Jeff: 36.1%
- UTG: 11.1%
- Kirby: 52.8%

Actual percentages for \$1,640 side pot, again assuming Kirby is telling the truth about his hand (calculation taken from twodimes.net):

- Jeff: 63.9%
- UTG: 36.1%

Actual percentages for \$1,640 side pot, assuming Kirby's hand is unknown:

- Jeff: 62.5%
- UTG: 37.5%

As the hand actually played out, I had 36.1% equity in the \$2,592 main pot for an expected value of \$935.71 -- that is, assuming that Kirby actually had J-T-9-9, probably about the best hand I could expect him to have. And assuming Kirby is telling the truth about his hand (i.e. backing out a jack, a ten, and two nines), I had 63.9% equity in the \$1,640 side pot for an expected value of \$1,047.96. In aggregate, my total expected value was

\$1,983.61 (\$935.71 + \$1,047.96). And backing out the \$1,650 I put in the turn, my net expected value was \$333.67 ($\$1,983.61 - \$1,650$), meaning I had a healthy positive expectation in the hand ($\$333.67/\$1,650 = 0.202$ for a 20.2% return on investment).

Value-Betting the River

We talked a bit about value-betting the river in *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy* (see "Betting on the River," pg. 100). Let's talk about it in greater depth.

While pot-sized bets may be standard on the flop and turn, there is a lot more room for bet-size variation once all the cards are out on the river. That said, there is also a lot more to think about when betting on the river than on any other street in Omaha.

The first rule of value-betting the river is that your bet must be ambiguous and open to interpretation. A blocking bet from out of position must also be capable of being interpreted as a "suck" bet with the nuts, or otherwise you are going to get raised every time you bet small out of position. A token value bet with a marginal hand in position must also be capable of being interpreted as a suck bet with the near-nuts (that is, a hand strong enough to pick off a bluff raise), or you will again face the problem of getting raised every time you bet small. In addition, a big bet must be capable of being interpreted as either a max value bet or as a bluff.

In other words, you can't just bet one amount when you "have it" and another amount when you are bluffing, otherwise your opponents will quickly figure out what each bet amount means and play you accordingly.

The second rule of value-betting the river is that when value-betting in position (that is, when your opponent(s) have checked to you), your bet sizes will tend to be tailored not only to the strength of your hand, but also to the perceived strength of your opponent's hand.

With that in mind, value-bets on the river fall into three basic categories:

1. **Token Bets** (roughly 10% to 25% of the pot)
2. **Big Bets** (about 75% to 100% of the pot)
3. **Standard Bets** (roughly 40% to 66% of the pot)

Token Bets (10% to 25% of the pot)

A token bet of about 10% to 25% of the pot is rarely used as a bluff. What this means is that in order to make a token bet out of position, the bet must be able to be interpreted as either as a value bet or as a blocking bet. This is because in order to make a blocking bet when out of position, you must also make token value bets when strong -- otherwise, your opponents will start raising you any time you bet small, defeating the very purpose of the blocking bet.

Here's a real-life example. It's a \$1-\$2 game with a \$5 bring-in, and you are dealt $A\clubsuit K\heartsuit Q\spadesuit 7\heartsuit$ in the big blind. Two players limp in, it is folded to you, and you complete. The flop comes $A\clubsuit J\clubsuit T\clubsuit$, giving you the nut straight. You bet \$15 and both opponents call. The turn is the $4\heartsuit$. You bet \$45 and both opponents call again. The river is the $9\spadesuit$.

How much do you bet?

At this point, there is \$180 in the pot, and it should be blatantly obvious that you have the nut straight. That said, if you make a standard bet of about half the pot or bigger, you are unlikely to get called by *anything*. However, if instead you make a little token bet, your opponents may interpret the bet as a blocking bet and pay you off with something like a set, a smaller straight (the $9\spadesuit$ makes two more possible straights), or perhaps even top two pair just to see it.

In the actual hand, I made a measly \$25 bet -- about 14% or a little under 1/7 the size of the pot -- and did in fact pick up a caller.

So there are really two main ideas behind the token value bet when playing out of position:

1. To give your opponents ridiculous-looking odds to gain value in situations where your opponents likely have little chance of actually winning but are unlikely to call a bigger bet.
2. To disguise your blocking bets.

Now when the positions are reversed and your opponents have checked to you on the river, the role of the token value bet changes a little bit, as there is no need to make a blocking bet when you can just check and show down for free. Moreover, your opponents have indicated a level of weakness by checking. And so a token bet in position is almost always used as a "suck bet" with a marginal-to-strong but non-nut hand (such as the second-nut flush or second-nut straight, or a set on a board with a possible straight out) tailored to the strength of your opponents' hands.

Once again, the idea behind the token bet in position is to give your opponents ridiculous-looking odds in order to gain value by getting them to call a bet when they have little chance of actually winning the pot and you don't believe they are strong enough to call a bigger bet. What you want to do is widen your opponents' calling range enough in order to make it profitable to value bet rather than check the hand down.

That said, when employing a token bet in position with a marginal hand, you have to be willing to call possible bluff check-raises from time to time, otherwise your opponents will start raising you every time you bet small.

Big Bets (75% to 100% of the pot)

At the other end of the spectrum, a big bet of about 75% to 100% of the pot must be able to be interpreted as either a max value bet with the nuts or as a bluff. You can't always have the nuts when you bet big, or your opponents will never pay you off; nor can you always be bluffing when you bet big, or your opponents will start calling you thin or even bluff raising you.

Note that this also applies to the specific use of the full pot-sized bet on the river as well: You want to avoid a pattern where you might bet 95% of the pot as either a value bet or a bluff but only say "pot" if you have the nuts, otherwise that pattern will become transparent.

Generally speaking, the big value bet should be used when:

1. You believe you have the best hand (usually -- but not always -- the nuts).

2. Your opponent rates to call a big bet with a hand worse than yours if he calls anything at all. Typical situations are when you make the nut straight on the river and your opponent may have drawn to the second-nut straight, or you make the nut flush and your opponent makes a smaller flush. Another good spot for a big bet is when you backdoor a straight, your opponent has led the betting the whole way and then checks the river (usually indicating a set).

Note: If you appear to be on tilt -- say you took a bad beat recently, or maybe you got bluffed out badly and your opponent "knows" that you want to get him back -- you should tend to make bigger bets than normal with some weaker hands than usual, as you stand a better chance of getting called with weaker hands than normal.

Standard Bets (40% to 66% of the pot)

A standard-sized value bet of about 40% to 66% (2/5 to 2/3 of the pot) should be made either to mimic a follow through (the pot/pot/half-pot betting sequence) or a float attempt, or otherwise when there is no compelling reason to make either a token bet or a big bet.

Most of the time in pot-limit Omaha, if your opponent has anything to call you with at the river, he will either be strong enough to call a big bet if he calls anything at all, or just strong enough to call a token bet out of curiosity. Because in contrast to hold'em, there are not a lot of made hand vs. made hand matchups in Omaha that go all the way to the river; most pots that go to the river in Omaha are made hand vs. draw. Moreover, most of the time, players tend to draw at the nuts, which lends itself to bigger bets at the river.

That said, there are instances when you might bet half the pot on the river for value. For example, you might bet half the pot on the river for value as part of a pot/pot/half-pot sequence. Let's say the board reads $J\spadesuit T\heartsuit 4\heartsuit 3\clubsuit T\heartsuit$, you bet the pot on both the flop and turn, and got called by a lone opponent on both streets. In this spot, you might make your bigger bets those times you have J-J-x-x for the overfull, but bet half the pot when you have J-T-x-x for the underfull.

This makes sense in that there aren't many hands that can call a big bet on this board when you are holding J-T-x-x, while an opponent holding J-T-x-x can call a big bet when you have J-J-x-x for the overfull. That said, when you bet half the pot and mimic a follow through when you have J-T-x-x for the underfull, your more astute opponents may sense a follow through sequence and be more willing to try to pick off a bluff and call you light on the river. Moreover, doing so will also lend credence to those times you bet pot/pot/half-pot and miss, giving more power to the sequence.

But the main point is that you want your value bets to mimic your bluffs in order to draw calls from worse hands. And so if you are holding the nuts and you are afraid that a big bet would look too much like the nuts to your opponent, but that a half-pot bet might look more like a bluff, it may be best to bet half the pot.

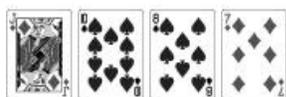
Let's say there is \$100 in the pot; if your opponent would call a \$100 bet 20% of the time, but a \$50 bet 50% of the time, then it would be more profitable to bet half the pot, because 50% of \$50 (\$25) is more than 20% of \$100 (\$20).

Hand #1: Medium Flush in Position

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in, six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack limps. I raise to \$15. The button calls. Both blinds fold, and the limper calls.



Flop (\$48): Hijack checks. I bet \$45. The button folds. The hijack calls.

This is a clean enough flop for a c-bet, with a high card and two small ones. I also have a flush draw with a gutshot.



Turn (\$138): Opponent checks. I check.

The fact that the button folded behind me on the flop makes this hand easier to play. I can check behind here safely and make this a one-bet hand from here.



River (\$138): Opponent checks.

This is a good spot for a token value bet.

Action: I bet \$25, and opponent calls with a smaller flush.

Granted, he could just as easily have played a bigger flush the same way, but having played the hand the way I did may also elicit calls from something like a straight or maybe even two pair as well. In contrast, had I bet the turn, my opponent's calling range would have been far narrower, as in limited to bigger flushes.

As an aside, this actually might have been a decent spot for a slightly bigger, standard-sized value-bet. That said, the idea behind the token-sized bet was to make it easy for my opponent to call me with something other than a flush.

Hand #2: Aces Up Out of Position

The game: \$2-\$5

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: A middle player (\$1,900) opens with a raise to \$20. Two players call behind him. I (\$2,200) call. The big blind calls.



Flop (\$100): I check, and it gets checked around.



Turn (\$100):

I now have the nut flush draw to go with my aces.

Action: I bet \$100. The next players both fold. The next player (\$800 remaining) calls, and the button folds.



River (\$300):

This is a good spot for a token value/blocking bet. A big bet is wrong because my opponent doesn't rate to call a big bet unless he can beat A-A-x-x. And rather than check and possibly have to face a big bet with my aces up, my preference is to make a price-setting token value bet.

Action: I bet \$50 and my opponent calls, showing J-3-x-x for a counterfeited two pair. He says he had a spade draw as well.

Hand #3: Weak Straight in Position

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: A middle player limps. The small blind completes. I check.



Flop (\$30): The small blind bets \$30. I call, and the other player folds.

A semi-bluff float in a short-handed pot with a 13-card nut wrap, though with two diamonds on the board.



Turn (\$90): My opponent checks. I bet \$90 and he calls.

Standard bet with the nuts.



River (\$270): My opponent checks.

Well, now I have the third-nut straight.

The first question is whether or not I have the best hand, and the answer is probably. My opponent probably would have bet out with the Q-T-x-x for the nut straight, and probably, but not necessarily, with T-7-x-x for the second-nut straight.

The next question is what can my opponent call me with, and how much will he call? I think regardless of whether he flopped a set or missed a flush draw but wound up with a pair or two, he probably isn't strong enough to call anything but a token-sized bet with all of the possible straights out.

Action: I bet \$25, and my opponent calls with a set of fours.

Hand #4: Nut Flush in Position

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two players limp in front of me. I call. The button folds. The small blind calls. The big blind checks.



Flop (\$50): Everybody checks to me. I bet \$50, and only the big blind and first limper call.

Positional bet with the nut flush draw, pair of eights and straight blocker draw (or whatever).



Turn (\$200): Both opponents check to me. I bet \$200 and only the big blind calls.

Well, I bet the blockers...



River (\$600): My opponent checks.

This spot calls for a big bet.

My hand is somewhat disguised, since I've bet the whole way. If I had the straight or a set, my opponent would expect me to check and show down. Meanwhile, it will be hard for my opponent to figure I've bet the nut flush draw the whole way.

The other question is what my opponent has. He might have two pair, a weak straight, or more likely, a flush. My view at this point is that my opponent doesn't call anything but a token bet with a two pair or a bad straight. But if he has a flush, he should be willing to call a big bet.

I gotta figure that a flush is fairly likely the way the hand has played out.

Action: I bet \$500, and my opponent calls. I win!

Hand #5: The Backdoor Nut Straight in Position

The game: A \$1-\$2 game with a \$5 bring-in

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two players limp in front of me. I (\$1,100) limp. Both blinds call.



Flop (\$25): The two blinds checks. The next player (\$950) bets \$25, and the player behind him (\$600) calls. I call. Both blinds fold.

Loose call.



Turn (\$100):

Sweet.

Action: The first player bets \$75, and the other player calls. I call.



River (\$325): Both opponents check to me.

My nut straight is very well disguised, having come backdoor. This is a good spot for a max value bet.

Action: I bet \$325. The first player calls with a set of jacks, and the other player folds.

You might recognize this hand from the first book. This hand took place in at the Scotty Nguyen Poker Challenge in Tulsa in May 2007, which in itself is notable as the first time I came across the \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in structure, which we adopted in St. Louis a couple of months later as our standard small-game structure, replacing the straight \$2-\$3 blind (\$500 max) structure we had been using whenever we could get the game going

That said, I should note that since that time, I've refrained a bit from betting the max, simply because I'd rather not have to bet the max when I bluff. You want to avoid falling into a pattern where you only bet the max when you have the nuts, but bet less when you are bluffing. As a result, my big bets look more like the \$500 (83% of the pot) bet in the previous hand, rather than 100% of the pot.

Had this particular hand occurred today, I probably would have bet either \$250 or \$300 -- more natural betting figures.

The one exception I have to making the adjustment is in games with a "Bet Pot" button -- such as in online games or on electronic tables -- where it is a little more natural to just bet the max rather than near it.

Hand #6: Aces Up in Position

The game: \$5-\$10, four-handed

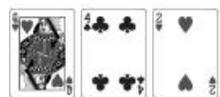
My Position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The button (\$5k) calls. The small blind (\$7k) calls. I raise to \$30. The button re-raises to \$100. The small blind calls. I call.

I put in a small raise to juice the pot a little. But after getting re-raised, it would be a mistake for me to put in another raise with just AA when we're sitting this deep.



Flop (\$300): The small blind checks. I bet \$300. The button folds. The small blind calls.



Turn (\$900): The small blind checks. I check.

I could have bet again, but I decided to check. My thought here is that I might induce a bluff on the river if the board doesn't change. Alternatively, I can represent queens-full by checking behind and betting/raising if a heart comes (I also have the dry ace).



River (\$900): The small blind checks.

I think a token value bet is in order. A big bet might look too much like a full house, but a small bet might induce a call from a bare queen.

River: I bet \$100 and my opponent calls. I win.

Hand #7: Top Set on Straight Board

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in

My position: Middle Position

My hand:



Pre-flop: Three players limp in front of me. I (\$3,200) raise to \$35. It gets folded around to the big blind (\$2,150), a very loose raiser who re-raises to \$120. The three limpers all fold. I call.



Flop (\$256): My opponent bets \$255. I call.

A standard positional combination call/float. I may have the best hand; and even if I don't, I have live draws to at least a straight, if not a set, plus blocker draws.



Turn (\$766): My opponent checks.

I have both top set and a pair of nines for blockers, and my opponent has checked. The overwhelming probability is that my opponent doesn't have the straight.

Action: I bet \$765, and my opponent calls.



River (\$2,296): My opponent checks.

The first question is whether or not I have the best hand.

As it stands, there are now two possible straights out, the only hands that can beat me. That said, I don't see my opponent checking T-9-x-x on both the turn and the river. If he actually had it, it is far more likely that he would have raised all-in on the turn. Failing that, it is hard to see him checking the river, as it is too easy for me to check behind and show down something like two pair.

I also find it difficult to see my opponent showing up with 7-5-x-x for the smaller straight, because even if he had something like 7-6-5-x, he would have to have called on the turn despite the obvious bigger straight already out.

And so at this point, I think it's pretty clear that I have the best hand, and so a bet of some type should be in order.

The next question is "How much?" In regard to the bet size, I have two choices: make a token value bet and hope to draw a weak call, or bet half the pot and set my opponent all in.

My concern with the bigger bet is that it looks too much like a straight. The way the hand has played out, it would be difficult for my opponent to call a \$1,000-plus bet no matter what he has. On the other hand, my opponent might have had something like AA with the nut flush draw or two pair, and be willing to call a smaller bet, if only for curiosity's sake.

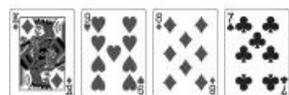
Action: I bet \$300 and my opponent calls. My set is good.

Hand #8: Backdoor Second-Nut Flush

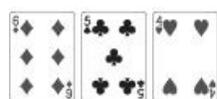
The game: \$0.50-\$1 (PokerPro)

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two players limp in. I (\$220) call. The big blind checks.



Flop (\$4): I bet \$4. The next two players fold, and the last player (\$115) calls.

This is obviously an OK flop, giving me the nut straight with a straight re-draw and a backdoor diamond draw as well.



Turn (\$12):

Now I have the king-high diamond draw to go with my straight and straight re-draws. It's tempting to check here and go for a check-raise. But unless I feel strongly that my opponent will actually bet rather than check and take the free card, my preference is to bet out again.

My opponent in this case is relatively new to PLO. He does not seem particularly aggressive in any sort of way, nor does he seem to be a particularly sophisticated player. I will bet.

Action: I bet \$12, and my opponent calls.



River (\$36):

OK, so I hit the backdoor second-nut flush, which I have to figure for the best hand. It is also fairly well disguised. I could check here, but I don't want my opponent to check behind a set or a small flush. If I bet, my opponent might not call a legitimately-sized bet with a set, but he will most likely call any amount if he has a flush (with the exception of the nut flush), as it will be difficult for him to put me on the king-high flush.

I don't know that there is necessarily a right or wrong answer here, but I'd like to bet the max here.

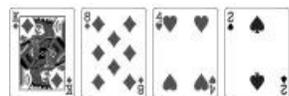
Action: I bet \$36, and my opponent calls with what he says is a smaller flush, after flopping what he says was two pair.

Hand #9: Blocking Bet

The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The first three players (\$54.10, \$57.65, and \$10.05, respectively) all call, and everybody else folds around to the small blind, who also folds. I (\$112.25) check.



Flop (\$2.15):

I have the second-nut straight here, which I don't really want to bet into three opponents. My best bet is to check and see what everybody else does, though at the risk of giving a free card. Such is the penalty for being out of position.

Action: I check, and it gets checked around.



Turn (\$2.15):

With the flop getting checked around and a clean turn card, the coast is clear to bet.

Action: I bet \$2.15, and only the UTG player calls.



River (\$6.30):

I am pretty confident that my straight was the best hand on the turn, but it is pretty hard to gauge where I am at now, because my opponent could have called on the turn with something like two pair or a set, which may be beating me now that the board has paired. Rather than check and possibly face a big bet, it may be a good idea to make a small blocking bet.

Action: I bet \$1.50. My opponent calls with Q♦ Q♣ T♦ 5♣ for queens up, and my straight is good.

Hand #10: Top Two Pair, Underfull, Big Bet

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 (\$1,000-max), five-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player posts a \$10 straddle. The cutoff folds. I (\$950) open with a raise to \$40. The small blind (\$450) calls. The big blind and straddler both fold.



Flop (\$95): My opponent checks. I bet \$75, and my opponent calls.



Turn (\$245): My opponent checks.

Well, I flopped top two, got called, and the flush card hit. I should check behind here and take the free card.

Action: I check.



River (\$245): My opponent checks.

I should make a big bet here. All my opponent knows is that I made a c-bet on the flop. If he was on the straight draw, then he is not going to call a bet of any amount. But if he was on the flush draw and hit it, then there should be enough doubt as to whether or not I have a full house in order for him to call a big bet with a flush.

Action: I bet \$200, and my opponent calls.

Hand #11: Top Two Pair, Underfull, Standard Value Bet

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$145.05) open with a raise to \$3.50. The button (\$234.95) calls. Both blinds fold.

Obviously, I would prefer to have a suited ace, but this is an OK open from the cutoff seat.



Flop (\$8.50): I bet \$8.50. My opponent calls.



Turn (\$25.50): I bet \$25.50, and my opponent calls.



River (\$76.50):

This is an interesting decision point. I almost certainly have the best hand, as I have a hard time seeing my opponent merely flat calling on both the flop and turn with K-K-x-x – the only hand better than mine. I also have a tough time seeing my opponent call both the flop and turn, and call a big bet on the river with a hand worse than mine, unless he has either 4-4-x-x having flopped bottom set, or Q-4-x-x having flopped bottom two pair and called two bets with it – neither of which seems all that likely.

What I mean is that if my opponent has what he is supposed to have to call down two bets – meaning top two pair (which ties me), a set (bottom set in this case), or a draw – he is far more likely to have missed a draw than he is to have a hand that is strong enough to beat anything but a stone bluff.

I think the best play here is probably to check and try to induce a bluff. Alternatively, I might put in a bet of about half to two-thirds of the pot, make it look as if I am just following through on a pot/pot/half-pot sequence, and hope to draw a call from something less.

In this case, I actually chose the latter.

Action: I bet \$47. My opponent raises and sets me all-in for \$60.55 more. I call. My opponent shows K♥ J♥ T♥ 5♥ for kings-up on an apparent bluff.

What actually happened in real time was that I hesitated for a moment, debating whether or not to check and try to induce a bluff, before I settled for a half-pot sized bet. I think my opponent probably read my hesitation for a sign of weakness. The rub is that he actually had enough to show down with his king. That said, if he thought I was bluffing, then he could have just smooth called and showed down the king, unless he thought for whatever

reason that I was value-betting A-A-x-x and would fold to a raise.

Hand #12: Standard Value Bet Against Competent Player

The game: \$0.50-\$1 (PokerPro), five-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



This is a hand against my buddy Randy Ohel, who had just finished reading this chapter of the book (or at least up until this point) when we played this hand at Excalibur. Randy is a very strong PLO player who, incidentally, had just come off of a 1st place finish in a NL hold'em tourney and a 4th place finish in the PLO tourney at the L.A. Poker Classic, netting about \$100k total.

Pre-flop: I (\$280) limp in UTG. The cutoff folds. Randy (\$240) raises to \$4.50 on the button. Both blinds fold. I call.

I was really just hoping to see a cheap flop, as my hand isn't all that strong without a suit, and I am more likely to wind up with a bare overpair on the flop than anything strong enough to play to the river. I could just as easily have open-folded.



Flop (\$10.50): I check. Randy checks behind.

The idea was to go for a check-raise with my 12-card nut wrap and overpair. It didn't work.



Turn (\$10.50): I bet \$10.50. Randy calls.

Standard bet with the nuts. With a possible flush draw out, this is not a spot to risk giving another free card.



River (\$31.50):

I still have the nuts. Checking would be a poor choice, as Randy would just show down something like two pair if he had it. Moreover, it is unlikely that Randy has a bare busted draw to bet, as I highly doubt that Randy was on just a bare flush draw -- particularly since I have the A♠ myself.

So at this point, there is little question that I am going to bet. The only question is how much.

This is an interesting decision against this opponent, because I know that Randy would know that a bigger bet would most likely indicate K-Q-x-x. I also think that he would probably be suspicious of a smaller bet as well. That said, what I want to do here is make a bet that would look the most like a bluff to him coming from me. I think in this case a standard half-pot sized follow-through bet would appear most ambiguous.

Action: I bet \$17. Randy called.

What actually happened was that Randy couldn't decide what to do, and ultimately decided to flip his player's club card to make a decision -- heads for a call, tails for a fold. It landed heads.

This hand is a good illustration of how you sometimes have to adjust your play when playing against good players. Against typical opponents who may not be particularly sophisticated, I think you should usually just go ahead and make the optimum play, which in this type of situation would probably call for a big bet. But against a strong opponent who has a book on you, you may have to deviate from the standard course of action at times in order to get the best result.

Hand #13: Standard Value Bet in Position

The game: \$0.50-\$1 (PokerPro), three-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



This is another hand against Randy from the beginning of the session.

png I (\$200) call. Randy (\$200) raises to \$2 from the small blind. The big blind (\$200) calls. I call.

For starters, I will qualify this hand by saying that 9-6-3-3 is a really bad hand. Secondly, I don't like jacking the pot with bare pairs -- even from the button. That said, I don't like folding my button much, either.



Flop (\$6): Randy bets \$5. The big blind folds. I call.

This is a sort of float against a c-bet, with a weak open-ended straight draw and a flush draw.



Turn (\$16): Randy checks.

I hit a set, which is probably the best hand at this point. I might as well bet it.

Action: I bet \$16, and Randy calls.

This is interesting. I've played quite a bit with Randy, and he's caught me floating a bunch of times in spots like these. My guess is that Randy probably has something like top pair and maybe the nut flush draw to go with it.



River (\$48): Randy checks.

I still think I have the best hand. My worry is that a bigger bet would look too much like the nut straight, while a small bet might look too much like a value bet. If I want Randy to call light, I have to do my best to make the bet look like a bluff. In this case, I want it to look as if I was in fact floating on the flop, and am just following up the turn bet with a final shot.

I will bet about half the pot.

Action: I bet \$25, and Randy calls. I win.

Hand #14: The Under-Underfull

The game: \$2-\$5 (\$1,000-max), eight-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$1,000) -- not necessarily a loose player UTG, but definitely not a tight player, either -- opens with a raise to \$15. The next player folds. The player in front of me (\$600) calls. I (\$1,050) call. Both players behind me fold. The small blind (\$500) calls. The big blind folds.



Flop (\$65): The small blind checks. The UTG player bets \$35. The next player folds. I call, and the small blind folds.

I can't fold (well, I can, but I probably shouldn't) here for one weak-stab c-bet.



Turn (\$135): My opponent checks. I check behind.

This is a pot control play. I don't rate to get more than one bet of value with this hand when I am ahead, and by checking here, I may be able to get a bet out of a flush on the river.



River (\$135): My opponent checks.

This is an interesting spot. I should note that my opponent is a competent poker player who has some experience with PLO, but is still fairly raw at the game. That said, he has to know that I didn't call him on the flop with nothing. As such, I don't see a big bet being called here by less than a full house, because he should expect me to check and show down an ace or bare trip queens, and probably a flush as well.

I think the best play here is to put in a small token value-bet and hope to draw a call from a flush or maybe even a bare queen.

Action: I bet \$45. My opponent calls, I show my boat, and my opponent mucks.

My opponent later said he had K-Q-J-T for bare trips.

Hand #15: Underfull in Position

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



This hand requires a little background. More specifically, this hand requires knowledge about the hand before it -- which I don't really want to talk about, but I'll do it anyway.

So it's a \$2-\$5 game at the Rio during the 2008 WSOP. I'm in the small blind with A♥ J♥ J♣ 9♠. The UTG player -- who had just sat down a round or two before -- opens with a raise to \$20. Everybody folds to me. I call, and the big blind folds.

The flop comes A♣ K♥ T♣, giving me top pair, a gutshot, backdoor hearts, and blockers to the straight. I bet \$45 and my opponent calls.

The turn is the 2♥, giving me a flush draw. I bet \$135 and my opponent calls. At this point, I'm wondering if my opponent doesn't have just a bare straight.

The river is the A♦, giving me trip aces. But I figure that maybe my opponent has the straight, and maybe I can represent A-K-x-x and bluff him out. So I bet \$300.

My opponent then raises to \$1,000. And, well, I give him credit for A-K-x-x and fold my trip Aces.

But before the kid mucked his hand, he flashed it to the dealer, and a couple of the guys at the other end of the table saw it, too. I saw at least one jaw drop. And apparently the kid had just complete garbage, like T-7-6-4 with a club draw (as the jaw dropper would later say). The thought never crossed my mind that I might have had the best hand, and so apparently I've been bluffed out badly.

This is the very next hand. The kid is now in the big blind, and I post a \$10 straddle on the button.

Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind (\$4,500) calls, and everybody else folds to me. I (\$2,200) check.



Flop (\$22): My opponent checks. I bet \$20 and my opponent calls.



Turn (\$62): My opponent checks. I bet \$60 and he calls.



River (\$182): My opponent checks.

I am going to bet the underfull as the likely best hand. But here's the key: I want to make it look like a bluff. This should be easy, because he has to

know that I want to beat him.

At this point, I don't really know what my opponent has -- maybe he missed a flush draw or something -- but I am going to put in a big bet. The more I bet, the more he has to blow when he puts in a bluff raise.

Action: I bet \$175. My opponent calls and shows A-K-x-x.

I was actually a little surprised that he had that. I was also little disappointed that he had that much to call me with, because I wanted him to put in that bluff raise. It should be noted that if I were to get raised, smooth-calling would be the clear best play rather than re-raising.

The Chapter on Bluffing

The gist of the chapter on bluffing is that bluffing in itself does not merit its own chapter. When you play a hand, you are telling a story.

An effective bluff is rarely executed in a vacuum; rather, a bluff is usually a part of a sequence. Those sequences including the Betting Machine described in Part II (once you decide to start betting at a pot, you play virtually every hand as if you flopped top set and bet the hand through, or at least until someone plays back at you), and the float as discussed in Part I. The most effective bluff is one in which you play a hand in such a way that is consistent with the hand or draw that you are representing.

The main bluff that *is* done in a vacuum is the bluff raise, which is executed when you think your opponent is betting light. That said, with what has already been discussed in this book, we have taken the subject of executing a bluff about as far as we need to go.

Now that we know how to execute an effective bluff, we are prepared to discuss how to pick off a *bad* bluff attempt.

Picking Off Bluffs

When picking off a bluff, you are looking for at least one of four things:

1. Inconsistencies
2. Bets preying on perceived weakness
3. Programmed plays
4. Tells

Inconsistencies

The first clue that your opponent may be bluffing is a bet that seems out of place. If your opponent's play doesn't make sense, chances are pretty good that he doesn't have the hand that he is representing.

"Given the way my opponent has played the hand thus far, is it plausible that he has the hand that he is representing?"

Bets Preying on Perceived Weakness

Oftentimes, your opponents will take a stab at the pot simply because you checked at your last betting opportunity. Sometimes, your opponents will put in a big raise because you have taken what may appear to be a weak stab at the pot.

"Is my opponent betting because I checked?"

"Why bet so much? What does he think I am going call him with?"

"Did he raise because he is strong? Or did he raise because I bet small and appear weak?"

Programmed Plays

Be suspicious any time your opponent looks as if he is going to bet the next street no matter what comes, because chances are, he is running a programmed play.

For example, your opponents -- particularly the stronger ones (and especially those who have read the first book) -- will often bet a big drawing hand through the river, hit-or-miss. However, a player who flops a set will often bet the flop but check the turn if the board pairs. This is key, because when your opponent bets the flop, the board pairs on the turn, and your opponent bets again, much of the time he will have air rather than a full house.

Take special note of opponents who *always* check when they fill up on the turn (Don't be that guy!), and consider raising in this spot if you have nothing to call with.

In addition, your opponents will often run plays on you from out of position -- either because you raised before the flop and your opponents expect you to c-bet, or because you bet in late position and your opponents suspect a steal. They will call your bet and then lead out with a bet on the turn almost no matter what comes. And then if you call that bet, then they will often bet the river almost no matter what.

You might recognize the play they are running as the Reverse Float (with a second barrel as necessary). That said, the key to picking off the play is recognizing it in real time. The drawback to trying to pick off this kind of play with a weak hand is that you may have to call two bets (one on the turn and another on the river); moreover, your opponent will often have some type of draw accompanying the play, and so you will get outdrawn at times.

Tells

By far the most important element of picking off a bluff is reading the betting pattern. That said, our opponent's behaviors -- his or her tells -- often will give us clues to further reinforce or otherwise contradict our suspicions, and thus help us make more accurate decisions. Other times, our opponent's behavior may be the first clue that something is amiss.

I will defer discussion on what certain behaviors actually mean to Joe Navarro's *Read 'em and Reap*, a scientifically-based book on "decoding" tells by a former FBI agent, and a book which I recommend 100%. Instead, we will focus more on the thought process and actual application.

Using Tells

Usually, when I pick off a bluff, I either:

1. Spot the inconsistency first, and then look for clues to support or contradict my hypothesis, or
2. Spot the tell first, and then put the tell into the context of the hand.

Most of the time, I spot the inconsistency first:

"Wait a second. That doesn't look right."

When I first detect a possible bluff, I usually have a pretty good idea within a split second what my take on the bet is, and what my response is going to be -- call if I can beat a bluff, or raise if I have nothing to call with. The initial read is the most important, because it will often be the most accurate. If you are thinking about raising, you can't spend a lot of time thinking about it -- otherwise your play will become more transparent. But if you have something to show down and the decision is between calling and folding, you can afford to take your time before acting.

At this point, I may look for behavioral clues that may reinforce or contradict my initial read, and then make a decision from there.

Other times, the way my opponent bets will make me suspicious. Maybe he bet too fast, or maybe he looks indecisive. Or maybe he just looks like he is making a play. Tempo, for example, is often a key to reading a programmed play -- usually it is because your opponent bets too fast -- as is a player who looks as if he is going to bet no matter what comes.

If I think my opponent just looks like he is bluffing or if I detect an otherwise weak bet (such as a possible blocking bet or just a weak stab), I may put in a raise on the spot if I have nothing to call him with; again, you can't spend too much time thinking in these spots, otherwise your opponents will be more likely to call you if they were in fact making a blocking bet. But if I can beat a bluff, I will take my time and replay the hand to help support my read.

You can learn quite a bit about behavioral tells by reading a book (specifically Joe Navarro's book). That said, there is no substitute for the intuition gained from experience. And that experience is gained by sitting at the table and paying attention to your opponents.

Hand #1: Straight on Flush Board (Betting on Weakness)

The game: \$5-\$10-\$20

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two players limp in front of me. I call. The button calls. Both blinds call. The straddler checks. Seven players see the flop.



Flop (\$140): Everybody checks to me. I (\$2,700) bet \$140, and only the big blind (\$1,500) -- who, incidentally, is not a good player -- calls.

ill-advised shot, maybe.



Turn (\$420): My opponent checks. I check.

Normally, I'd fire another shot. Part of the reason I checked was because I thought that my opponent might be trapping with a set, part of it was that I picked up a gutshot, and another part was that I thought I'd try something different from pot/pot/half-pot and try to exercise a little pot control just to see what would happen.



River (\$420):

Now I have the nut straight, though with three diamonds out.

Action: My opponent says "I bet the pot" and bets \$420.

My thought here is "Why so much? And what does he think I am going to call him with?"

"Would he bet that much with a non-nut flush? If not, then how likely is it that he has the nut flush?"

All my opponent has seen me do so far is bet the flop and check behind on the turn, and so he has no reason to think I have anything to call him with. I have to be suspicious here. Given no other information, my inclination here is to call. That said, my opponent exhibited a tell that I had just read about earlier in the day in Joe Navarro's book that provided further evidence that my opponent was bluffing.

Action: I call. My opponent shows A♦-9-7-3 (the dry ace and other stuff which I can't explain), and my straight is good.

Indicators: Possible inconsistencies, betting on perceived weakness, tells

Hand #2: Jack-High Flush on Paired Board (Betting on Weakness)

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in

My position: Hijack

My hand:



This hand is from the \$1-\$2 blind \$5 bring-in game in St. Louis. The player on the button is a player who doesn't bluff much; however, another player at the table has made a comment noting that he "never bluffs."

Pre-flop: A middle player (\$3,500) limps. I (\$550) call. The button (\$700) calls. Both blinds call. Five players see the flop.



Flop (\$25): It gets checked to the player in front of me, who bets \$25. I call, and the button calls. Both blinds fold.

This is a loose combination call with the overpair, gutshot, flush draw, and position against what I thought was a possibly suspect bet.



Turn (\$100): The first player checks. I bet \$100, and only the button calls.

A loose bet preying on the first player's check. I thought it was worth a shot.



River (\$300):

I have a flush with which I'd like to showdown -- particularly now that the board has paired as well.

Action: I check.

What actually happened was that I checked, and my opponent paused to think about betting. I said, "You got a flush, too?" trying to discourage him from value-betting the nut flush if that's what he was thinking about.

That might be the last time I say that.

Action: My opponent bets \$250.

There are three legitimate possibilities here:

1. He has a full house.
2. He has the nut flush.
3. He was on a straight draw and missed, and is taking a stab at the pot because I checked (and because I told him I have a flush).

Possibility #1: He has a full house

The first question is whether or not it is plausible that he has a full house. If my opponent had something like 8-8-x-x, he would have raised on the turn, if not the flop. So we can rule out 8-8-x-x. On the other hand, it is plausible that he has something like 3-3-x-x or 2-2-x-x (having flopped middle or bottom set), and it is also possible that he has K-8-x-x.

But the next question is, if he had a full house, would he actually bet \$250 into a \$300 pot? I mean, does he think I would call \$250 with just a flush?

Possibility #2: He has the nut flush

If my opponent was on the draw, then he either had the nut flush draw and hit it, or he was on a straight draw. The question here is, if he has the nut flush, then why bet so much? Because if he has the nut flush himself, then he also knows that I don't have it. And so if he actually had the nut flush, does he think I am going to call \$250 with something less?

On one hand, it's possible that he knows that a bigger bet looks more like a bluff, and that I would be more likely to call a bigger bet with less if I thought there was a good chance that he was in fact bluffing. But for him to bet \$250 with the nut flush, he would have to know that I think that way, and I think that's giving him way too much credit.

In fact, I think we might be quite a ways away from having people make big value bets with the nut flush on paired boards, as that would require having two players at a very high level of thinking -- one who recognizes that the bigger bet looks more like a bluff, and another (the one holding the flush) knowing that his opponent thinks that much.

We are still a little early in the development of the game for that.

Possibility #3: He has a busted straight draw and is on the bluff

This possibility is consistent with the way the hand has played out, as well as the size of the bet on the river.

At this point, I don't think either of the first two possibilities is all that likely, while the third one -- the bluff scenario -- makes a lot of sense, despite my opponent's supposed reputation. After studying my opponent for a minute and running through the possibilities, I decide to make the call.

Action: I call, and my flush is good.

It's possible that my opponent has been influenced somewhat by the earlier comment about him "never" bluffing.

Indicators: Inconsistencies, betting on perceived weakness, tells

Hand #3: Getting Raised (Perceived Weakness)

The game: \$5-\$10, five-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I limp in. The CO folds. The button calls. The small blind limps and the big blind checks.

Perhaps a loose call UTG. But the two guys behind me aren't terribly aggressive pre-flop.



Flop (\$40): Both blinds check. I (\$2,400) bet \$40. The button (\$1,700) and small blind (\$900) call. The big blind folds.

Well, I bet the blockers and got called twice.



Turn (\$160): The small blind checks.

I got two callers on a straight board, and now the board has paired. This card seems far more likely to have helped someone than not.

Action: I check. The button checks.



River (\$160): The small blind checks.

That is either a miracle or a disaster. On the one hand, I have an overfull, and there is now a possible flush out. On the other hand, I may be staring at opponents with either Q-Q-x-x for a bigger full house, or T-T-x-x for quads.

A small value/blocking bet is in order. A small bet limits my downside if QQ or TT is out, while it also might get someone to call me with a flush.

River: I bet \$25. The button raises to \$100. The small blind folds.

I could be beat by QQ or TT, but the raise may just be a reaction to my small stab. I have to call here.

Action: I call. My opponent says he just has a straight and was trying to get me to fold, and my jacks-full is good.

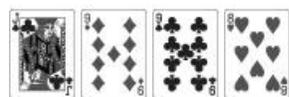
Indicators: Betting on perceived weakness

Hand #4: Jack

The game: \$0.50-\$1 (PokerPro), seven-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



This game took place on the PokerPro electronic table at the Excalibur. The pre-flop raiser is Aaron, a very loose-aggressive player (just to illustrate, he saw the flop over 80% of the time in this game, and he entered the pot with a raise maybe one-third of the time). I've played a fair amount of PLO with Aaron up to this point, in games as big as \$5-\$10 and with \$4k or so stacks between us.

Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The next player raises to \$3.50. Everybody folds to me. I call.



Flop (\$7.50): I check. Aaron checks.



Turn (\$7.50): I check. Aaron bets \$7.50.

Why so much? For him to bet the pot here, he likely has to have either AA, a four, or air. But if he has AA, there is no need for him to bet the full pot here, as it is not reasonable for him to think I would call him with less than a four (or at least not until he has actually seen me call with less in this spot). And odds are, he doesn't have a four.

I like my jack here.

Action: I call



River (\$22.50):

There's no need for me to bet here. I've represented a four, and I think Aaron is unlikely to bet again unless he can beat a four.

Action: I check. Aaron checks and shows A-9-7-2.

I got rivered. That's a toughy, especially after having made that call. Well, on the bright side, at least we were playing \$0.50-\$1 rather than \$5-\$10.

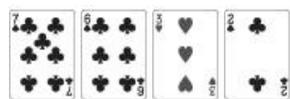
Indicators: Inconsistencies, betting on perceived weakness

Hand #5: Bluff Check-Raise (Tell)

The game: \$0.50-\$1 (PokerPro), six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I call. The cutoff folds. The button calls. The small blind calls. The big blind checks.



Flop (\$4): Both blinds check. I bet \$4, and only the button calls.



Turn (\$12):

My opponent probably either made his flush, or he has a queen or a straight draw. I'll check and prepare to give up the pot if he bets.

Action: My opponent bets \$12.

What actually happened was that my opponent looked as if his natural inclination was to check, but then at the last second changed his mind and decided to take a stab at the pot. He just looked like he was bluffing.

This is a good spot for a bluff raise.

Action: I raise to \$30 and my opponent folds.

Indicators: He looked like he was bluffing.

Hand #6: Two Pair Against Reverse Float (Programmed Play)

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



This hand took place at the Rio during the WSOP. Now during this particular session, my bets from the button weren't getting a whole lot of respect – probably because I'd bet almost every time that I got checked to. My adversary in this particular hand was an Irishman.

Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind calls. Two middle players limp in front of me. I check.



Flop (\$42): Everybody checks to me. I bet \$45. It gets folded back to the player in front of me, who calls.



Turn (\$132): My opponent bets \$135, almost in the dark.

I have a bigger two pair, but if my opponent actually has anything, it probably beats me. That said, it looked to me as if my opponent was going to bet the turn no matter what came. Reinforcing that opinion is the probability that if he actually had anything, he probably would have bet the flop, being second-to-last in the hand.

Action: I call.



River (\$402): My opponent checks.

I have enough to showdown.

Action: I check. My opponent shows J-8-6-6 for the second-nut straight.

Omaha.

It's worth noting that my opponent made a mistake in not putting a bet in of some sort when he hit the second-nut straight at the river. If he was afraid that I may have hit the bigger straight, then he could have put in a small blocking bet; otherwise, he might bet half the pot or more and fold to a raise. Either way, he should have put in a bet of some sort.

Indicators: Programmed play/tells

Hand #7: Check-Raise Bluff at the River

The game: \$0.50-\$1 (PokerPro), eight-handed

My position: Early Position

My hand:



This is another hand against Aaron.

Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I open with a raise to \$2.50. The next two players fold. Aaron re-raises to \$9. Everybody folds back to me. I call.

Heads up out of position against Aaron. Not exactly what I had in mind.



Flop (\$19.50): I check. Aaron checks.



Turn (\$19.50): I check. Aaron checks.

I probably could have taken a stab.



River (\$19.50): I check.

I basically gave up the hand, as I can't win checking down with J-T-high here.

Action: Aaron bets \$14.

I have new life. I'm trying to figure out what Aaron could have here that he would check through and then bet \$14 on the river. If he had a pair, he would probably show that down. If he had anything that makes a full house, he more often than not would have bet the flop.

I'll take my chances. If I am wrong, at least it'll be good for my image.

Action: I raise to \$47.50. Aaron folds.

Indicators: Probable inconsistencies

Hand #8: KK Against Bluff Raise

The game: \$0.50-\$1 (PokerPro), five-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Another hand from the Excalibur. The big blind is my buddy TT, a semi-professional poker player. TT plays primarily mid- to high-limit limit poker games -- and he has a reputation as one of the best 2-7 triple draw and Badugi players around -- but he hasn't played much PLO up to this point.

Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I call. The button folds. The small blind calls. TT checks in the big blind.



Flop (\$3): Both blinds check. I bet \$1. The small blind folds. TT raises to \$6.

I was kind of just messing around, and I didn't expect to get any action. But the basic question here is, why raise?

First of all, TT didn't look as if he had any interest in the pot until I bet \$1. It is unlikely -- though not impossible -- for TT to have AA here, as well as A-2-x-x. That said, I think if he had an ace, he much more likely would have just called rather than raised.

I just don't believe him yet. I'll call and give serious consideration to folding if he bets again.

Action: I call.



Turn (\$15): TT checks. I check.



River (\$15): TT checks. I check. I win.

Indicators: Betting on perceived weakness, possible inconsistencies, tells

Hand #9: Tens Up OOP, SB vs. BB (Perceived Weakness)

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I (\$216.05) call. The big blind (\$79.30) checks.

I don't like raising much from the small blind, but I do want to see the flop with this hand.



Flop (\$2): I check. My opponent checks.

I bet top pair (plus a non-nut gutshot) here much of the time, but for whatever reason I decide to check.



Turn (\$2):

I picked up another straight draw. I should bet my top pair-plus here now.

Action: I bet \$2, and my opponent calls.



River (\$6):

This is an interesting spot. I could put in a small blocking bet, but I am not terribly concerned about being beat here. I think if my opponent had anything worth betting -- like an overpair or a full house -- he more likely would have bet the flop after I checked. If instead he has something weaker like a ten or an eight, I expect him to check and showdown if I check.

That said, if I check and my opponent does bet, I think it will be far more likely that he will be betting a missed straight draw -- rather than a made hand -- on the hope that my check indicates weakness. My play here is to check and call any bet.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$5.

I will call as planned. As I said before, I think my opponent would have bet an overpair on the flop if he had one, and that he would check and show down a pair of tens or eights if he had that. So either my opponent got really lucky and both fives hit him, or he has nothing.

Action: I call. My opponent shows $A\clubsuit K\heartsuit 7\spadesuit 6\clubsuit$ for a busted open-ended straight draw and AK-high. I win.

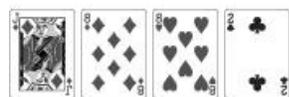
Indicators: Betting on perceived weakness, probable inconsistency

Hand #10: Bottom Set

The game: \$1-\$2-\$5 with Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



My adversary in this hand is an inexperienced PLO player who is on raging tilt. I have a pretty loose image here, and my bets from late position aren't getting much respect.

Pre-flop: Both blinds call. Two other players limp in front of me. I check.



Flop (\$25): Everybody checks to me. I (\$1,200) bet \$25. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$350) raises to \$50. The other two players fold. I call.

I only have bottom set, but I'm not sure I believe him at this point. I'll take a card off and see what my opponent does on the turn.



Turn (\$125): My opponent insta-bets \$100. I call.

I'm still not convinced by the relatively weak bet.



River (\$325): My opponent bets \$200 all-in.

What actually happened was that my opponent was already geared up to bet the river no matter what. It's kind of hard to figure what kind of hand is strong enough to fade multiple straight draws and a backdoor flush, except maybe a flush draw itself. That said, my feeling is that this bet was predetermined on the flop -- before the club draw appeared.

Action: I call. My opponent shows A-J-7-4, having backed into the second-nut straight.

Strange. So he actually had top two pair on the flop -- neither that weak, nor that strong -- and apparently he was just afraid of getting bluffed out by the scare card on the river, so he decided he was going to bet no matter what to preempt a bluff. I don't think he would have bet the \$200 on the river with the second nut straight on a flush board if he wasn't planning on betting no matter what and/or if he wasn't on tilt.

Indicators: Programmed play, tells, inconsistencies

Hand #11: Aces Up on Paired Flush Board (Programmed Play)

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind calls. An early player limps in, and it is folded to me. I raise to \$30, and both opponents call.



Flop (\$92): Both opponents check to me. I bet \$90. The big blind folds, but the other player calls.



Turn (\$272): My opponent now bets \$225, with another \$757 behind. I call.

The play has the appearance of a weak-stab reverse float. I also have the dry A♣.



River (\$722): My opponent insta-shoves his whole \$757 stack in.

A note on the bet: The rule in pot-limit play is that when you are heads up and your opponent overbets the pot, you have the option of calling only the size of a pot-sized bet (\$725 in this case), or you can choose to call the amount that your opponent pushed into the pot (\$757).

That said, you should be suspicious any time your opponent looks as if he is going to bet the next street no matter what, because there is no hand that he could have that is so strong that the river doesn't matter. If he had Q-6-x-x (or any queen for that matter), there is no way he autopushes, because there are straight and flush draws out on the turn. If he had a flush draw and/or wrap such as 8-7-5-x with clubs, there is no way that he autopushes unless he has the nut flush draw; and I know he doesn't have the nut flush because I have the A♣.

I am highly doubtful that he has either a flush or a full house, or even trips.

The initial read is important in picking off a programmed play. I think he was making a play with some kind of straight draw.

Action: I call the \$757, and my aces are good.

Indicators: Programmed play, tells, inconsistencies

Picking Off Bluffs: Final Thoughts

The bottom line question when deciding whether or not to call a bet at the river is the gut question: "Do I have the best hand?"

That's it.

With that in mind, we'll note that the average player makes one of two mistakes:

1. Thinking about all the hands that can beat him.
2. Giving undue consideration to the odds to call.

For one thing, spending a lot of time thinking about all of the hands that can beat you is a good way to psyche yourself out. Granted, it is probably better than only thinking about all of the hands that you can beat, but what we are really looking for is accuracy. You want to know whether it is plausible for your opponent to have what he is representing, and you need to decide whether your opponent's actions -- the bet size and his behaviors -- are consistent with both the hand that he is representing and the way the rest of the hand has played out.

You may also have noticed that the one thing that we have not discussed is the odds your opponent is offering you to call. For example, if there is \$100 in the pot and your opponent bets \$100, you are getting 2:1 odds and need to have the best hand 33% of the time to justify a call. But if instead there is \$90 in the pot and your opponent bets only \$10, then you are getting 9:1 odds on the call and thus only need to be right 10% of the time.

Some poker authors will then have you break down all of the possible holdings your opponent have and assign probabilities to the various possibilities. If your analysis says that you have the best hand 33% of the time in aggregate, then you can justify calling a pot-sized bet.

However, while this kind of analysis makes sense on the surface, it has been wildly overemphasized.

The problem with turning this into a math problem is that doing so will cause you to overthink the problem, thus making the problem seem far more complicated than it actually is. Moreover, if somebody is giving you ridiculous odds to make the call, *it is often because you have no chance of winning*. The fact is that a bigger bet is far more likely to be a bluff than a smaller bet is. Which is not to say that you shouldn't call smaller bets more often than bigger bets -- generally speaking, you probably should.

In addition, like a Wall Street analyst, you can tinker your analysis to draw virtually any conclusion you like -- if you are itching to call, you will ultimately convince yourself through "objective" analysis that calling is the right play.

That said, if your intention is to make more accurate decisions, then generally speaking, the bottom line is that you either have the best hand or you don't. The fun in poker is trying to figure that out.

Part IV: Small Ball

Our core strategy for using the positional advantage to exploit our opponents in short-handed pots in general and in short-handed play in particular.

As described in *Pot-Limit Omaha: The Big Play Strategy*, our core basic strategy for full-ring play (where multi-way pots are the norm) is geared towards being on the dominant end when the big pots get played, while utilizing the positional advantage to pick up more than our fair share of the small pots along the way. However, while our relatively tight core pre-flop playing strategy is quite effective for full-ring play, it does leave something to be desired when playing short-handed. Moreover, there are further exploitable opportunities to be had in full-ring play as well.

In Omaha -- and this is true in any form of Omaha -- there are really two kinds of pots:

1. Pots that are contested multi-way after the flop, and
2. Pots that are contested short-handed after the flop.

As may be apparent from what you've read thus far -- Part I: Floating in particular -- the number of players in the pot *after* the flop has a fairly dramatic effect on post-flop play. And, as post-flop play dictates pre-flop playing strategy, the number of players we can *expect* in the pot after the flop also affects our pre-flop hand selection.

In limit Omaha Hi/Lo, for example, everybody knows that hands like A♠ A♣ 2♠ 3♣ and A♠ 2♣ 3♠ K♣ are the premium hands, and that these hands tend to do well against any number of opponents under basically any circumstance. As such, you are going to play these hands no matter what.

But let's say instead that you have a hand like A♥ Q♠ 7♥ 5♦ on the button, which is ordinarily a pretty weak hand. If another player has entered the pot in front of you, you should rarely -- if ever -- play this hand, as it is weak in both directions and you will have little chance of winning in either direction, much less scooping the pot. But if instead everybody has folded to you on the button, A♥ Q♠ 7♥ 5♦ is more than enough to open fire on the blinds, as it plays well enough heads up with the positional advantage.

Starting hands in PLO are similar in that respect. The "Premium" hands such as Q-J-T-9 double-suited and A-A-K-K double-suited do quite well in both multi-way and short-handed pots. But there is an additional group of hands that don't fare as well in multi-way pots but do just fine in short-handed pots (especially when you are heads up with the positional advantage). And so once you figure out how to fully utilize the positional advantage in order to control both the size of the pot and your opponent (via the float), a large number of hands become playable when you can expect a short-handed pot.

For example, if the UTG player opens with a raise and everybody folds to me on the button, I am probably going to call with a hand like Q♥ 10♦ 9♥ 5♣ -- a hand that does not do well in multi-way pots for reasons discussed in *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy* (the top gap and the dangler). This is going to be true regardless of whether four players were dealt a hand before the flop or ten players were. And the reason I am going to call is simply that I can expect to play a short-handed pot (hopefully heads up) with the positional advantage.

The only real difference between short-handed and full-ring play is that more pots are contested short-handed after the flop when playing short-handed than in a full nine- or ten-handed game. As such, you are going to have a lot more opportunities to play a short-handed – if not heads-up – pot with the positional advantage when playing short-handed. What this means, in turn, is that you will be able to play a lot more of these types of hands for a raise in short-handed play than in full-ring play.

That brings us to Small Ball.

The Small Ball Approach

The Small Ball approach is a loose-passive pre-flop approach to playing short-handed pots, which essentially entails playing short-handed pots with the positional advantage, but *without* the pre-flop initiative. When facing a raise, this means flat calling; when everybody has folded to us in late position, this means open-limping with a wide range of hands (though we will talk about blind-stealing and playing with the initiative later in this chapter).

Simply put, the idea behind Small Ball is to deliberately engage in small-pot warfare in spots where you can't be getting the worst of it – namely, when you are heads up after the flop with the positional advantage against a pre-flop raiser, or when you are up against the blinds in an unraised pot. Our goal is to utilize the positional advantage to control both our opponents and pot size in short-handed confrontations via the float. In the process, we will tend to play a lot of small-pot poker until we catch the kind of flop that we want to play a big pot with.

That said, there is really one main driving factor behind the approach, and it is this: *Every hand is a dog to hit the flop hard.*

You see, in contrast to multi-way pots -- where you often need strong hands or draws in order to get to showdown -- it is not nearly as critical to have a strong hand in a short-handed pot simply because *most short-handed pots* (especially heads-up pots) *never make it to showdown*. This point is key in a situation where you are heads up with position on the pre-flop raiser and you can expect your opponent to follow through with a c-bet – a signal for a potential floating opportunity.

Meanwhile, playing without the initiative makes your opponents more predictable, as not only can you expect that your opponents are betting light much of the time when they c-bet by default, but also because their checks in aggregate tend to be much more reliable indicators that the pot is available. As such, by letting our opponents keep the initiative, we can play them more accurately.

Small Ball: Post-Flop Play

Here is the basic situation: The UTG player opens with a pot-sized raise, it gets folded to you; you call holding x-x-x-x (we'll discuss what these four cards should be next), but both blinds fold, and you are heads up with the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser. The SPR is > 8, so this is a deep stack scenario where there are three legitimate bets left to play.

So what now?

There are two basic possibilities on the flop: Your opponent will either (a) Check, or (b) Bet.

Situation A: Your Opponent Checks

Generally speaking, if your opponent checks, you should tend to bet, unless you have a bare gutshot, if you hit the pivot card on the flop to give you a draw at a wrap, or if you have a non-nut flush draw. Basically, you should usually take the steal sign unless you could really use the free card. You might also check behind if you flop a small flush, in which case you will generally want to play a small pot.

That said, checking behind occasionally will add some much-needed balance to your game, because if you always bet when your opponents check, then you will start getting check-raised more often, which is bad in the sense that it makes your opponents less predictable.

Situation B: Your Opponent Bets Into You

If instead your opponent follows through with a continuation bet of any kind, you should tend to call (float) if you catch a piece of the board (such as top pair or two pair) or flop some kind of nut draw, such as the nut flush draw, a big wrap that contains some non-nut outs, a nut open-ended straight draw, or perhaps a nut gutshot straight draw.

The key thing to remember is that the big-pot hands are still the big-pot hands, and the small-pot hands are still small-pot hands. So if you flop a big-pot hand like the nut straight with a flush draw, the overfull, or a 13-card nut wrap with a flush draw, then you should still raise if your opponent bets into you. On the other hand, the small-pot hands such as the bare nut straight, middle set, top two pair and undertrips are still small-pot hands in a heads-up pot, and as such, you should tend to smooth call with these hands when facing a bet.

In addition to keeping the size of the pot down, one of the main benefits of smooth calling with these strong small-pot hands is that doing so will add weight to the float. If your opponents think you only smooth call with air, they will start firing second shots more and more often, which will devalue the float. If, on the other hand, your opponents know that you will smooth call with the nut straight, a set, and trips, they will be less inclined to keep firing once you've called on the flop.

Now if you miss the flop completely and your opponent bets, you should tend to fold, although you might consider a bluff raise if the board is paired or there is a possible flush on the board.

PLO Tip: One of the biggest mistakes the average player makes is playing too aggressively by raising in spots where floating is nearly as effective as a bluff while giving you a much better bang for the buck.

PLO Tip: The average player also raises too often with small-pot holdings such as top two pair and undertrips, where the correct play is generally to smooth call and play a small pot.

Below is a table using Q♠ T♦ 9♠ 5♣ as example. Q-T-9-5 with a single suit is the quintessential Small Ball hand in that it is imperfect with the top gap and dangler, but it has 13-card nut wrap-plus flush draw potential. As a result, this hand is going to flop a small-pot hand the vast majority of the time, but at the same time has some potential to develop into a big-pot hand.

Small Ball: Holding Q♠ T♦ 9♠ 5♣*

Flop	Note	If Opponent Checks, tend to...	If Opponent Bets, tend to...
7♣ 3♠ 2♦	Air	Bet	Fold
K♥ 7♠ 2♦	Air	Bet	Fold
9♦ 6♥ 4♠	Top pair	Bet	Call (combo float)
T♥ 9♦ 4♠	Top two pair	Bet	Call (pot control)
Q♥ 7♠ 2♦	Top pair	Bet	Call (combo float)
K♠ J♦ 4♠	Non-nut 13-card wrap	Bet	Call (float)
J♥ 8♦ 3♠	13-card nut wrap	Bet	Raise
J♥ 8♦ 3♦	13-card nut wrap on two-flush board	Bet	Call (float)
J♠ 8♦ 3♠	13-card nut wrap with flush draw	Bet	Raise
8♦ 7♠ 6♦	Bare nut straight on two-flush board	Bet	Call (pot control)
8♠ 7♦ 6♠	Nut straight with flush re-draw	Bet	Raise
J♥ 8♠ 7♦	Nut straight with straight re-draw	Bet	Call/Raise
9♥ 9♦ 4♠	Bare trips with live draw	Bet	Call (pot control)
9♥ 9♦ 5♠	Overfull	Bet	Call/Raise
9♥ 5♠ 5♦	Underfull	Bet	Call (pot control)

Flop	Note	If Opponent Checks, tend to...	If Opponent Bets, tend to...
8♦ 7♠ 3♥	Nut open-ended straight draw	Bet	Call (float)
8♦ 7♥ 3♦	Dry nut open-ended straight draw on two-flush board	Bet	Call (float)
8♠ 6♠ 2♠	Non-nut flush	Check/Bet	Call
7♦ 6♠ 4♠	Gutshot	Check	Call (float)
7♦ 6♠ 4♦	Gutshot on two-flush board	Check	Fold/Call
J♠ 6♠ 4♦	Flush draw	Check	Fold/Call
J♠ 6♦ 4♠	Wrap draw, backdoor flush draw	Check	Call

*Heads up with positional advantage on pre-flop raiser, and SPR > 8

Small Ball: Starting Hand Considerations

The first thing to note is that Small Ball is not a replacement for Big Play Strategy, but rather is a complementary strategy in addition to Big Play Strategy. In other words, when we have a chance to be heads up with the positional advantage, we are going to play all of the starting hands discussed in *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy* – the “Premium,” “Speculative,” and “Marginal” hands. That said, once you figure out the float and how to utilize the positional advantage and play effective small-pot poker after the flop, a new group of starting hands become playable

before the flop.

So what kind of hands are we looking for?

Ideally, you'd like to have a hand that may have some structural weakness, but has some potential to develop into a big-pot hand. And essentially, this means:

Any three straight cards with 13-card nut wrap potential, at least single-suited. This means any hand that has three straight cards such as J-T-9-x, or three straight cards with a gap such as Q-T-9-x or Q-J-9-x, so long as the hand is at least single-suited.

All of these additional hands would fit into an extended "Marginal" category.

Small Ball Hands

Hand	Extrapolation	Comment
J-T-9-x	A-K-Q-x down to x-6-5-4	Three straight cards.
Q-T-9-x	A-Q-J-x down to x-6-4-3	Gap on top.
Q-J-9-x	A-K-J-x down to x-6-5-3	Gap on bottom.

The key to playing these hands effectively is having an understanding of both straight draw physics and big-pot science. This is because a hand like Q-T-9-x makes a 13-card nut wrap on J-8-x flop, but a non-nut 13-card wrap on a K-J-x flop; similarly, a hand like Q-J-9-x (gap on bottom) makes a 13-card nut wrap on a T-8-x flop, but a non-nut 13-card wrap on a K-T-x board. And whereas you might raise on a semi-bluff with a 13-card nut wrap in a short-handed pot, a non-nut 13-card wrap is generally a small-pot -- floating -- hand.

Once you've got that figured out, then exactly how wide a range you play is largely up to you, though it will also depend a bit on your opponents.

Targeting Opponents

I'll put it this way: If it makes sense that you should tend to float weaker players who will take one shot and give up, then it follows that you should tend to get involved more often with players who are easy to float.

For example, the UTG player opens with a raise, and it is folded to you on the button. If the UTG player is a hyperaggressive maniac, you might fold some of the smaller, weaker hands in that range -- hands such as J-6-4-3 or K-6-5-4. But if instead the UTG player is easy to float -- or even better, he also checks-and-folds on the flop often -- then you will probably want to play the full range against him, and perhaps even add a few hands to that range as well.

You may also want to play additional hands when you are on the button and everybody has folded to you. For example, I will often play an otherwise weak wrap hand like J-T-7-3 or J-7-6-3 (connectors with a two-gap at the bottom for 17-card wrap potential) on the button if no one else has entered the pot in front of me. And if the blinds are extremely weak, I may also play a hand that contains "two hold'em hands" such as J-T-5-4 double-suited.

Big Blind vs. Small Blind Confrontations

Let's say you are in the big blind, and everybody folds to the small blind, who opens with a raise. In this case, you can call with a fairly wide range of hands simply because you are guaranteed to be heads up with the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser. This is in contrast to the other scenarios, where you should generally play a little bit tighter due to the possibility of a third or even fourth player entering the pot from the blinds.

This is an extremely favorable situation. And in this spot, it would take an absolute trash hand for me to fold, such as K-T-7-2 rainbow or 9-3-3-3. Generally speaking, I would play "two hold'em hands" or better, and maybe even a little worse than that depending on how weak a player the small blind is.

I can't emphasize enough how valuable position is in PLO. Because in PLO, starting hand values run much closer together than they do in hold'em. For example, in hold'em, a premium hand like AA is at least a 4:1 over any other hand, whereas there are few reasonable hand matchups in PLO in which one hand is as much as a 2:1 favorite over any other.

The key differentiator in starting hand values in short-handed pots in PLO is position, much more so than the actual contents of the hand.

Playing From the Mississippi Straddle

When playing from the Mississippi Straddle, how wide a range you will call a raise with will depend largely on how many players entered the pot in front of you. If the pre-flop raiser is the only player in the pot (i.e. both blinds folded, one player raised, and everybody else folds to you, or one of the blinds opened with a raise and everybody else folded to you), then you can play as if you are in a big blind vs. small blind heads-up confrontation, as you know for certain that you will be heads up with the positional advantage. However, if there is another player in the pot, you will have to tighten up a little bit, especially if there is a chance the pot could be re-raised (i.e. your call does not close the action).

With only one other player in the pot, you may want to stick to the “Marginal” category hands as described in *Pot-Limit Omaha Poker: The Big Play Strategy* as the very bottom end of your range. In fact, you may want to play even tighter than that.

Playing Against the Blinds:

Open Limping vs. Blind Stealing

When you are on the button and everybody has folded to you, you should be playing at least 50% to 60% of hands -- and probably 60% to 70% of hands -- if you play as I have described. At this point, the decision regarding whether or not to play the hand will be based largely on what you are holding -- if you have anything that doesn't qualify as trash, then you are probably going to play the hand.

In addition, if you have a premium-class hand like T-9-8-7 double-suited or A-A-Q-J double-suited, you are probably going to bring it in for a raise to build the pot for value.

The real question at this point is with the lesser hands, and whether or not you are going to open limp or come in for a raise and attempt to steal the blinds. And the two main factors guiding your decision are:

1. What is in your hand.
2. How loose or tight the blinds are.

Before we get into how to use these factors to make a decision, we should talk about why these factors are important. And really what it comes down to is finding a balance between pot control and picking up the blinds.

For example, let's say you have J♠ 6♣ 4♠ 3♣ on the button, and everybody has folded to you. You have some 13-card nut wrap potential and are double-suited, so you decide to play the hand. Do you raise or limp in?

Now if the blinds are both extremely tight, you can safely raise and expect to pick up the blinds. But if instead one or both blinds are fairly loose and you expect to see a flop, then you should be more concerned about how the hand is going to play out after the flop. The problem here is that you are not likely to find much to bet at after the flop with three small cards and a big dangler, and so much of the time you will find yourself shutting down after the flop in the face of any resistance.

That said, rather than build a big pot pre-flop, you are better off limping in. In doing so, you are essentially dictating that this will be a small pot unless you catch a big-play flop for your hand like J♣ 5♠ 2♠.

Ditto for a hand like J♠ J♣ 5♠ 4♦. If you know the blinds are probably going to fold to a raise, then you can go ahead and try to steal. But if instead you figure to get called, you should probably just limp, because unless you flop a set, you are going to be stuck playing after the flop with a hand that probably won't be able to stand much action and will likely be difficult to improve to.

Blind-Stealing Standards from the Button

We'll start with basic blind stealing standards from the button against most opponents, to which you can adjust downwards depending on how tight your opponents play. Naturally, all of these hands should be at least single suited. Against most opponents, you should raise with:

Premium-class hands. Any four-card rundown with a suit from A-K-Q-J down to 6-5-4-3; four-card rundowns with a bottom or middle gap and a suit such as A-K-Q-T down to 6-5-4-2 and A-K-J-T down to 6-5-3-2; big double-pair hands with a suit; premium-plus AA hands; premium pair-plus hands such as Q♠ Q♣ J♠ T♠; a suited ace with a rundown such as A♦ 9♠ 8♦ 7♣, etc.

Big speculative wrap hands. Speculative class wrap hands with high-card strength, such as Q-J-9-7 and Q-J-T-7. You should generally open-limp with smaller speculative wrap hands such as 7-6-4-2.

Three Broadway cards. Any three cards ten-and-higher, such as K-Q-J-x, K-Q-T-x, and A-J-T-x.

Three middle rundowns with an overcard kicker. In other words, you can bring it in for a raise with Q-9-8-7, but you should generally open limp with 9-8-7-2.

With that list in mind, the tighter the blinds are, the wider your blindstealing range should be. If the blinds are extremely tight, you might consider raising with virtually any hand you choose to play, with one caveat: You should generally avoid trying to steal the blinds with hands with dry pairs in them, such as J-J-5-3 with a suit, Q-Q-T-7 with a suit, or K-K-J-2 with a suit, as you are likely to be handicapped after the flop unless you flop a set. However, a hand like A♠ Q♣ Q♦ 4♠ for a big pair with a suited ace is good enough for a raise, as is a hand like K♠ K♦ Q♠ J♣.

Adjustments for the Cutoff Seat

When everybody folds to you in the cutoff seat, you have another obstacle to overcome: the player on the button. Generally speaking, you should tighten up a bit in the cutoff seat. But how much so depends on how loose, tight, and/or aggressive the player behind you is.

Ideally, you'd like to have a really tight player on your left who rarely, if ever, raises pre-flop. This way you effectively get to have the button twice, and as such don't have to adjust your game much. You can generally raise as if you are on the button and everybody has folded to you, and limp with the hands that you would ordinarily limp in with from the button.

But if the player on your left is the type of player who would limp frequently, but plays tight and folds often against raises, you might be a little more inclined to raise in order to knock him out and secure the button.

If, instead, the player on your left is extremely loose and will call any pre-flop raise, you need to tighten up your blind-stealing requirements – otherwise you will often find yourself playing heads up out of position after the flop when the button calls your raise, but the blinds fold. In fact, with this type of player on your left, you can still open limp with a wide range so long as the button doesn't raise much pre-flop, but you should avoid opening with a raise with most everything except the premium-class hands.

Now if, instead, you have a maniac on your left who raises pre-flop at every opportunity, then you have even more problems, as you can no longer figure to see the flop cheaply. In that case, you need to tighten up considerably. You should also look to change seats, or otherwise find a different game.

The Size of the Raise

Generally speaking, when you are on the button and nobody has entered the pot in front of you, you should go ahead and bring it in for a full pot-sized raise. In other words, in a \$5-\$5 game, you should go ahead and bet the full \$20. However, if the blinds are extremely tight, but you have a hand like Q-J-T-9 double-suited and you really want to see the flop, you might consider bringing it in for a minimum raise to encourage action.

Playing Behind a Limper

Let's say that you are on the button, and only one player has limped in front of you. Generally, in this spot, you should revert back to normal full-ring strategy, which is to raise with the premium-class hands, and limp in with the speculative and marginal hands – which now include the additional Small Ball hands presented in this chapter. However, if the blinds are extremely tight and the limper is a weak player, you might consider raising with additional hands, which should generally be composed of high cards – hands such as K-Q-J-8 or K-Q-T-7 at least single-suited, or a Broadway wrap hand like A-K-T-3 with a suited ace.

A Note on Open-Limping

In contrast to limit poker and tournament poker where the blinds are relatively meaningful, this is not the case in cash game pot-limit poker. On the contrary, the size of the blinds is relatively inconsequential compared to the rest of the money that goes into the pot after the flop in pot-limit poker – and especially in PLO. In other words, the blinds aren't really worth fighting for.

Moreover, open-limping from the button is not the weak play that some people make it out to be. The truth is that if you open limp from the button, the small blind folds, and the big blind raises, this is an extremely favorable situation for you simply because you will be heads up with the positional advantage against the pre-flop raiser.

Usually, it is the blind that is making the mistake by raising out of position, and not the other way around.

Playing With the Initiative: After the Flop

When you raise before the flop and you don't get re-raised, you have taken the pre-flop initiative, a condition which changes the dynamics of post-flop play. This is because now, your opponents will check to you after the flop expecting you to bet. And as a result, your opponents will now check-and-call with their marginal hands in order to let you bluff at the pot, and – worse – they will also check-raise you far more often.

On your end, this requires finding a balance between c-betting and taking the free card. Where this balance lies depends on two things:

1. How many players are in the pot, and
2. How tricky your opponents are.

How many players are in the pot?

Clearly, you should be more inclined to follow through with a continuation bet against one opponent rather than two, much less three or four. The more players in the pot, the more players you have to make fold; moreover, the more players in the pot, the more likely it is that one of them hit the flop.

How tricky are your opponents?

The trickier your opponents are, the more important it is for you to check behind and take the free card more often.

Let's say, for example, you open with a raise from the button and only the big blind calls. If this player is a weak, predictable opponent who will always bet his hand, but never check-and-call and *never* check-raise, then you should follow through with a continuation bet about 100% of the time that he checks to you on the flop. And if instead this player will check-and-call but never check-raise, you should still c-bet the vast majority of the time, as the penalty for getting caught isn't so steep when you are guaranteed to at least see the turn card.

That said, it is the tricky player who is capable of both checking-and-calling and check-raising that you should be more concerned with. And it is against this player that you need to balance your game by taking the free card more often. When you threaten to check behind, your opponents will be disinclined to try to check-raise you with some of the stronger hands out of fear of giving a free card, thus making them a little more predictable.

Taking Free Cards

The next question is, when do you take the free card?

Generally speaking, you should check behind with a wider range when you have taken the pre-flop initiative than when you haven't. For example, when my opponent has the initiative and he checks to me, I will generally check behind and take a free card when I have a gutshot straight draw, a non-nut flush draw, or when I have a draw to a wrap (such as when I have Q-T-9-2 on a J-5-3 flop, where a king or eight would give me a 13-card wrap). However, I will usually bet an open-ended nut straight draw (as in Q-T-9-2 on a 8-7-3 flop) and sometimes the bare nut flush draw as well, as my opponent's check is a fairly reliable indicator that he will fold to a bet in this spot.

But when I raise before the flop and have taken the initiative, I will go ahead and check behind when I have an open-ended straight draw as well -- and often with the bare nut flush draw, too -- as I am more likely to get check-raised in this scenario. In addition, I will occasionally mix things up a bit and check behind with top pair as well.

Here's an example of the latter:

Checking Top Pair: Example Hand #1

It's a \$5-\$5 game, four-handed. I am dealt K♦ J♣ T♦ 8♥ on the button. The UTG player folds. I (\$3,300) raise to \$20. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$1,200) calls, and there is \$45 in the pot. The flop comes K♠ 6♣ 4♠. My opponent checks. I check.

The turn is the K♥, giving me trip kings. My opponent checks. I bet \$35 and my opponent calls. The pot is now \$115.

The river is the 2♦. My opponent now bets \$80. I call, picking off a bluff attempt.

One of the benefits of checking a hand like top pair on the flop is that it effectively shortens the hand and makes it a two-street affair. Another is that it adds a little deception. In this particular hand, my opponent likely figured that I would bet a hand like top pair on the flop, prompting him to attempt a reverse float when the board paired kings and I bet on the turn.

Here's another example:

Checking Top Pair: Example Hand #2

It is a \$0.50-\$1 game on the electronic tables at Excalibur. I (\$200) am dealt K♣ J♦ T♣ T♥ in the cutoff. TT (\$200) -- a loose raiser, but a player who respects my play after the flop -- opens with a raise to \$2 UTG. Two players call behind him. I make a loose re-raise to \$11.50, and only TT calls, so we are heads up and there is \$28.50 in the pot.

The flop comes K♦ 7♥ 2♣, giving me top pair. TT checks. I check behind.

The turn is the 8♠, giving me a gutshot straight draw. TT checks. I check behind and take the free card.

The river is the Q♦. TT checks. I check behind and win the pot with my pair of kings.

In this hand, I used position to control the hand, keep the pot size down after the flop, and checked one pair the whole way through. The key to this hand is that my checking range should be wide enough to prevent my opponent from taking stabs at the pot.

Because if my opponent thinks that I will always bet one pair or better or any kind of draw, then he will think that I am always weak when I check, and he will respond by betting any time I check behind. But if instead he recognizes that I will check top pair, he will be less likely to bet at the pot on the turn if I check behind on the flop because I am a much bigger threat to call him.

This gives me much greater control over the hands in these types of heads-up confrontations when I have the pre-flop initiative.

Here's a third example:

Checking Top Pair: Example Hand #3

A tournament hand, with the blinds at \$25-\$50. We are playing eight-handed. I (\$12,000) am dealt A♦ K♣ T♦ 9♠ on the button. The player in the hijack seat (\$11,000) open limps, and the cutoff folds. I raise to \$225. The small blind (\$8,000) calls. The big blind folds.

The flop comes A♥ 5♦ 3♣, giving me top-pair, top-kicker. Both opponents check. I check. The turn is the 9♣, giving me top two pair. Both opponents check. I bet \$725; the small blind calls, but the other player folds. The river is the 2♥. My opponent checks, I check behind, and I take the hand with my two pair.

This is another good pot control example, which is a bit more important in tournament play, where one mistake could end your tournament life. In this hand, I did not want to get check-raised on the flop, and I am probably not going to get called by a worse hand than a bare ace if I bet.

Here's one last example:

Checking Top Pair: Example Hand #4

It is a \$2-\$5-\$10 game with a Mississippi Straddle, and I am on the button straddle holding T♦ 9♣ 8♦ 7♥. Both blinds fold, and two players limp in front of me. I raise to \$40, and both limpers call, so there is \$127 in the pot. The flop comes 7♦ 4♣ 2♥, giving me top pair. Both opponents check to me.

In this spot, I will check top pair (1) just to mix things up, and (2) because there are a lot of cards that could come on the turn that would significantly improve my hand. I really don't want to bet out and get check-raised here and have to fold.

So I check. The turn is the 3♠, giving me a flush draw. The first player leads out with a \$100 bet, and the other player folds. At this point, I am not convinced that the bettor has a straight, and I think there is a good chance that the bettor is just on a steal given the flop action (or lack thereof), so I call, putting \$327 in the pot.

The river is the 7♥, giving me trip sevens. My opponent now bets \$200. And given how passively I have played the hand thus far, I pretty much have to call here, so I do. My opponent had flopped bottom two pair with x-x-4-2, which he flashes before mucking.

This hand illustrates the main difficulty of playing with the pre-flop initiative, which is that there are a lot more contingencies to think about.

When you play without the pre-flop initiative and your opponents check to you, the game is relatively simple, and you can just pot/pot/half-pot or pot/pot/showdown for the most part. But when you have taken the pre-flop initiative yourself, you have to worry more about the possibility of getting check-raised. This forces you to check behind at times on the flop. And one of the drawbacks of checking behind is that when you take a free card, you are also giving one, which means your top pair is liable to get outdrawn.

And then after checking the flop, you now have to consider the possibility that a turn bet from the opposition may simply be a steal attempt in reaction to having the flop get checked around. And then if you do call the turn and your opponent bets again on the river, you then have to consider whether your opponent is just following through on the turn bet or if he actually has something.

PLO is a much simpler game when you play without the pre-flop initiative.

So Why Raise?

The previous discussion begs the question: If the game is so much simpler when you play without the pre-flop initiative, then why raise at all?

The answer is to build the pot when you have the positional advantage in order to maximize the value of the positional advantage. The basic idea is that you want to play the biggest pots when you have the positional advantage, but keep the pots small pre-flop when you do choose to play a hand out of position.

The difficult part is learning to play with the pre-flop initiative. But generally speaking, the more experience you gain and the more comfortable you become playing with the pre-flop initiative, the wider the range of hands you will be able to comfortably raise with before the flop, and the better able you are to fully utilize the positional advantage.

C-Betting: How Much to Bet?

Finally, when you do decide to follow through with a continuation bet, you should generally bet the full size of the pot unless the board is paired or a flush is possible.

Small Ball: Final Thoughts

The Small Ball strategy presented here does two things:

1. Uncovers additional opportunities to exploit your opponents in full-ring games.
2. Represents the core basic strategy for short-handed play.

With regard to short-handed play, the key here is late position volume. Personally, I play about 50% to 60% of hands from the cutoff and button in 6-max games, and about 60% to 70% of hands from the cutoff and button when playing four-handed. That said, the Small Ball strategy will be featured in our hand walkthroughs in Part VI: Short-Handed Play.

But before we get to that, we will discuss 3-betting before the flop, a situational LAG tactic used to more actively promote a short-handed pot after

the flop.

Special Insert

The Pre-flop Initiative: Myth vs. Reality

Myth: Having the pre-flop initiative is extremely valuable in PLO.

Reality: The positional advantage tends to trump the pre-flop initiative in deep-stack play.

With regard to PLO strategy, the pre-flop initiative is an extremely important topic to fully understand because it represents the fundamental difference between our two core pre-flop approaches to playing short-handed pots, those being our loose-passive (Small Ball) and loose-aggressive (LAG) pre-flop styles of play.

Let's talk a bit about the difference between what the pre-flop initiative actually does and what most players think it accomplishes.

The reality about the pre-flop initiative is that it tends to be both poorly understood and way overvalued by a large chunk of the PLO playing populace. And the reason the pre-flop initiative is both poorly understood and overvalued in PLO is, in large part, due to its value in no-limit hold'em.

In NLHE, when you raise before the flop, you are representing a hand (like AA) that is a huge favorite to make it to showdown. And the reason the c-bet is so effective in NLHE is because it is much harder for your opponents to outdraw one pair when they are only holding two cards.

But in PLO, hand values are much more flop dependent. The misconception that most people have is that their opponents fold because they raised before the flop. This is incorrect. Much of the time, your opponents aren't folding hands they wouldn't ordinarily have folded anyway.

In reality, your opponents don't actually fold because they fear that you have AA. In fact, the opposite is true; if your opponents thought you had AA, they would tend to come after you more often.

And so in contrast to NLHE, the pre-flop initiative does not actually create fold equity in PLO, except in three basic instances:

1. When an ace flops and nobody was helped by the board.
2. When the board is paired on the flop and nobody hit it.
3. When your opponent misses the flop entirely in a low-SPR, heads-up pot.

The truth is that the positional advantage tends to trump the pre-flop initiative because the pre-flop initiative doesn't actually create much fold equity in deep-stacked PLO. And yet, many players constantly raise and re-raise pre-flop from out of position in an effort to get the pre-flop initiative, when the reality is that they are only setting themselves up to get outplayed in a bigger pot.

This is a huge leak.

That said, my point here isn't that c-betting doesn't work in PLO; my point is that c-betting doesn't work for the reasons that people think it does. Your opponents don't typically fold because you've represented a big hand pre-flop, but rather because they simply have nothing to call you with. And once you recognize what the initiative does and doesn't do, you can adjust your game plan accordingly.

PLO Tip: In deep-stack PLO, the positional advantage tends to trump the pre-flop initiative.

Part V: 3-Betting Before the Flop

Situational LAG Tactics

"It's fun, isn't it?"

-- Luke Van Cleve

As we discussed in the previous chapter, our default strategy when we have the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser in a potential heads-up pot is the Small Ball strategy, which is to flat call the raise and use the positional advantage to control both our opponents and pot size *after* the flop via the float. But rather than flat calling the raise and *hoping* everybody else folds so that you can see the flop heads up with the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser, you might instead choose to take a more active approach to isolating the pre-flop raiser by re-raising (3-betting).

In contrast to Small Ball -- a loose-passive approach in which we let our opponents keep the pre-flop initiative -- 3-betting is a loose-aggressive (LAG) tactic in which we will take the pre-flop initiative. There are two basic versions of the play:

1. **Pump-and-Shove (Maniac/LowSPR).** 3-betting to build the pot and create a low-SPR situation such that there are only two bets left.
2. **Isolation Play (Tactical/Deep Stack).** 3-betting to isolate the pre-flop raiser in a deep-stack situation.

The Pump-and-Shove

(Maniac/Low-SPR Play)

The Pump-and-Shove play is to put in a re-raise before the flop in an effort to create a short-handed pot (usually heads up) in low-SPR situation (SPR \leq 4) after the flop such that there are only two bets or less left to play. Naturally, you want to have the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser.

The basic idea is to try to build a big pot pre-flop. If only the original pre-flop raiser calls, much of the time he will check-and-fold to a bet after the flop. But if he bets, the pot will be big enough such that you can shove all-in if you choose to contest the pot at all.

For example, let's say it's a \$0.50-\$1 game with 100 BB or \$100 stacks, as is typical of what you might find in an online game. You have T \heartsuit 9 \clubsuit 8 \clubsuit 7 \clubsuit in the cutoff. The UTG player opens with a pot-sized raise to \$3.50, and everybody folds to you (it makes little difference here whether you are playing 6-handed or 10-handed). You make a pot-sized re-raise to \$12, and it gets folded back to the UTG player.

Now let's assume that the pre-flop raiser calls, so there is \$25.50 in the pot and you both have \$88 remaining. If he checks the flop, then you will usually put in a continuation bet. But if your opponent bets the pot (\$25.50) instead, then you will either shove all-in if you catch any piece of the board (like top pair, sometimes less), or fold if you miss the flop entirely.

Alternatively, if your opponent puts in another re-raise pre-flop to \$37.50 -- a fourth bet -- then you will just call the raise and commit if you catch any piece of the flop, as you will be in an ultra-low-SPR situation (one bet left).

This play can be done with a fairly wide range of hands, from premium-class hands such as T \heartsuit 9 \clubsuit 8 \clubsuit 7 \clubsuit , to otherwise marginal hands such as J \clubsuit 9 \clubsuit 8 \clubsuit 6 \clubsuit , or even hands a lot worse. But the main criteria for starting hands are:

1. Your hand should generally be double-suited. Ideally, you'd like to be able to have something to shove with on the flop. That said, having a double-suited hand improves your chances of flopping a pair and a flush draw, which is good enough to shove in an low-SPR situation heads up.

2. You should avoid 3-betting with hands that contain pairs other than AA. Unless you flop a set, pairs are generally a handicap after the flop. What you are looking to flop is a multi-way hand, such as a wrap or a pair with straight and/or flush draws. This is especially true when your opponent comes back with a re-raise pre-flop and you are left in an ultra-low-SPR situation, as it is much easier to improve to a hand that can beat AA when you flop a pair with a hand like J \clubsuit T \heartsuit 9 \clubsuit 7 \clubsuit than it is when you flop a pair with a hand like 9 \clubsuit 8 \clubsuit 8 \clubsuit 6 \clubsuit .

3. Your hand should generally have some wrap potential. You don't necessarily have to have a premium structure hand, or even a good speculative structure hand like J-T-8-6 double-suited -- even normal garbage like J-9-7-6 with the two gaps on top does well enough heads up in a low-SPR scenario -- but you should prefer to have hands that have some wrap potential. Again, the idea is to flop a multi-way hand that is shoveworthy in a low-SPR situation. This means that you are probably better off throwing away hands like K-T-7-2 double-suited.

4. Whether or not you 3-bet with AA hands depends on how deep you are, as well as the overall quality of the hand. Personally, unless I can get all or most of my money in before the flop, I don't like to raise or re-raise with anything but the premium AA hands -- double-suited aces, single-suited aces with either Broadway Wrap potential (such as A-A-J-T or A-A-Q-J with a suited ace), connecting sidecards (such as A-A-8-7 with a suited ace), or a second pair. Because if I have trashy aces, then what I want to do is put in enough of my stack to commit myself to the pot no matter what comes. For example, if my opponent and I have \$100 stacks and we both put \$50 in the pot before the flop, then the SPR will be 0.5 (in the case of a blind-vs.-blind battle) or less, making it an ultralow-SPR scenario where I only need 25% equity after the flop; in this case, I can comfortably commit every time and expect to come out with better than 25% equity on average.

But let's say you want to loosen your requirements a bit. Generally speaking, if you are going to 3-bet with trashy AA hands, you should target a post-flop SPR under 1 -- still in ultra-low-SPR territory -- making it at most a one bet affair. In this case, you want to get at least one-third of your stack in before the flop; if you and your opponent both have \$60 stacks, then putting \$20 each in before the flop is enough to make it a one-bet affair (as there will be at least \$40 in the pot -- a little more if you count any blind money -- and you will have \$40 remaining stacks).

The next question is, "How deep do you need to be in order to put one-third of your stack in pre-flop?" The answer is "relatively shallow," assuming only two players put in money before the flop. In a \$1-\$1 game, if the first player raises the pot to \$4, you re-raise the pot behind him to \$14, and only the original pre-flop raiser calls, there will be \$30 in the pot counting the blinds. This means that an SPR of 1 equates to \$30; add the \$14 you put in pre-flop, and that is \$44 or a 44BB stack pre-flop.

But if instead you are playing a \$0.50-\$1 game where the small blind counts as \$0.50 (rather than \$1) for betting purposes pre-flop, you need to be even shorter than that. If the first player raises the pot \$3.50, you re-raise the pot to \$12 and only the first player calls, there will be \$25.50 in the pot. The \$25.50 pot plus the \$12 pre-flop action equals \$37.50 or a 37.5BB stack pre-flop, or even shorter.

The gist of it is that unless the stacks are relatively short, then you should tend to favor smooth calling over 3-betting with all but premium AA hands.

The upside to the Pump-and-Shove is that it allows players to get in there and gamble, play for stacks and bust their opponents on relatively thin margins. As such, players can play the game without having to actually learn the fundamentals of Omaha (which you need to play in multi-way pots and with deep stacks). That is probably the main reason that the play has become so popular in online 6-max games (and the ability to avoid having to actually learn how to play Omaha is probably the main reason that 6-max games are so popular online).

However, there are a couple of downsides to the Pump-and-Shove play. The first is that it takes away post-flop play, virtually eliminating your skill advantage. The other downside is that the play adds considerable volatility to your game, as you will often be playing for stacks on some pretty thin margins. The result is a high-volume, relatively low-edge strategy. And whereas you might need a 50-60 buy-in bankroll to employ a strictly Small Ball approach to small-stakes 6-max PLO online, you might need two or three times as many buy-ins to Pump-and-Shove, depending on how often you intend to use it^[2].

Isolation Play

(Tactical/Deep-Stack Play)

The second -- and more dynamic -- version of the play is the tactical play, which is to 3-bet to isolate the pre-flop raiser in an effort to play heads up with the positional advantage in a deep-stacked scenario after the flop. The target SPR in this case is roughly 8 or higher -- enough for three legitimate bets (pot/pot/half-pot) after the flop. This can be accomplished either because the stacks are deep to begin with, or otherwise by making smaller re-raises (such as a minimum re-raise).

Here are the main advantages of 3-betting to isolate the pre-flop raiser in a deep stacked situation:

1. Deep stacks give you leverage to discourage your opponents from check-raising. Generally speaking, the main drawback of taking the pre-flop initiative is that doing so makes you a target for a check-raise, as your opponents have good reason to expect you to bet the flop if they check. This makes your opponents less predictable, particularly in a low-SPR situation where the penalty for check-raising with marginal hands (such as one pair) or draws (such as open-ended straight draw or sucker wrap) and being wrong isn't steep.

In contrast, when you build a big pot pre-flop, you are heads up with the positional advantage and the stacks are deep, you put your opponents on the defensive, as now the penalty for check-raising with marginal hands or draws and being wrong becomes much more expensive. And the higher the SPR, the more true this becomes. As a result, your opponents will be more inclined to check-and-call or check-and-fold rather than check-raise with their marginal hands, allowing you to c-bet more often with less fear of a check-raise.

2. Deep stacks and the positional advantage enable the float. As we discussed in Part II, an SPR of around 8 is deep enough to make the float a viable weapon.

3. Deep stacks, the positional advantage, and the pre-flop initiative give you a level of control over the hand. In contrast to the pump-and-shove strategy, where you are basically c-betting if your opponent checks and are either shoving or folding if your opponent bets into you, you have a bit more freedom in the deep-stack scenario where pot-size control comes into play. Now when your opponent bets, you can choose to smooth call and keep the size down. Floating is now an option. In addition, when your opponent checks to you, you can and should check behind more often and take a free card.

Now, if instead of just calling your re-raise, your opponent comes out and puts in a fourth bet (re-raises again), you are now playing heads up both with the positional advantage and without the initiative, which is highly advantageous. If you are still in a high-SPR or at least mid-high-SPR situation after the flop, you can still play Small Ball. But if your opponent's re-raise puts you in a low-SPR situation after the flop, then you can expect your opponent to follow through with a bet on the flop. In this case, you can play him for AA and shove if you catch any piece of the flop.

On a side note, when you raise pre-flop and somebody behind you 3-bets, you should generally avoid putting a fourth bet if the stacks are deep for those exact reasons. You are now heads up out of position, so you are better off just calling the re-raise, keeping the pot relatively small, and allowing your opponent to keep the pre-flop initiative.

3-Betting for Isolation: Key Concepts

Now that you have an idea about the advantages of 3-betting for isolation in deep-stack play, we are prepared to talk about the actual application of the play. Here are some key concepts.

1. AA can't be your entire 3-bet range. The first rule of 3-betting pre-flop is that you can't only 3-bet with Aces. Because if you only 3-bet with Aces, you will become fairly easy to play against in these spots. What will happen is that instead of checking-and-folding, your trickier, more astute opponents will start calling you down or check-raising you with thinner and thinner holdings. This is because unless an ace hits the flop or the flop comes with an open pair on the board, your opponents are going to figure that your hand didn't hit the flop and play you accordingly.

In fact, Aces shouldn't even be *most* of your 3-bet range, either, because if it is, some of your opponents will often still make the right play -- even if they are wrong about your hand -- simply because you are a dog to hit the flop yourself no matter what you have.

Let me give you a couple of examples against the same opponent.

Example Hand #1

It was a \$5-\$10-\$20 game with the straddle UTG. I was dealt A♠ A♣ 3♠ 5♠ in the cutoff, and I had a \$3,500 stack. My opponent in this hand (\$5,000 stack) opened with a raise from middle position to \$100. The next two players folded, and I re-raised to \$200. It got folded back to my opponent, who called.

The flop came Q♣ 7♠ 6♣. My opponent checked. I bet \$400. My opponent raised to \$1,600, forcing me to fold. He then showed me J♦ T♥ 9♣.

This time he was right, and I had AA.

Example Hand #2

This hand came from a \$1-\$2 game with a \$5 bring-in, about eight months earlier. We are playing six-handed, and I am dealt J♣ T♦ 9♠ 8♣ on the button. My opponent opens with a raise to \$15 from the hijack, and the cutoff folds. I re-raise to \$40. Both blinds fold, and my opponent calls.

The flop comes 8♠ 6♥ 5♣, giving me top pair and a gutshot. My opponent checks. I bet \$80, my opponent raises to \$250, and I fold.

"I didn't think there was anything you could have 3-bet with that could have hit that flop," he said.

This time he was wrong, but made the right play.

My thought at the time was that I would get him eventually -- that he would misread my hand and make a play at me when I flop the nuts. Well, I have yet to do it -- he always seems to check-and-fold when I flop the nuts (like the time I 3-bet him with T♠ T♦ 9♠ 9♦ and flopped a set of tens) -- but that's actually beside the point.

You see, the real strength of the play isn't actually in all the times that you stack your opponents, but rather in *all the times that your opponents check-and-fold on the flop*.

The fact is that in order to stack your opponent in a high- or at least mid-high-SPR scenario, you need to actually hit the flop hard yourself. So in reality, the 3-bet play as employed here is actually a Small Ball tactic. What should happen is that you pick up a bunch of small pots heads up until that one time you flop hard and your opponent makes a mistake.

This brings us to the next point.

2. By 3-betting, you are representing a range of hands, rather than a specific hand; you want this range to be wide. I was playing in a \$2-\$5-\$10 game at the Rio during the WSOP when I had an epiphany. I was dealt 9♠ 7♠ 5♦ 4♠ on the button straddle. The small blind folded, but the big blind limped in. Everybody else folded to the player in the cutoff, who raised to \$40. On a whim -- I also may have been tilting a little at the time -- I re-raised to \$100. To make a long story short, the big blind folded, but the cutoff called and check-and-folded to a \$150 bet when the flop came 8♣ 8♦ 3♠.

As he folded, my opponent showed A♦ K♣ Q♣ Q♥ and said that he thought that an eight was probably in my range, which is obviously true, since I actually had a nine and a seven in my hand.

But that's when it hit me why this play is so strong.

You see, a lot of players who frequently raise or 3-bet pre-flop mistakenly believe that the reason their opponents check-and-fold is *because* they raised and took the pre-flop initiative. However, this is not the case -- most of the time their opponents aren't folding hands they wouldn't ordinarily fold anyway. Rather, the reason your opponents will check-and-fold more often is because your 3-bet range is wide enough that you *can hit any flop hard*. And if you can hit any flop hard, it would be pure guesswork and risky for them to try to make a play at you and check-raise you with air.

As such, it is the *threat* of being able to hit any flop that will make your opponents more predictable, and not the actual pre-flop initiative itself. Whereas you might 3-bet in no-limit hold'em specifically to represent a big hand like AA, you don't 3-bet in PLO to represent a specific hand like AA, but rather a *range* of hands.

And you want this range to be wide.

3. Pick on easy targets. Another thing you can do to make your opponents more predictable in these spots is simply to pick on weak, predictable opponents and avoid the tricky ones. There is little better than an opponent who will only check-raise you with the nuts, or one who will always bet when he hits the flop but check when he misses.

4. You don't have to re-raise the maximum. There's one school of thought among LAG-types that says you want to make your opponents stick in as much money as possible before the flop while you have the positional advantage. This isn't necessarily right or wrong -- I think it may just be more of a stylistic difference.

There is one breed of pre-flop LAG-types who are looking to build a huge pot pre-flop and create a low-SPR situation where they can take away post-flop play and break their opponents with marginal holdings.

In contrast, I prefer to use the 3-bet more often as a tactical play. My main concern is knocking out the blinds (and/or button straddle in the case of the Mississippi Straddle) and getting the pot heads up with the positional advantage, and my preference is to keep the pot down to a manageable size pre-flop. That said, when deciding how much to re-raise, you don't need to raise any more than what you think it will take to accomplish your goal, which, for Small Ball players, is simply to get heads up with the positional advantage.

5. All else being equal, you should tend to re-raise about the same amount every time. The one thing you definitely don't do is raise the maximum with aces and a smaller amount for everything else. What I mean by "all else being equal" is that you should tend to re-raise the same

amount in similar situations. For example, if you are in a \$5 blind game with \$1,000 stacks and are facing a raise to \$20, you shouldn't re-raise to \$70 with A-A-x-x but only to \$50 with T♠ 9♣ 8♠ 7♣; instead, you should pick one amount and re-raise the same amount with whatever hands you choose to re-raise with.

If you choose to re-raise to \$70 with A-A-x-x, then you should tend to re-raise to \$70 with T♠ 9♣ 8♠ 7♣ as well.

6. The size of the re-raise should be tailored somewhat to the size of the stacks. If you are playing in a \$5 blind game with \$1,500 stacks and are facing a raise to \$20, you might go ahead and raise the maximum to \$70, because if only the original pre-flop raiser calls, then there will be \$150 in the pot and \$1,430 remaining stacks for an SPR of 9.5. Now if instead you are playing a \$5 blind game, your opponent raises to \$20, but he only has a \$650 stack, this is a different scenario. In this case, you don't have to re-raise the same amount as you would if you were playing with \$1,500 stacks -- you can tailor the size of the re-raise to the situation. And so in this spot, you might re-raise smaller -- if re-raising the minimum gets the job done (meaning that it will succeed in isolating the pre-flop raiser), then you can re-raise the minimum.

A minimum re-raise -- if successful in isolating the original pre-flop raiser -- would put \$90 in the pot with \$610 remaining stacks for an SPR of 6.8 -- a 'tweener SPR, but still relatively deep. Alternately, you can smooth call and play Small Ball; or, you might re-raise big and play Pump-and-Shove, as a max re-raise to \$70 would put the SPR under 4.

That said, if you do choose to re-raise the minimum in this spot, you should tend to re-raise the minimum with your entire 3-bet range.

7. Your 3-bet range may be wider than your calling range. Let's say you are playing in a full-ring \$5-\$5 blind game with \$1,000 stacks, and you are dealt J-9-7-6 single-suited in the hijack. The player in front of you opens with a raise to \$20.

You don't really want to smooth call here and let the players behind you come in cheap, as J-9-7-6 single-suited is pretty marginal hand with the two gaps on top -- the kind of hand that does not do so well in multi-way pots. On the other hand, so long as the two players behind you are reasonably tight and would fold most hands to a re-raise, you might consider putting in a re-raise to attempt to isolate the player in front of you.

You don't mind so much playing heads up with the positional advantage with this type of hand, as you only have to beat one hand in that case. If it gets folded back to the player in front of you and he just calls, then you can play Small Ball; if instead he re-raises, then you play pump-and-shove.

8. 3-betting for isolation requires absolute position in addition to relative position. Another thing you definitely don't want to do is 3-bet from up front. If you are sitting in a 10-handed game, the UTG player opens with a raise, and you are sitting right behind him with J-9-7-6 single-suited, you should plan on folding about 99% of the time, if not more.

Smooth calling with this hand in this spot is bad; re-raising would be a *disaster*. Because if you do choose to re-raise, what's going to happen is that you are going to have six guys behind you licking their chops to play a big pot with the positional advantage on you.

9. Don't 3-bet with trash if multiple opponents are in the pot. Let's say you are on the button with Q-9-7-4 single-suited. An early player limps, another player raises, and it is folded to you.

You should avoid 3-betting here, and not just because your hand is trash -- you should avoid 3-betting because you want to avoid getting limp re-raised by the limper! If that happens, then you are basically committed to playing the hand out with a trash hand.

You can wait for a better hand.

10. Don't 3-bet with a hand you don't want to get 4-bet with. This is related to the previous point. But generally speaking, if you are concerned about playing for four bets pre-flop with a trashy hand, then don't put in three!

11. You should 3-bet more often in games with a Mississippi Straddle. There are two reasons why you should 3-bet more often in games with a Mississippi Straddle than in games without: The first is that knocking out the player on the button straddle gives you extra incentive to make the play if it secures you the button; the other reason is that since the blinds act in turn, both blinds will already have acted by the time the action gets to you.

What this means is that if both blinds fold, there are two less players you have to worry about 4-betting with AA.

12. When considering a 3-bet in front of a player on the Mississippi Straddle, it helps if the player on the straddle is a tight player. If the player on the button straddle is a maniac -- or if he will otherwise play every hand no matter what -- you should avoid 3-betting in front of him. Generally speaking, you want tight players on your left regardless, but take precaution against loose players.

Starting Hand Considerations

As far as starting hands go, there aren't any hard rules. That said, you can afford to 3-bet with a slightly wider range of hands when playing deep than in the Pump-and-Shove play. A few guidelines:

1. It is preferable, but not as important to be double-suited when playing deep than when doing the Pump-and-Shove. This is because you are a little more dependent on starting hand value in the low-SPR Pump-and-Shove scenarios. Whereas you are more likely to play for stacks in the Pump-and-Shove -- and as such need to have the extra pair plus flush draw possibility -- you will end more pots without a fight when playing deep.

2. You can now 3-bet with double-paired hands. Whereas you should avoid 3-betting with double-paired hands that don't include AA in the Pump-and-Shove, you can now more safely 3-bet with double-paired hands such as T-T-9-9 in deep-stack play, as you now have implied odds if you hit a set.

3. You should still prefer to have a hand with wrap potential. You still want to have hands that have some big-play potential, though you can make this play with some otherwise speculative hands such as J-T-8-6 double-suited or even otherwise marginal hands such as J-9-7-6 double-suited -- and you can also probably get away with 3-betting with hands a lot worse than that from time to time as well.

4. You should still avoid 3-betting with single-pair hands other than AA. Having a pair in your hand is generally a handicap unless you flop a set. As such, you should be more inclined to play small pots with hands with pairs in them.

C-Betting After 3-Betting Pre-flop

Generally speaking, under normal circumstances, when you are the pre-flop raiser and you choose to c-bet, you should tend to bet the full pot on the flop if you bet at all, unless the board is paired or a flush is possible. However, when c-betting after 3-betting pre-flop, you don't necessarily have to bet the full pot. That said, your c-bets should be tailored to the structure of the flop.

For example, if the flop comes A-7-2 rainbow, you might bet two-thirds of the flop if your opponent checks, as there are no real draws out (except wheel-draws), and your opponent will likely fold if he does not have an ace himself.

Similarly, if the board comes J-2-2, a half- or two-thirds pot bet should do the trick.

If instead the flop comes Q♣ J♣ 2♦, you should bet the full pot if you bet at all, as there are now all kinds of draws out.

Alternatively, if the flop comes T♣ 9♥ 8♠ (making a straight possible) or A♠ 8♠ 7♠ (making a flush possible), you might bet more like two-thirds to three-quarters of the pot, assuming you choose to bet at all.

PLO Tip: When 3-betting pre-flop, your c-bets after the flop should be tailored to the structure and texture of the flop.

The Clearout: The Limp Re-Raise Isolation Play

I also use an improvised version of the isolation play. Usually, what happens is that I will open limp from somewhere (anywhere) on the table, and there might be a limper behind me. One of the blinds -- or maybe an UTG straddler -- will raise; if I am next to act, I may opt to 3-bet to knock out the player(s) behind me.

The drawback is that my hand will usually be among the more marginal hands, as there is usually a good reason why I limped in to begin with. That said, there are a few examples of this play in the Hand Walkthroughs that follow.

3-Betting Before the Flop:

Hand Walkthroughs

Hand #1: Pump-and-Shove

The game: \$1-\$2 blinds with \$5 bring-in

My position: Middle Position

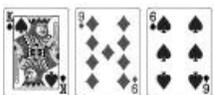
My hand:



Pre-flop: An early player (\$700) limps in. The player in front of me (\$1,100) raises to \$20.

Q-T-9-7 with a single suit is a pretty marginal hand. Folding wouldn't be terrible. Calling is OK, but doing so invites players to come in. And if I re-raise, I have a chance to knock out everybody else -- including the limper -- and get heads up with the positional advantage.

Action: I (\$800) re-raise to \$75, and only the original raiser calls.



Flop (\$158): My opponent checks. I bet \$150 and he folds.

This hand is useful for highlighting the difference between Small Ball and the Pump-and-Shove plays. In this hand, I flopped a pair, a double-nut gutter and a flush draw, and the SPR is just under 5 -- a little high for the Pump-and-Shove (since it would take a little more than two bets to get all-in), but not terribly so. My opponent checked, and I bet as planned. If instead he had bet the pot (\$160), I would raise the max, essentially getting all-in.

But let's say instead that I had smooth called, and that by some chance everybody else folded, leaving me heads up with the pre-flop raiser. Now the flop comes $K\heartsuit 9\spadesuit 6\clubsuit$, and there is only \$48 in the pot with another \$780 left to play. If my opponent checks, I can safely bet my multi-way hand, as I did in this hand; but if instead my opponent follows through with a continuation bet, the play would be to smooth call and float in this high-SPR (SPR 16) scenario.

That said, the one factor -- aside from the fun factor -- that pushed this decision towards a 3-bet over a smooth call was that doing so gave me a much better chance of knocking out the limper (as well as the blinds and everybody else) and getting heads up with the pre-flop raiser.

Hand #2: Pump-and-Shove AA

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind (\$700) calls. It gets folded to the cutoff (\$500), who raises to \$50. I (\$1,500) re-raise to \$100. The big blind folds, and the cutoff calls.

The \$100 re-raise was my standard re-raise, meant to disguise the contents of my hand. I probably could have (and perhaps should have) re-raised a bigger amount in this spot, particularly considering that the original raiser only had a \$500 stack.



Flop (\$212): My opponent checks. I bet \$100, and he calls.



Turn (\$412): My opponent now bets \$300 all-in.

At this point, it appears that my opponent has K-T-x-x for two pair, but I basically have to call with the nut flush draw and the over pair, as I have as many as 15 outs against top two pair. Plus he might have something like A-Q-J-T for one pair rather than two pair.

Action: I call. He has KK, having turned top set.

Well, at least my disguise worked.

Hand #3: Isolation Play

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with a Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

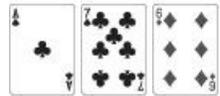
My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind (\$600) calls. It gets folded to the hijack (\$1,000), who raises to \$40. The cutoff folds.

There's no rule that says you have to 3-bet with this hand. But it is double-suited with some straight potential, and I have a chance to knock out the big blind and get heads up.

Action: I re-raise to \$100. The big blind folds. The hijack calls.



Flop (\$212): My opponent checks. I check.

I flopped a pair with an open-ended sucker-end straight draw. I could have bet, but I opted to take the free card here.



Turn (\$212): My opponent checks. I bet \$100 and my opponent folds.

He checked twice...

Hand #4: Whoops

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with a Mississippi Straddle

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind folds. The big blind (\$240) calls. It gets folded to the hijack (\$1,000), who raises to \$20. The cutoff folds.

This hand is far weaker than the previous one. Also note the short stack who had limped in the big blind. I probably got a little carried away here.

Action: I re-raise to \$75. The big blind goes all-in for \$240. The hijack folds.

Well, I think it is pretty clear that the big blind has AA. I am getting about 2:1 here to call, and there aren't too many hands my opponent could have that would make me a 2:1 dog against AA.

Action: I call. The big blind has A♠ A♣ T♠ 2♦. I go on to lose.

I am actually only about a 3:2 dog against that hand. That said, I made a couple of mistakes here. The first was re-raising with a hand that I really did not want to get re-raised with, and the other was ignoring the size of the big blind's stack.

Hand #5: Maniac/Isolation Play

The game: \$5-\$5

My position: Button

My hand:



I had just bought the button from the small blind, and so this is my second hand at the table.

Pre-flop: Two players limp in. A middle player (\$2,000) raises to \$30, and it is folded to me.

I may be able to knock out the blinds and both limpers with a re-raise...

Action: I (\$2,100) re-raise to \$100. Both blinds fold. The first limper (\$700) calls. The other limper folds. The original raiser calls.



Flop (\$315): Both opponents check. I bet \$200 and they both fold.

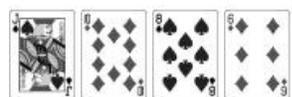
Standard c-bet.

Hand #6: Isolation Play

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle

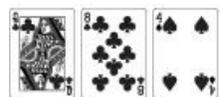
My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: It gets folded to a middle player (\$1,200), who opens with a raise to \$40. The next player folds. I (\$2,500) re-raise to \$100, and only the pre-flop raiser calls.

A bit of a 'tweener SPR at 5.5. I do have a double-suited hand that is not complete trash, however.



Flop (\$207): My opponent checks.

I have a pair and a gutshot. I could bet, but I don't want to get check-raised off my draw.

Action: I check.



Turn (\$207): My opponent bets \$160.

Now I have the bare nut straight with no re-draw on a flush board, facing a about a three-quarter pot-sized bet, and a raise will not put me all in. Under normal circumstances, the standard play is to smooth call and keep the pot size down. However, if I don't believe that my opponent has a straight, I should raise and make him pay to draw.

Action: I raise to \$500. My opponent thinks for a minute, and finally decides to re-raise all-in for \$1,100 total. I call.



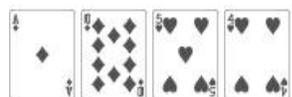
River (\$2,407): My opponent shows Q♦ J♣ 5♣ 4♥, having had two pair with a club draw, but splitting the pot with the same straight on the river.

Hand #7: Pump-and-Shove

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in (\$500-max)

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: It gets folded to the player in front of me, a weak player (\$450) who opens with a raise to \$15. I (\$570) re-raise to \$50. The button folds. But the small blind (\$600) and big blind (\$500) both call. The original raiser calls.

This is a bit of a loose re-raise, and I was trying to encourage the blinds to fold. But I am double-suited with the positional advantage (the shove position) in a low-SPR situation.



Flop (\$200):

That's a miracle.

Action: The small blind -- a hold'em player new to Omaha -- bets \$90. The other two players both fold.

I have a pair, a gutshot, and the nut flush draw. I just named three things.

Action: I raise to \$470. My opponent sets me all-in for \$50 more. I call. My opponent shows K♠ K♦ J♠ J♥ for top set.



Turn (\$1,240):



River (\$1,240): I win.

Hand #8: Deep-Stack Double-Pair Hand

The game: \$5-\$10-\$20

My position: Middle Position

My hand:



Pre-flop: Gordo (\$1,600) calls the straddle in early position. Luke (\$6,000) raises to \$100. I (\$4,000) re-raise to \$200. Only Gordo and Luke call.



Flop (\$615): Both players check to me. I bet \$600, and both opponents fold.

Hand #9: Pump-and-Shove AA

The game: \$5-\$10

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



This hand took place later in the same session. I had lost a couple of big pots, and I am only sitting on \$1,700 now.

Pre-flop: Kyle (\$5,000) opens with a raise to \$30 in early position. Luke (\$7,000) re-raises to \$100. I (\$1,700) re-raise to \$200. Both blinds fold. Kyle and Luke both call.

This is another spot where I could have re-raised a larger amount.



Flop (\$615): Kyle checks. Luke bets \$615.

I only have \$1,500 left, and this is a shove or fold situation. My one pair can probably beat Luke's hand; otherwise, he likely would have checked expecting me to bet.

Action: I raise all-in for \$1,500. Kyle folds. Luke calls with 8-7-5-4 for a pair and 13-card nut wrap.

Having contributed \$1,500 of the \$3,615 pot after the flop, I need about 41.5% equity to justify the shove with AA. Technically, I do have the best hand at the moment, but I am actually about a 5:4 dog equity-wise -- and maybe a little worse depending on suits -- but I am still about odds-on against Luke's actual holding.

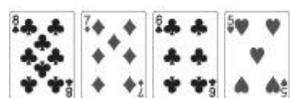
Luke would improve and win the pot.

Hand #10: Deep-Stack Play

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in (\$1,000-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$3,500) limps in. The next player (\$3,000) -- a very bad and very loose player -- raises to \$20. I (\$1,500) re-raise to \$75. It gets folded around to the UTG player, who calls. The original raiser calls.



Flop (\$228): Both opponents check.

The play here is to take the free card. For one thing, there are a lot of cards that could come on the turn that would bring lots of help -- such as any three, five, six, or a seven (an eight makes a straight on the board). For another, I have two opponents, and there are two high straight cards on the board.

Action: I check.



Turn (\$228): The first player checks. The other player bets \$225. I fold. The other player folds.

You can't win them all.

Hand #11: Deep-Stack Play

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in (\$500-max), five-handed

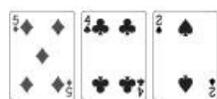
My position: Cutoff

My hand:



This is another hand against Luke, who is UTG.

Pre-flop: Luke (\$4,200) opens with a raise UTG to \$20. I (\$1,300) re-raise to \$60. Only Luke calls.



Flop (\$123): Luke checks.

This is a pretty good flop, as I have a pair with an open-ended straight draw. Moreover, this flop doesn't look like it would hit me. As such, I expect an aggressive player like Luke to check-raise me with some frequency here, to which I can re-raise all-in and blast him out of the pot.

Action: I bet \$120. Luke raises to \$480. I re-raise all-in for \$1,240. Luke insta-calls, showing A♥ A♦ 7♥ 6♥.

Just my luck. He actually has me here.



Turn (\$2,603):

We are splitting this pot with the same straight.



River (\$2,603):

Hand #12: All Purpose Play

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in (\$500-max)

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: An early player limps in. The next player (\$750) -- a loose/bad player -- raises to \$20, and it is folded to me. I (\$1,000) re-raise to \$50, and only the original raiser calls.

Isolation/Value play. I have a pretty nice hand. The real idea here is that I just want to play a bigger pot.



Flop (\$107): My opponent checks. I bet \$100. My opponent calls.

Standard.



Turn (\$307): My opponent checks. I bet \$305. My opponent calls.



River (\$917): My opponent checks.

With two possible straights out and a marginally strong hand, I should check and show my two pair down.

Action: I check. I win.

Hand #13: Isolation Play

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in (\$500-max)

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two players (\$400 and \$500, respectively) limp in. The small blind (\$1,500) raises to \$15.

I have a double-suited rundown hand with a gap at the top, which would be very marginal in a multi-way pot. That said, the two limpers are relatively reasonable players who would likely fold to a re-raise. This is basically a re-raise or fold situation as far as I am concerned.

Action: I (\$2,350) re-raise to \$55. Both limpers fold. The small blind calls.



Flop (\$120): My opponent checks. I bet \$75 and he folds.

Standard c-bet.

Hand #14: All Purpose

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in

My position: Button

My hand:



This hand came two hands later against the same opponent, who is a hold'em player relatively new to Omaha.

Pre-flop: It gets folded to the cutoff (\$1,450), who opens with a raise to \$15. I (\$2,400) re-raise to \$50, and only the cutoff calls.



Flop (\$103): My opponent checks.

This is a relatively clean flop. I don't need to bet the max here, but I should definitely bet.

Action: I bet \$75. My opponent raises to \$330.

Nice. At this point, I have two options: re-raise, or smooth call and then pop the turn. My preference in this particular situation is to just call. Because if my opponent has 7-7-x-x for a set of sevens, he is probably going to bet the turn if I just call anyway, whereas he might otherwise fold to a re-raise. Moreover, if he is bluffing, he is not going to call a re-raise, but he might bet the turn if I just call.

Action: I call.



Turn (\$763): My opponent checks. I bet \$735 and my opponent folds, showing A♥ 9♥ 8♥ 7♦ having flopped top two pair and saying that the king must have hit me.

That was a possibility I had not accounted for. Well, if I could have seen his cards I would have re-raised!

Hand #15: 3-Bet Pre-flop, then 4- and 5-bet Pump-and-Shove

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in

My position: Middle Position

My hand:



Pre-flop: A middle player (\$500) opens with a raise to \$15. I (\$1,100) re-raise to \$50, and it gets folded to the small blind (\$500) -- a very loose player -- who calls. The big blind -- another loose player -- re-raises all-in for \$85 total. The player in front of me folds.

I 3-bet the middle player mostly because I felt like it. However, I probably should have given more consideration to the loose play of the players in the blinds. But at this point, the play is to put in another re-raise to try to knock out the small blind and put his dead money in the pot, and get heads up with the big blind.

Action: I re-raise the max to \$320. The small blind calls.

The small blind is a very loose player.



Flop (\$740): The small blind checks.

Well that's dumb luck -- I flopped a double-nut gutter with the nut diamond draw and backdoor spades. Shove.

Action: I set the small blind all-in for \$180 and he folds. I win the \$470 side pot.



Turn (\$270 Main Pot):



River (\$270 Main Pot): The big blind wins the \$270 main pot with A-T-x-x for a pair.

Hand #16: Pump-and-Shove

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in (\$500-max)

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$1,100) opens with a raise to \$20. A middle player calls (\$900), and it is folded to me. I (\$485) re-raise to \$50. The small blind (\$700) calls. The big blind folds. The UTG player calls. The middle player calls.

Now we have a low-SPR situation (SPR a little over 2).



Flop (\$202): Everybody checks to me.

I have a pair and a 17-card wrap. With everybody having checked to me, I should bet.

Action: I bet \$200, and only the UTG player calls.



Turn (\$602): My opponent checks.

I may be winning with my pair.

Action: I bet \$235 all-in. My opponent calls.



River (\$1,072): I win with straight.

Hand #17: Deep-Stack Play

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



This hand was against my buddy Alan Schermer, a reasonably tight-aggressive player.

Pre-flop: AI (\$845) opens with a raise to \$20. The next player folds. I (\$1,050) re-raise to \$50, and only AI calls.



Flop (\$103): AI checks.

I have top two pair with a gutshot and backdoor spades. With a highly coordinated flop like this, I should bet the max.

Action: I bet \$100. AI raises to \$400.

I could fold. But sitting at the table, I'm not convinced I am beat here.

Action: I call.



Turn (\$903): AI bets \$395 all-in.

This is a tough spot. If AI has a set, then I am in bad shape. If he has a straight, I might have seven outs (two queens, two jacks, and the other three tens), but I am only getting 3.3:1 to call, and seven outs is not enough to justify a call. On the other hand, I am not in such bad shape against a two pair hand like Q-J-T-9. It is definitely not a clear call here.

Action: I call.



River (\$1,693): We both check. AI has A♣ K♣ K♦ 8♥. I win.

This was a unique situation that doesn't come up much when you play Small Ball and flat call pre-flop. Having 3-bet pre-flop, I had to face the check-raise and the shove on the turn. Truth is, I might have gotten a little lucky that AI had the one legitimate hand that I could beat.

Hand #18: 3-Betting with AA

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in (\$500-max), five-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



The small blind in this hand is Brian, a fairly tough player.

Pre-flop: It gets folded to Brian (\$1,500) in the small blind, who raises to \$15. I (\$1,200) re-raise to \$50. Brian calls.

I don't know -- I just felt like this was a good enough hand that I should re-raise.



Flop (\$100): Brian checks. I check.

I flopped a gutshot to go with my pair. This is a spot where I want to keep the pot small, and a free card could help. I do not want to get check-raised here.



Turn (\$100): Brian checks. I check.

Ditto.



River (\$100): Brian checks. I check.

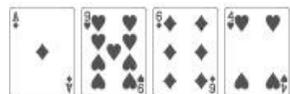
I had enough to showdown. However, Brian had A-Q-7-4, and won the hand with his two pair, queens and fours.

Hand #19: Limp 3-Bet Pump-and-Shove

The game: \$1-\$2 with a \$5 bring-in and a \$10 straddle

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I (\$550) limp in. The button (\$500) calls. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$700) calls. The straddler (\$1,000) -- a loose player -- raises to \$35.

I don't have a great hand, but it is double-suited, and I have a shot of knocking out both the player behind me and the big blind. That would get me heads up with the positional advantage against the straddler in a pump-and-shove scenario.

Action: I re-raise to \$100, and the other two players fold. The straddler calls.

The SPR is about 2.



Flop (\$221): My opponent checks.

I should bet my two pair here and play it for the best hand.

Action: I bet \$220, and my opponent calls.



Turn (\$661): My opponent checks. I bet \$230 all-in and my opponent calls.



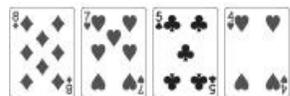
River (\$1,121): My opponent doesn't show, and my two pair wins.

Hand #20: Deep Stack Play

The game: \$5-\$10

Your position: Button

Your hand:



This hand took place in the \$5-\$10 game at Harrah's Maryland Heights (St. Louis). You get to play this one against me. I am UTG.

Pre-flop: I (\$1,700) open with a raise UTG to \$25. Everybody folds to you on the button. You (\$2,200) re-raise to \$100. Both blinds fold. I call.

The SPR is 8, a reasonably deep-stacked situation.



Flop (\$215): I check.

You have a gutshot, plus you hit the pivot card. There are a lot of cards that could come on the turn that can help you. You don't want to get check-raised here, and as such should take the free card.

Action: You check.



Turn (\$215):

Bingo. You now have a 17-card wrap with a flush draw.

Action: I bet \$200.

I don't have to have much here to bet after you checked behind on the flop.

Action: You raise to \$800. I call.



River (\$1,815): I bet \$800 all-in. You fold.

Well, there's not much you can do with 8-high when I am already all-in. My actual hand was $Q\clubsuit J\clubsuit 9\clubsuit 8\heartsuit$.

Hand #21: Deep-Stack Play

The game: \$5-\$10

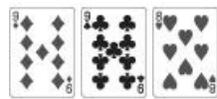
Your position: Middle Position

Your hand:



This hand took place at the Rio during the WSOP. You get to play this one as Luke. I am UTG.

Pre-flop: I (\$2,400) open with a raise UTG to \$25. It gets folded to you in middle position. You (\$3,400) re-raise to \$75. It gets folded back to me. I call.



Flop (\$165): I check. You check.

You could have c-bet here, though you do have a double-gutter, and the nines are in my likely range.



Turn (\$165): I bet \$25. You raise to \$150. I call.

Nice bluff-raise attempt...not!



River (\$465): I check.

You have the nut straight. You are on your own.

Action: You bet \$175. I call. You win.

I gotta tell you, I cannot beat this kid. Luke said he thought I had A-K-x-x. My actual hand was $A\clubsuit A\spadesuit J\clubsuit 8\heartsuit$. And to be honest, I bet \$25 on the turn because I knew he was going to raise. I also thought he was going to bet the river no matter what -- which we'll never know for sure -- but by some miracle, he hit the straight.

Hand #22: Pump-and-Shove

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$80.70) limps in. I raise to \$2.75. Both blinds fold. The UTG player calls.

I was really just looking to build the pot with my half-pot raise, but I wound up isolating the limper.



Flop (\$7): My opponent checks. I check.

I have a pair and a double-nut gutter. Standard Pump-and-Shove procedure is to pound if you catch any piece of the flop.

Action: I bet \$72. My opponent calls.



Turn (\$216): My opponent bets \$189.40 all-in.

Now I have two pair and a nut gutshot. That said, my opponent doesn't have to have a straight here to bet, particularly if he puts me on A-A-x-x. I have to call.

Action: I call. My opponent has Q♦ T♦ 7♥ 3♦ for a pair, a gutshot, and a flush draw.



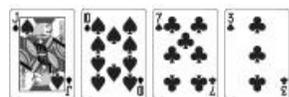
River (\$594.80): My opponent makes a bigger two pair and wins.

Hand #23: Limp Re-Raise

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



The table consisted of a few fairly passive players behind me, but the one player in the small blind who was fairly loose-aggressive pre-flop (but not in a good way). The small blind is the player from the previous hand.

Pre-flop: I (\$195.55) limp in. The hijack folds. The cutoff (\$119.45) calls, but the button folds. The small blind (\$658.35) -- the player from the previous hand -- raises to \$10. The big blind folds.

It was a pretty loose limp UTG. But I am double-suited and I have some wrap potential, and I have a chance to isolate the small blind with a re-raise.

Action: I re-raise to \$18. The button folds. The small blind calls.

I opted for the min re-raise. In retrospect, I probably should have raised more, as we now have an effective SPR near 5.



Flop (\$40): My opponent checks.

I have top-and-bottom pair with a gutshot and a flush draw. While it is not ideal, I should be aggressive, especially since the penalty for being wrong and running into a straight is not steep.

Action: I bet \$40. My opponent calls.



Turn (\$120): My opponent checks.

I have to bet to protect my multi-way hand against any draws. If he happens to have the straight, I still have outs one way or another.

Action: I bet \$120. My opponent folds.

One thing to note is that the drawback to playing a weak wrap hand like J-T-7-3 is that you'll wind hitting top-and-bottom pair with a gutshot draw to a non-nut straight on a flop like this, whereas you don't have that problem with a real premium-structure hand like J-T-9-8. That said, you can do without playing the J-T-7-3 hand.

Hand #24: Clearout

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in, five-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$440) limp in. The cutoff folds. The button (\$600) limps in. The small blind (\$800) – who is not a good player – raises to \$20. The big blind folds. I re-raise to \$70. The button folds. The small blind calls.

I felt like it.



Flop (\$147): My opponent checks. I bet \$125, and my opponent calls.

I have the nut straight with a straight re-draw, and backdoor hearts as well. I am committed here in this low-SPR (2.5) situation. Note the bet of roughly 5/6th the size of the pot, which is about a standard c-bet for this type of flop.

It is a little surprising, however, that my opponent just smooth called rather than raised and set me all-in.



Turn (\$390): My opponent sets me all-in for \$245. I call. My opponent has K-J-J-7 for second-nut straight and no flush draw.

He definitely should have raised on the flop, as:

1. My range on the flop is pretty wide.
2. He has the J-J blockers and the second-nut straight.
3. It is a low-SPR situation.

In other words, if he is going to play, then he should shove. And he should definitely play in this spot with his hand against my range and my stack.

However, he definitely should not have raised from the small blind pre-flop with that garbage.

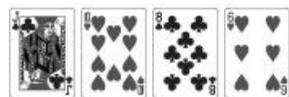
River (\$880): Blank. I win.

Hand #25: Pump-and-Shove Float

The game: \$1-\$2 online, eight-handed

My position: Cutoff, posted \$2 blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: It gets folded to the player in front of me (\$143.50), who raises to \$9. I (\$200) re-raise to \$16. The button and both blinds fold. The original raiser just calls.

A Pump-and-Shove min re-raise. Effective SPR ~ 4.



Flop (\$35): My opponent bets \$35.

My feeling is that my opponent is just taking a stab at the pot hoping that I don't have an ace. I did hit a pivot card, and I have dual backdoor flush draws as well.

Action: I call (float).



Turn (\$105): My opponent checks. I bet \$105, and my opponent folds.

This hand was a little risqué.

Hand #26: Limp Re-Raise

The game: \$2-\$5, seven-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$2,500) limp in. Two players limp behind me. The small blind (\$1,200) limps. The big blind (\$3,000) raises to \$30.

The big blind is a very loose raiser. Given this opportunity, I'll 3-bet here for kicks and try to isolate him. I do have a double-suited hand with three good cards and one dangler.

Action: I re-raise to \$75. Both players behind me fold. The small blind and big blind both call.

Not bad. I have position in a three-way pot.



Flop (\$235): Both blinds check. I check.

This is not the kind of flop I was looking for. My preference is to take the free card rather than c-bet, as the tens seem likely to have hit somebody, and I do have a diamond draw as well.



Turn (\$235): Both blinds check.

I should probably bet my pair, open-ended straight draw and flush draw. If I get raised, I can fold, or if I get called, I will show down the river if possible.

Action: I bet \$150, and only the small blind calls.



River (\$535): My opponent checks. I check and win with the flush.

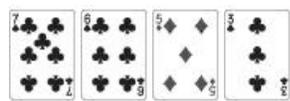
Given the way the hand played out and my opponent's reaction to the flush (he was mad), I'm guessing he probably had A-A-x-x.

Hand #27: Deep-Stack Turned Pump-and-Shove

The game: \$0.50-\$1 (\$200-max) on electronic table at Excalibur, six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



This hand took place in early November 2008 on the electronic poker tables in the fully automated poker room at Excalibur on the Las Vegas Strip. This was the very first hand of the very first session of small-stakes PLO that I hosted on these electronic tables – the same session as the hand in the Checking-and-Calling chapter of Part III. Clonie Gowen is in the hijack, and I am right behind her in the cutoff.

About 15 seconds earlier, the first thing Clonie did when she sat down was complain about the max buy-in I had put in place. I decided that I was going to 3-bet her for kicks at the first opportunity.

Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. Clonie (\$200) raises to \$3.50. I (\$200) re-raise to \$12. The button folds. The small blind (\$100) calls. The big blind folds. Clonie re-raises to \$49. I call. The small blind calls.

I had intended to play heads up with deep stacks, but Clonie 4-bet and now we have an ultra-low-SPR situation where there is basically only one bet left. I am pot committed if I catch any piece of the flop.



Flop (\$148): The small blind checks. Clonie bets \$148.

I have a pair, backdoor clubs, and some backdoor straight draws. That's good enough.

Action: I raise all-in for \$3 more to \$151. The small blind folds. Clonie goes into the tank and acts as if she is about to fold to the \$3 raise. She finally calls, and shows A♥ A♠ 4♥ 4♠ for an overpair and the nut heart draw.



Turn (\$450):

Awesome. Now I have a gutshot as well.



River (\$450):

I win.

“So, Pot-Limit Boy...” she says, indignant. “You called with one pair and no flush draw?”

“I was pot-committed,” I explained.

I was getting about 2:1 on my money, which means that I only need about 33% equity to justify the call. In the actual hand, I was a 72.9%/27.1% dog. But if instead she has A♥ A♠ 4♦ 4♠ for no flush draw, I am only a 57.4%/42.6% dog. I think the reality is that Clonie will commit with any A-A-x-x hand for basically one bet. And even assuming that she will only 4-bet pre-flop with double-suited aces, she will only have the nut flush draw half the time. And in that case, I have a blended 34.85% equity $[(27.1\% + 42.6\%)/2]$.

Basically, I am roughly spot on.

Despite the initial reaction, Clonie was actually a pretty good sport about it.

Hand #28: Clearout (with Trash)

The game: \$0.50-\$1-\$2 at Excalibur

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I (\$600) limp in.

This is not in the book.

Action: The cutoff folds. The button calls. Both blinds call. The straddler raises to \$12. I re-raise to \$32.

This is not in the book.

Action: The button and big blind both fold. The straddler calls.



Flop (\$70): My opponent checks. I bet \$50 and he folds.

Standard.

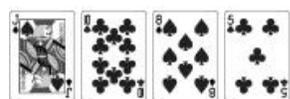
I don't really recommend running this play with this hand, but it does show how the play works, often regardless of the actual holding.

Hand #29: Clearout

The game: \$0.50-\$1 at Excalibur

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I limp in. The cutoff folds. The button limps. The small blind raises to \$5. The big blind folds. I re-raise to \$17. The button folds. The small blind calls.

A similar play, but with a far more suitable hand.



Flop (\$36): My opponent checks. I bet \$25. My opponent calls.

I probably should have bet the pot here, though it might not have made a difference in the actual hand.



Turn (\$86): My opponent bets \$50. I fold.

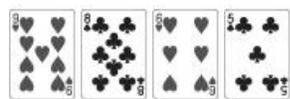
Can't win them all.

Hand #30: Deep-Stack Play

The game: \$0.50-\$1-\$2 at Excalibur

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: An early player (\$150) limps. It gets folded to TT (\$365) in the hijack, who opens with a raise to \$7.50.

This is a good spot for a 3-bet, and I have a good hand to do it with.

Action: I (\$550) re-raise to \$26. The button, both blinds and the straddler all fold. TT re-raises to \$81.50.

I can't fold now.

Action: I call.



Flop (\$163): TT bets \$100.

I have a heart draw, and I also hit the pivot card, facing a c-bet and what is most likely aces. Folding is an easy option. I could also raise all-in if I think TT might fold.

The alternative is to float and see what happens on the turn. If, for example, TT only has dry AA, he may be inclined to give up the pot. Even if he doesn't, there are a lot of cards that could bring tremendous help on the turn.

Action: I call.



Turn (\$363): TT checks.

Bingo!?! The 9♠ puts a possible straight out, and TT may be more than willing to fold -- particularly if he has AA. If I give TT credit for A-A-x-x, then he is unlikely to have a straight (he would have to have specifically A-A-J-T); and even if he has a straight, he would be unlikely to check out of fear of giving me a free card to draw at a flush, a bigger straight, or maybe even a possible full-house draw.

And even if he doesn't fold, this is a great card for me, as I now have a pair with a wrap and a flush draw.

Action: I set TT all-in for his last \$183.50. TT insta-calls. TT shows A♥ A♦ J♥ T♦ for the nut straight with the nut flush draw, having flopped a 12-card nut wrap with the nut flush draw and an overpair. I am drawing dead.

Whoops. This is probably the main drawback of 3-betting, is that it puts you in a lot more difficult situations where it is easy to make mistakes while trying to play poker. This time, I ran into a bigger flush draw, and TT happened to have the perfect hand as well.

Hand #31: The Idiot Savant Hand

The game: \$0.50-\$1 on PokerPro at Excalibur

My position: Button

My hand:



This is another hand against TT that took place a little while later.

Pre-flop: Everybody folds to TT (\$650) in the cutoff, who raises to \$3.50.

I don't really have the kind of hand I want to 3-bet with. But I thought I'd try it.

Action: I (\$250) re-raise to \$12. Both blinds fold. TT calls.



Flop (\$25.50): TT checks. I bet \$12. TT calls.

My bet was actually about half the pot (the electronic table takes the rake out of the pot during the hand, so there was actually \$23.50 in the pot after the rake), so it was a fairly standard c-bet representing A-A-x-x. I give TT credit for a king here.



Turn (\$49.50): TT bets \$40.

All I have here is basically jack-high, but this big bet looks like a bluff; it looks like TT has a king, got counterfeited, and is trying to buy the pot.

Action: I raise to \$125. TT calls.



River (\$249.50): TT checks.

There are essentially two possibilities here: TT has either a deuce or AA; or he has a king, misread his hand, and thinks he has a full house.

Now I have another \$100 left, and I definitely can't win by checking. I still believe that TT has a king. My problem is that I am not sure that he hasn't misread his hand, and I am afraid that he is going to call me whether he has a full house or better or not. I decide to give this one up.

Action: I check. TT wins with A-K-x-x for ace-high.

TT would say that he thought I was bluff-raising -- that I would have just called with a pair in my hand or AA. I guess he's right -- and I do have to give him credit for a good read here -- but I still thought it was a pretty good bluff, as probably 99% of players (everybody else but TT) would have folded to the raise.

"I guess I'm sort of an idiot savant with cards," he says.

Great. I'm still not convinced TT didn't misread his hand, though.

Final Thoughts: 3-Betting vs. Small Ball

There are three basic motivations for 3-betting before the flop as described in this chapter:

1. **Because you feel like it.** It's fun.
2. **To knock out limpers and/or a button straddler in order to isolate the pre-flop raiser while having the positional advantage.** The strategic justification.
3. **To build the pot. Sometimes, you have a big hand and just want to play a bigger pot with the positional advantage.** Other times, you just want to Pump-and-Shove.

This brings up an interesting question regarding 3-Betting and Small Ball: Is one strategy superior to the other?

I think, all else being equal, my preference is to play Small Ball. The downside to the Pump-and-Shove is that it takes away post-flop play -- which is only good if you don't play well after the flop. It is a highly volatile, high-volume, and relatively low-edge strategy that requires a massive bankroll to play. Meanwhile, 3-betting for isolation in deep-stack play is also a relatively volatile playing strategy compared to Small Ball, and is fairly difficult to play. As a result, it is also much easier to make big mistakes after 3-betting pre-flop when the stacks are deep.

In contrast, Small Ball is fairly easy to play, and is a far less volatile playing strategy.

That said, there are situations where 3-betting may be the preferred play, especially in games with a Mississippi Straddle, where you have to knock out the straddle to get the button. And once you figure it out, you can play bigger pots in position, and you can get value out of some weaker hands (such as 9-7-5-4) by isolating players with hands you probably wouldn't want to play for a raise in a multi-way pot.

The bottom line is that while I default to Small Ball, I think 3-betting pre-flop is a nice complementary weapon to have in your arsenal, and one that will allow you to play bigger pots in position as you get more and more comfortable implementing the strategy.

Part VI: Short-Handed Play

Playing six-handed or less.

In Part IV, we discussed Small Ball -- a loose-passive pre-flop playing approach, and our core basic strategy for utilizing the positional advantage to exploit our opponents in short-handed pots after the flop in general, and in short-handed play in particular. And in Part V, we talked about 3-betting before the flop -- an alternative approach to Small Ball, and a situational LAG tactic in which we take a more proactive approach to isolating the pre-flop raiser pre-flop when we have the positional advantage.

That said, if you've read this far, then you are armed with both the skills and strategies needed to excel at short-handed pot-limit Omaha games in general, including the 6-max PLO games that are popular online. We are now ready to talk about short-handed play.

In this chapter, we will:

1. Talk about the differences between short-handed play and full-ring play.
2. Identify the five biggest mistakes the average player makes in short-handed play, and make the necessary adjustments to correct for those mistakes.
3. Walk through 128 hands I've played in short-handed PLO games both online and live, employing the skills and strategies presented in this book.

Note: If you just picked up this book and skipped ahead to this page, you should first go back to Part IV: Small Ball, where our discussion on short-

handed playing strategy begins. But before you do go back to the beginning of the book and read Part I on floating, the key concept on which our Small Ball strategy is based. And then you need to read Part II – especially the section on the stack-to-pot ratio (SPR), a concept which is crucial to the understanding and the application of both Small Ball and the two variations of our 3-betting pre-flop play. And then after that, you need to read Part III on advanced skills – the skills needed to become a complete player and make full use of the strategies presented in this book.

In other words, if you are interested in playing short-handed PLO proficiently, then start from the beginning!

Short-Handed Play vs. Full-Ring Play, and PLO vs. NLHE

As we've noted on a few occasions thus far in this book, the main difference between short-handed and full-ring PLO games is simply that more pots are contested short-handed after the flop in short-handed play than in full-ring play.

In full-ring play – 9- and 10-handed games – the vast majority of pots tend to be contested multi-way after the flop, or at least in live play (the full-ring games tend to play a bit tighter online). As a result, these highly favorable situations that we've talked about in the two preceding chapters where you are in late position and everybody has folded to you – or where a player opens with a raise and everybody else folds to you – occur fairly infrequently in full-ring games, and may occur once or twice a session in live play (though a bit more frequently online).

In contrast, in short-handed play – including the 6-max games that are popular online – these situations where you can expect to play a short-handed pot after the flop with the positional advantage are the norm rather than the exception. Moreover, in PLO, these situations will play roughly the same *after* the flop regardless of whether you are playing four-handed or ten-handed. In other words, if the UTG player opens with raise, everybody folds to me on the button, I call with Q-T-9-5 single-suited, and both blinds fold, this hand will play out essentially the same virtually no matter how many people were dealt a hand pre-flop. And as a result, starting hand values are not affected so much by the number of players that were dealt a hand before the flop, but rather by how many players actually see the flop, as well as your table position relative to the opposition.

Let's talk a little bit about why this is so.

Let's say you are playing \$2-\$5 NLHE with \$500 stacks. You are on the button holding J6-offsuit – complete trash. The UTG player – a reasonably tight player – opens with a raise to \$15, and everybody else folds to you. What do you do?

The answer depends greatly on the number of players in the game. This is because in hold'em, there is a wide disparity in pre-flop hand values between the best hands – namely, AA and KK, and to a lesser extent AKs and QQ – and everything else. And the more players who are dealt a hand pre-flop, the more likely it is that somebody at the table is going to show up with one of these super-strong hands; conversely, the fewer players dealt a hand, the less likely it is that anybody has anything that strong.

And so clearly, you can be far more liberal playing against the UTG pre-flop raiser in NLHE if you are playing four-handed than when you are in a ten-handed game, simply because the UTG pre-flop raiser in a full-ring game is far more likely to actually have something. As such, his initial raise represents a credible threat.

Assuming J-6 offsuit is too weak a hand to call with, your choice is between re-raising and folding. And whereas you should probably fold this hand in this situation in 10-handed game – where your opponent likely has something, and it would be a disaster for you to 3-bet and then have to fold to a re-raise when you are obviously way behind (about an 86.5%/13.5% dog against AA, and a 69%/31% dog against AKs, for example) – you might be inclined to re-raise against this same opponent playing four-handed, where every pre-flop raise is suspect.

But PLO is fundamentally different, and for several reasons:

1. Starting hand values in all-in pre-flop confrontations run much closer in PLO than in NLHE.
2. The pot-limit betting structure takes away the all-in move.
3. Hand values are much more flop dependent in PLO than in NLHE.
4. Every hand is a dog to hit the flop hard.
5. The positional advantage is much stronger after the flop in PLO than it is in NLHE.

Think about what the first two points mean. In stark contrast to hold'em, there are few reasonable starting hand matchups where one hand is as much as a 2:1 favorite over another in an all-in pre-flop confrontation; moreover, in PLO, it is possible for an A-A-x-x hand to be a (small) dog in an all-in pre-flop confrontation to a hand that doesn't contain an ace! When combined with the restrictions of the pot-limit betting structure, the result is that you can 3-bet quite liberally before the flop in PLO without fear of having to fold to an all-in re-raise, since you are never getting worse than 2:1 to call for one more bet.

The last three points are the fundamental ideas on which our Small Ball strategy is based. The first is that hand values are much more flop dependent in PLO ("every hand is a drawing hand"); the second is that virtually every hand is a dog to hit the flop hard; and the final point is that the positional advantage is much stronger in PLO than it is in NLHE not only due to the restrictions of the pot-limit betting structure (where it is more difficult for your opponent to end the hand prematurely with an all-in bet or raise, and you may get to have the positional advantage for an additional betting round or two as a result), but also where every card that doesn't help your opponent is potentially going to look scary to him in a game in which it is easy to outdraw one pair.

A function of the last point is that if you have the skills to fully utilize the positional advantage to control the hand via the float, then the burden is on your opponent to either hit the flop hard or otherwise risk getting outplayed. And so if your opponent needs to hit the flop hard, but every hand is a

dog to hit the flop hard, this means that when you are heads up after the flop with the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser, your opponent is going to be a dog to make it to showdown virtually *no matter what he is holding*.

And so in PLO, we don't really care whether an UTG pre-flop raiser is more likely to have A-A-K-K double-suited in a ten-handed game than in a four-handed game, because what your opponent is holding is mostly irrelevant under Small Ball. What we are more concerned with is whether or not we have a chance to see the flop heads up with the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser. And if one player opens with a raise and it is folded to you on the button, you should be able to call profitably with 30% to 40% of hands and maybe a lot more, depending on how weak a player the pre-flop raiser is.

That said, the only real difference between short-handed (including 6-max) and full-ring play is that this situation comes up more often in short-handed play.

The Five Biggest Mistakes Average Players Make

When playing short-handed, the five biggest mistakes that average players make are:

1. Defending the blinds too liberally
2. Making big raises pre-flop from out of position
3. Being too timid
4. Overcompensating by being too aggressive with small-pot hands (such as undertrips, underfull, middle and bottom set, two pair, etc.), and
5. Exercising poor game and seat selection

Blind Defense

The first big mistake that average players make is defending their blinds too loosely. In contrast to short-handed limit poker -- which basically amounts to a fight over the blind money -- the blinds are relatively insignificant in PLO compared to what goes in the pot after the flop, even in short-handed play. However, because the blinds come around faster in short-handed play than full-ring play, the average player tends to compensate by liberally defending his blinds against pre-flop raises.

The problem with defending your blinds is that you are just setting yourself up to play what will largely be defensive, small-pot poker from out of position. This is a situation with little upside, one that invites post-flop mistakes, and one that you can do without. In fact, particularly if you are just starting out in short-handed PLO, you might even be better off not defending your blinds altogether!

Generally speaking, you should avoid calling raises from the small blind unless you have a real premium hand, and maybe a speculative drawing hand at worst. Ditto for the big blind, though you can probably call min-raises when you are already half-way in with some of the marginal hands like big pairs, three-card straight hands, and suited aces with connectors. The obvious exception from the big blind is when everybody has folded to the small blind, who opens with a raise; in this spot, you can be quite liberal in defending the big blind as you are guaranteed to be heads up with the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser.

Now don't get me wrong: You *do* need to make up for the fact that the blinds come around faster when playing short-handed. That said, the key to Small Ball is late position volume -- playing a lot of hands on the button and in the cutoff seat -- and *not* in defending the blinds.

Raising/Re-Raising Pre-Flop From Out of Position

Another common error that average players make is to make big raises from out of position.

When playing out of position, your first priority is to keep the pot multi-way. That said, you should avoid taking actions that will likely result in leaving you heads up after the flop *and* out of position. This means that you should tend to avoid making pot-sized raises UTG if the most likely result is that the you pick up a caller behind you but both blinds fold; instead, you should tend to open-limp from UTG, or otherwise keep your pre-flop raises small to make it more inviting for the blinds to come in.

Likewise, if you are in the small blind, you should tend to avoid making pot-sized raises from the small blind if doing so will knock out the big blind and leave you heads up with a limper. You should also tend to avoid 3-betting from the small blind to knock out the big blind for the same reason; this play might be standard in limit hold'em, and it might work in NLHE, but it is asking for trouble in PLO.

And yet, it is common for the small blind or big blind to come out with a raise because they think they are "attacking" the limper, when the game doesn't actually work that way!

A lot of players do these things because they mistakenly believe that the pre-flop initiative is extremely valuable, when the reality is that the positional advantage tends to trump the pre-flop initiative in PLO. And for the most part, the only thing that raising from out of position accomplishes is to build a bigger pot while making the game more difficult to play.

The main exception to re-raising from out of position is when you can get most if not all (or at least one-third of your stack, depending on how far you want to go) of your stack in the pot before the flop and make it a one-bet hand after the flop. In this case, if you have a hand like AA, you can go ahead and re-raise in this spot.

Being Too Timid

One thing that is certainly true about short-handed play is that you need to be aggressive if you want to win. This means capitalizing on opportunities to take down the pots that your opponents give up on. If you see a play, make it – failure to do so is a leak.

Aggressive players look for excuses to bet. You should, too.

Overcompensating

On the flip side, a lot of players overcompensate for short-handed play by becoming more aggressive and raising on marginal holdings (such as undertrips, middle and bottom set, the bare nut straight, the underfull, and non-nut flushes) when the hand strength dictates a small pot.

This is another problem that is probably derived from the adjustments that players make when moving from full-ring to short-handed limit hold'em, where you become more aggressive on thinner and thinner holdings. The difference is that in limit poker, the bets are relatively small compared to the size of the pot, whereas in PLO, you are often making pot-sized bets.

In short-handed play, the big-pot hands are still the big-pot hands, and the small-pot hands are still the small-pot hands. What's different is that small-pot situations are the default in short-handed play, largely because you will be contesting pots with far more marginal holdings both before and after the flop.

Game Selection and Seat Selection

Probably the #1 mistake that PLO players make when playing short-handed is exercising poor game and seat selection. While this is also true in full-ring play, the effects of poor game and seat selection are magnified in short-handed play.

Let's start with game selection. There is a tendency in some players – particularly those with egos (and what poker player doesn't have one?) – to default to the biggest and toughest games they can find. That said, in full-ring play, you can generally get away playing in a game with three or four strong players because most pots are contested multi-way after the flop, and as such the emphasis is on hand valuation skills, which are relatively easy to master. Moreover, you will have ample opportunity to play against the weaker players. But in a five-handed game where most pots are contested short-handed after the flop, you have to play more poker, and must rely less on hand valuation skills. And in this game, you should think twice about sitting with three or four strong players because you are going to be involved with them every hand.

If you are going to play in a five-handed game with three world class opponents, the fourth guy had better be *awful*.

Beyond composition, another issue in regard to game selection is the nature of the game. A passive table where nobody ever raises pre-flop, for example, is generally more favorable than an aggressive one where there is a raise pre-flop on every hand. The obvious benefit of a passive table is that you will get a free pass in the blinds more often. In contrast, in an aggressive game, there is a lot more pressure on your blinds, which might encourage you to make the mistake of defending them.

That said, if you are not comfortable giving up your blinds or otherwise playing in an aggressive game, then just don't sit in one!

The last issue is seat selection. Ideally, you'd like to have tight, passive players on your left, which will give you the freedom to play more liberally from the cutoff seat, and perhaps the hijack and even UTG depending on how passive the players are to your left. But what if you have a maniac directly on your left, who raises pre-flop at every opportunity?

People want to know how to play with the maniac on your left, but the best answer is simply that you don't. The maniac on your left may very well be the biggest loser at the table (it's possible that he is a winner, too), but he is going to be disruptive to your game under any circumstance. The first thing you need to do is tighten up; but ultimately, you need to either find another seat (preferably on the maniac's left) or find another game.

Short-Handed Play: Walkthroughs

What follows are 128 hands that I've played in short-handed games both live and online, utilizing the skills and employing the strategies presented in this book. The stakes range from as low as \$0.10-\$0.25 online to as high as \$5-\$10-\$20 live.

Hand #1: Raise Pre-flop, Free Card, Combo Float, Max Value Bet

The game: \$0.50-\$1.00 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$90) limps in, the cutoff folds, and I (\$100) raise to \$4.50. Only the limper calls.

I have three Broadway cards and a semi-connected card that helps make a nut straight (T-7 makes a nut straight, so the seven is not a complete dangler), and I have good high card strength. I think limping in or raising are equally strong choices, depending on the opponents. If the blinds are tight players and the limper is a weak player, then raising the max to try to isolate him may be the preferred play choice.

If the blinds are loose and will call any raise, limping in may be the better the option. Also, if the seven were instead a six (a complete dangler), I would also lean towards limping in rather than raising. In this spot, I chose to raise.



Flop (\$10.50): UTG checks. I check.

I have a gutshot to the nuts, and a lot of cards could come on the turn to vastly improve my hand. I would hate to get check-raised here and have to fold; I'll take the free card.



Turn (\$10.50): UTG bets \$10.50. I call.

This is a good card for me. I now have a double-nut gutshot and top pair, which, if not good, may improve to a winning two pair or trips. I can't fold here for one bet.



River (\$31.50): UTG checks.

I now have the nut straight. If my opponent has anything to call me with at all, he will likely call a big bet.

Action: I bet \$31.50, and my opponent calls.

In this hand, my opponent actually flopped a set of nines and did in fact call the river bet.

Hand #2: Top-and-Bottom Pair Heads Up

The game: \$2-\$4 online, heads up

My position: Small Blind/Button

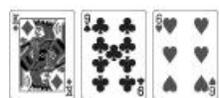
My hand:



This is the first hand of a heads-up match against an unknown opponent.

Pre-flop: I (\$400) raise to \$12 from the small blind/button. The big blind (\$400) calls.

Standard opener.



Flop (\$24): BB bets \$24.

I have top-and-bottom pair and a gutshot. It's possible I am beat here, but I can't fold for one bet -- plus I have outs even if behind. Raising is a poor choice, because I only rate to get action from hands I don't want to get action from, and we are in a high-SPR situation (SPR 16.7). Ideally, I'd like to play a small pot here. The Small Ball play is to call and bet the turn most of the time if my opponent checks.

Action: I call.



Turn (\$72): BB bets \$36.

The weak stab from my opponent changes things a bit. It may indicate a weak hand, or it may be a reaction to the straightening card. A raise here may encourage a better hand (like K-9-x-x or 9-9-x-x) to fold, or make a drawing hand (like Q-J-T-x) pay up.

Action: I raise to \$180. BB calls.

Interesting.



River (\$432): BB bets \$184 all-in.

I am a little concerned that my opponent has the one hand that beats me (K-9-x-x), but at this point I think I have to go with it. My opponent may have 9-9-x-x -- which I can beat -- or may simply give me credit for a straight and be trying to bluff me out with something like Q-J-T-x.

Action: I call. My opponent shows $K\clubsuit T\spadesuit 8\clubsuit 8\heartsuit$ for trip kings.

The latter scenario turned out to be closest to the truth: My opponent flopped a pair and gutshot and turned a king-high flush draw. My opponent would later say that she was trying to bluff me off a straight on the river.

Hand #3: Stopping Call, Bluff Raise

The game: \$2-\$4 online, heads up

My position: Small Blind/Button

My hand:



Pre-Flop: I (\$396.40) call. My opponent (\$478.20) checks in the big blind.

My preference is to open limp with marginal pair hands -- even heads up -- as I am most likely going to want to play a small pot after the flop with this hand.



Flop (\$8): My opponent bets \$4. I call.

I may have the best hand here, plus I have a club draw. I can't fold for one bet heads up.



Turn (\$16): My opponent bets \$8. I call.

At this point, I'm still not convinced my opponent has a king.



River (\$32): My opponent bets \$16.

Now I am reasonably positive that my opponent does not in fact have a king, as the double-paired board makes it unlikely that she has a full house, and I think she is more likely to have checked bare trips at the river than bet it (though I could be wrong, and she would be right in value-betting A-K here). However, I am concerned that the eight hit her. That said, I could put in a raise here to try to represent a full house and bluff her off an eight or even a king, even if she happens to have one.

Action: I raise to \$64. My opponent calls, showing $Q\heartsuit 9\heartsuit 8\clubsuit 6\spadesuit$ for trip eights.

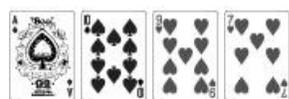
Oh well. She didn't believe me this time, but I think I played the hand about as well as it could have been played. Next hand.

Hand #4: Checking-and-(Calling)

The game: \$2-\$4 online, heads up

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: SB/Button (\$473) limps. I (\$413.40) raise to \$8. Opponent calls.

I don't like making big raises out of position, but I'd like to sweeten the pot a little with this hand.



Flop (\$16):

My opponent is not going to call with a hand worse than mine, but she might be willing to take a stab at it if I check. One thing for certain is that I can't win a big pot here with this hand. Checking is the right play.

Action: I check. My opponent checks.



Turn (\$16): I check. My opponent checks.

Same situation as on the flop. I could just as easily have put in a small bet here to try to end the pot, but I don't mind checking the hand down either.



River (\$16):

Nothing's changed, and there's little point in betting.

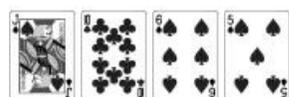
Action: I check. My opponent checks. My opponent shows T♥ 8♥ 7♦ 6♠. I win.

Hand #5: Top Two Pair*

The game: \$2-\$4 online, heads up

My position: Small Blind/Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$272.40) call. My opponent (\$690.60) raises to \$12. I call.

Without any wrap potential, this is not a hand I'd like to raise with pre-flop. But at the same time, I'm not folding it heads up with the positional advantage.



Flop (\$24): BB bets \$24.

I have top two pair heads up in a mid-high-SPR situation (SPR 10.8). My opponent's betting range is pretty wide here -- it might include one pair or even just air -- which might make a raise more acceptable. That said, if I were to play this hand today, I would be more inclined to smooth call with top two pair -- an extremely vulnerable hand even if best -- and keep the pot small.

Hence the asterisks.

Action: I raise* to \$96. BB calls.



Turn (\$216): BB checks.

At this point, I have to bet my two pair behind my opponent's check. Had my opponent instead bet out, I would have folded my two pair.

Action: I bet \$164.40 all-in. BB calls.



River (\$544.80): My opponent shows $K\heartsuit K\clubsuit T\spadesuit 4\heartsuit$, and my two pair is good.

Hand #6: Top Two Pair

The game: \$2-\$4 online, heads up

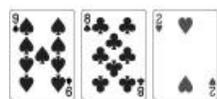
My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The SB/Button (\$376.60) raises to \$8. I (\$561.40) call.

This is not a good hand. I probably could just as easily have folded; I was tempted by the min-raise, however.



Flop (\$16): I check. My opponent checks.

I have top pair, top kicker with re-draws. I probably could have bet here as well, but having the flop get checked through isn't so bad, either.



Turn (\$16): I bet \$16. My opponent raise to \$40. I call.

I naturally bet my top two pair, and at this point I have to call the raise because I have no reason to think my two pair aren't good. Plus I have the dry $A\spadesuit$, which might come in handy.



River (\$96):

My hand doesn't look as good, but my opponent may just have something like J-T-x-x with two spades. My hand may still be good, but at the same time I don't want to have to call a big bet. This is a good spot for a blocking bet.

Action: I bet \$24. My opponent calls. My opponent shows $K\heartsuit 8\spadesuit 4\heartsuit 3\spadesuit$ for smaller two pair.

I think this hand is more on my opponent than myself. Had I been in my opponent's shoes, I would have folded or limped pre-flop, bet the flop after getting checked to, and smooth-called the bet on the turn after having checked the flop.

Hand #7: Two Pair

The game: \$2-\$5, six-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Two players limp in. The small blind limps. I check.



Flop (\$20): Everybody checks.



Turn (\$20): The small blind bets \$20. I call. The other two players fold.

My two pair might be good, and if not, I have a flush draw plus a draw to either a bigger two pair or a full house. I don't know exactly what I am up against, but I think the percentage play is to call.



River (\$60): The small blind checks.

I think my two pair may be best here. There aren't too many instances where you should value-bet two pair, but I think it's worth a shot here if you think you have the best hand. From my opponent's perspective, there are a lot of draws I could have missed here, which makes it more likely that I will get a call from a worse hand.

Action: I bet \$40, and my opponent calls.

The SB actually had K-6 for a bigger two pair on the turn, but I improved to beat him.

Hand #8: 3-Betting Pre-flop

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle, four-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind (\$1,500) raises in the dark to \$20. The big blind folds. I (\$1,200) re-raise to \$40. The button folds, and the small blind calls.

K-9-8-5 isn't the kind of hand I'd ordinarily play in a full-ring game, but I have a chance here to get heads up with position. I put in a small re-raise to knock out the button and put his dead money into the pot, while giving me the positional advantage heads up against the small blind.



Flop (\$95): The small blind checks. I bet \$80 and my opponent folds.

Standard.

Hand #9: Wrap/Straight on Paired Board

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$118.55) raises to \$3.50. The cutoff folds. The button (\$24.50) calls. The small blind (\$94.50) calls. I (\$89.20) call.



Flop (\$14): Everybody checks.

I have a weak 13-card wrap and the board is paired. This isn't necessarily a bad spot for a steal attempt, but I opted to check here with two players behind me. Note that the small blind's check isn't necessarily indicative of weakness, as a raised pot is a good check-raising situation. In other words, I can't count him out yet just because he checked, because it is possible that he was just checking to the raiser.



Turn (\$14): The small blind checks.

With the flop having gotten checked around, it looks like the coast is clear for a steal.

Action: I bet \$8, and only the button (\$21) calls.

I put in a bet of a little over half the pot to try to pick up the pot. I probably should have bet more.



River (\$30):

Now I have a straight. I'm not sure what my opponent called me with, though I kind of figure something like A-K-x-x. In that case, I'd like to put in a value bet. I don't know if he'll call all \$13, but maybe he'll call \$10?

Action: I bet \$10, and the button calls with A♥ 8♣ 7♣ 5♦ for two pair, sevens and fives.

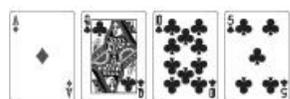
That's not even a good call for a hold'em player.

Hand #10: Top Two Pair

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$97.15) limps. The next two players fold. The button (\$126.45) calls. I (\$198.70) call. The big blind (\$100) checks.



Flop (\$4): I bet \$4. All three opponents call.

I naturally bet my top two pair, and got plenty of action -- maybe a little more than I would have liked.



Turn (\$16):

This is clearly not the card I was looking for, but I have to follow through with another bet here and try to end the pot.

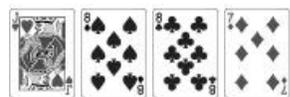
Action: I bet \$11, and everybody folds.

Hand #11: Big Blind vs. Small Blind

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to the small blind (\$37.55), who calls. I (\$103.65) check.

I've got a middle pair and no suits. I'll check and play a small pot.



Flop (\$2): My opponent bets \$2. I call.

Standard stopping call with top pair. I don't have a strong hand, but I can't fold for one bet, either. In these spots, you should often make your opponents bet twice.



Turn (\$6): My opponent checks. I bet \$3, and my opponent folds.

Standard small ball.

Hand #12: Overpair and Open-Ended Straight Draw

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$215.95) limp. Everybody folds to the small blind (\$76.50), who raises to \$4. The big blind folds. I call.

A loose call UTG with a mediocre QQ hand. In a tougher, more aggressive game, I might have folded. But after the raise, this is a standard call, especially heads up with position.



Flop (\$9): My opponent bets \$5.

OK. Two things: One is that my opponent made a weak-stab c-bet of about half the pot; the other is that this is a pretty decent flop for me heads up against a weak stab. I have an overpair and an open-ended straight draw (albeit only half to the nuts), plus a backdoor flush draw. I think the totality of the hand suggests that a raise is in order.

Action: I raise to \$24. My opponent calls.

Unexpected, but OK.



Turn (\$57): My opponent checks.

At this point, I need to keep the pressure on, fire the last shot, and set my opponent all-in. I may very well have the best hand here, and even if not I should still have a lot of outs against whatever my opponent has.

Action: I bet \$57 and my opponent folds.

Hand #13: Calling on the River

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$93.85) limp. The cutoff folds. The button (\$137.50) raises to \$4.50. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$194.95) calls.

I probably could have raised myself, and I definitely would have had I had a suited ace.



Flop (\$14): The big blind checks.

This isn't a bad spot to take a stab and try to pick this one up. I do have a gutshot (albeit to a sucker straight) and a draw to the dry ace as backup...

Action: I bet \$14. The button folds. The big blind calls.

Not exactly the desired result. But play on.



Turn (\$42): The big blind checks. I check.

My choice here is really between firing another shot and giving up the pot. That said, about the only way I have the best hand here is if my opponent was on a flush draw, because if he was on a straight draw, then he hit it. And if he wasn't on a straight or a flush draw, then he already had me beat. I decide to give this one up.



River (\$42):

Well, now I have a straight.

Action: BB bets \$21.

I'm not sure what to make of that bet. On the one hand, there are two bigger straights out there than mine, and it is quite possible that he has one. On the other hand, my guess is that he probably would have bet 7-6-x-x on the turn. However, it is also possible that he has a busted flush draw, and could be betting in response to my check on the turn.

It seems like a 50/50 proposition to me, but I am getting 3:1 to call, so I only need to have the best hand 25% of the time. This is one of the few times you will see me use pot odds as the main factor on a river decision.

Action: I call. My opponent shows 6♠ 6♥ 5♥ 5♣ for a set of fives, and I win with my straight.

OK. Not exactly what I thought he had, but I can beat that too.

Hand #14: Raising Pre-Flop, Taking Free Cards, and the Second Nut Flush

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The first two players fold. I (\$140.55) raise to \$3.50. The button folds. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$100.50) calls.



Flop (\$7.50): My opponent checks.

I don't want to get check-raised off the second-nut flush draw. This is a good spot to mix things up and take the free card rather than c-bet.

Action: I check.



Turn (\$7.50): My opponent bets \$7.50.

I should call here. For one thing, all my opponent has seen me do is check the flop; I may have both the best hand and best draw here. And even if my opponent has an ace, I'm probably not in bad shape. I think the percentage play is to call.

Action: I call.



River (\$22.50): My opponent checks.

The 3♠ gave me the second-nut flush, which I should value bet here.

Action: I bet \$11. BB raises to \$55.50.

I have to call here. I think it's possible that in my opponent's mind I probably would have bet the nut flush draw on the flop if I had it, though I'm not sure what else he thought I could have both called him with on the turn and bet the river with except maybe a smaller flush or a straight, both of which I might be willing to give up to a raise. I also think the likelihood is that he would have bet the river himself had he had the nut flush rather than risk having me check behind in the event that I actually have something like A-9-x-x for two pair.

My view is that he either has the nuts here or he has nothing. I'll take my chances.

Action: I call. My opponent shows K♥ Q♦ 9♣ 7♠ for a pair of nines, king kicker.

Hand #15 - Top Two Pair, Small Blind vs. Big Blind

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I call. The big blind checks.

I'd like to see a flop here with this hand, though if the big blind were an aggressive player who was likely to raise, I would consider just folding and giving up the small blind. That said, I don't like the idea of making a raise from the small blind to try to steal the big blind, because I don't want to build a pot out of position, especially with a borderline hand like this.



Flop (\$2): I bet \$2. The big blind calls.

This is a good flop for me, giving me top two pair and the second-nut flush draw.



Turn (\$6):

This is not a good card. That said, my opponent may have called with a wide range of hands that the 8♣ didn't hit, such as a flush draw or one pair. And even if my opponent did make a straight and raises me, I still have the flush draw and two pair to draw at a full house with.

should follow through with another bet.

Action: I bet \$6 and my opponent folds.

You can see one the drawbacks of playing out of position: If I check the turn, I may wind up giving a free card to the nut flush draw, but if I bet and my opponent has the straight and not the flush draw, I am giving up value one way or another.

Hand #16: Top Two Pair

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

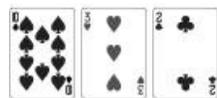
My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The first two players fold. The cutoff calls. I call. The small blind calls. The big blind checks.

Standard limp with a marginal hand from the button. I have three cards with a 13-card nut wrap possibility plus a flush draw.



Flop (\$4): Everybody checks to me. I bet \$4. Only the small blind calls.



Turn (\$12): The small blind checks. I bet \$12. My opponent folds.

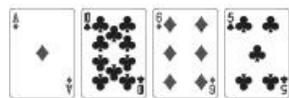
You might not like the card, but it might not have helped your opponent either. The play is to bet now with the intention of showing down the river if called.

Hand #17: Overfull vs. Dry Trips

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to the button (\$134.95), who calls. I (\$99) call. The big blind (\$100) checks.



Flop (\$3): I bet \$3. The big blind raises to \$12. The button folds. I re-raise to \$39. The big blind re-raises to \$99 all-in. I call.

This is the best-case scenario for me, getting it all-in on the flop with the nut full house and a full complement of re-draws. Going for a check-raise is a viable alternative to leading out, as any opponent with an ace is probably going to bet the flop, while if neither of your opponents has an ace they aren't going to call you anyway.



Turn (\$199):



River (\$199): My opponent shows A♠ Q♦ T♥ 2♠.

The big blind overplayed his hand badly. By raising on the flop, he insured that the only hands that were going to play with him for stacks were

hands against which is mostly gambling, meaning any ace. With dry trips you want to play a small pot and maintain your positional advantage. Even in the event that I had A-K-x-x and bet the pot the whole way and he called me all the way down for whatever reason (calling the turn after the K♦ hit would have been a marginal call at best hoping for a showdown, and then calling a third bet on the river would have been pure spew), he would only have lost \$39 (the three pot-sized bets) from the flop on.

There are few (if any) scenarios in which his whole \$99 stack should end up in the middle without him making the nut full house.

Hand #18: Middle Set

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6 max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$113.45) call. The next two players fold. The button (\$49.60) calls. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$101.45) checks.

In a fairly passive game, this is an OK call with a marginal hand (dry KK) UTG. In a more aggressive game, I would fold.



Flop (\$3.50): The big blind bets \$3. I call. The button folds.

Standard flat call with middle set.



Turn (\$9.50): My opponent bets \$7.

The slight under-bet on the flop is somewhat ambiguous, as it could mean AA trying to induce action or something somewhat weak. But the turn bet -- the second bet -- is far more likely to reflect the true strength (or weakness, in this case) of the bettor's hand. At this point, while calling is OK, I can safely put in a raise with what is likely the best hand.

Action: I raise to \$30.50. My opponent folds.

Hand #19: The Betting Machine

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I call. The small blind calls. The big blind checks.

This is not in the book.



Flop (\$3): Both blinds check.

I have a bad flush draw, a bad gutshot, and \$3.

Action: I bet \$3. The small blind folds. The big blind calls.



Turn (\$9): The big blind checks. I bet \$5 and my opponent folds.

Once the betting machine is in motion...

Hand #20: Small Ball

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

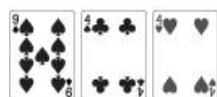
My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$39) calls. The hijack (\$176.35) raises to \$4.50. The CO folds. I (\$123.35) call. Both blinds fold. The UTG player folds.

Standard. 3-betting might be a viable alternative on another day with this speculative double-suited wrap hand, though I should note that this hand came before I started 3-betting pre-flop. Also note that the limper only had a \$39 stack. That said, I'd prefer not to 3-bet here and then have the limper come back and 4-bet all-in, though that wouldn't necessarily have been a complete disaster.



Flop (\$11.50): My opponent bets \$8. I call.

Make your opponent bet twice in this heads-up pot.



Turn (\$27.50): My opponent checks. I bet \$14 and my opponent folds.

Standard Small Ball.

Hand #21: Wrap

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack (\$100) calls. The cutoff (\$87.85) calls. The button folds. The small blind (\$92.55) calls. I (\$82.50) check.



Flop (\$4): The small blind checks.

I must bet the 13-card nut wrap (inside wrap plus gutshot wheel draw).

Action: I bet \$4, and only the hijack calls.



Turn (\$12):

The spade taints my draw a bit. But at the same time, it may be a scare card for my opponent even if he has an ace but not A-K-x-x; moreover, the initiative would be valuable in the instance that my opponent is also drawing himself. I don't really want to get raised, but I think firing another shot is the best play here.

Action: I bet \$12 and my opponent folds.

Hand #22: Raising Pre-flop, Undertrips, Value-Betting the River

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), four-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$80.70) limps in. I raise to \$2.75. Both blinds fold. The UTG player calls.

I was really just looking to build the pot with my half-pot raise, but I wound up isolating the limper.



Flop (\$7): My opponent checks. I check.

Thought I'd mix things up a bit by checking behind. It can't hurt to shorten the hand with weak trips, either.



Turn (\$7): My opponent checks.

I should make a bet here. I probably have the best hand, and I shouldn't give a free card to a bigger diamond flush draw.

Action: I bet \$3.50. My opponent calls.



River (\$14): My opponent checks.

I don't ordinarily value bet dry trips on the river, much less dry trips with a jack kicker. However, I should fire another value-bet here with the trip eights, as my opponent may give me credit for a stab given my check on the flop. Note that had I bet both the flop and turn and gotten called in both spots, I would almost certainly have checked behind on the river.

Action: I bet \$7. My opponent calls, and shows A♦ K♣ J♥ 6♦ for a king with an ace kicker.

It turns out he had a diamond draw too.

Hand #23: Trips

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I call. The CO calls. The button calls. The small blind calls. The big blind checks.

This is kind of a loose call from the hijack, but is OK in a passive game.



Flop (\$5): Both blinds check.

I have trip queens with no kicker and no improvers. I could bet, but I only rate to get action from hands better than mine (like Q-J-x-x, J-J-x-x, or A-Q-x-x); checking and seeing what the other players do isn't such a bad idea, either.

Action: I check. The cutoff checks. The button bets \$3, and it gets folded back to me.

About the only thing I can beat here is a bluff. That said, the bet is coming from the button. I'll call one bet and see what happens.

Action: I call. The cutoff folds.



Turn (\$11):

Mystery solved. It makes no sense to bet here. The play is to check and give my opponent another chance to bluff at it.

Action: I check. My opponent checks.



River (\$11):

Ok, so he didn't bite on the turn, but the same deal applies. My opponent is unlikely to call a bet here unless he has something like AA or KK, but may be willing to fire a desperation bluff if I check.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$7. I raise to \$32. My opponent folds.

I probably could have bet less -- maybe he calls a smaller raise with AA or KK -- but in all likelihood, I don't think it mattered much in this hand.

Hand #24: Raising Pre-flop, Top Pair

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), three-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$97.95) open with a raise to \$3.50. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$42.85) calls.



Flop (\$7.50): My opponent checks. I bet \$7.50. My opponent calls.



Turn (\$22.50): My opponent checks.

If the stacks were deeper, you could make a case for checking behind on the turn. But in this hand, my opponent only had about \$32 left, so even if I am wrong the penalty isn't so steep.

Action: I bet \$22.50. BB folds.

Hand #25: Second-Nut Straight, Value-Betting the River

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The cutoff calls. The button folds. The small blind calls. I check.



Flop (\$6): The small blind checks.

I could bet here with what probably is the best hand (I do have blockers). However, I am not going to be able to play a big pot and get the best of it. That said, checking may induce action – if not now, then maybe later in the hand.

Action: I check. The next player bets \$2. The small blind folds. I call.

After the weak stab bet from the button, I must call with the straight. I also intend to bet the turn so long as the board doesn't change.



Turn (\$10): I bet \$10 and my opponent calls.

I might be up against a set or two pair, or something that includes a flush draw.



River (\$30):

At this point, I can figure that my straight is probably best. If I check, my opponent is unlikely to bet a worse hand, as he would be more likely to showdown a set or two pair. If I bet big, I might not get called by a worse hand. This is a good spot for a token value bet.

Action: I bet \$6 and my opponent calls, holding $9\heartsuit 3\clubsuit 2\clubsuit 2\spadesuit$ for a set of deuces.

That's not exactly what I thought he had, but I'll take it.

Hand #26: Overpair, Gutshot, Nut Flush Draw

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), four-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$106.75) open with a raise to \$3.50. The button and small blind both fold. The big blind (\$30.30) calls.



Flop (\$7.50): My opponent checks. I bet \$7.50. My opponent calls.

Standard. This is a good flop for me, giving me an overpair with the nut flush draw. It is also a low-SPR situation.



Turn (\$22.50): My opponent bets \$19.30 all-in.

I now also have a gutshot, and I am getting 2.16:1 to call. Even against a straight I am only 2.5:1 against (12 outs to a straight or flush against 30 unknown cards, accounting for my opponent's two straight cards), and against anything else I am in far better shape. So worst case, it is a small mistake to call, and my opponent doesn't need much to bet all-in here. A must-call.

Action: I call.



River (\$61.10): BB shows $J\spadesuit 8\heartsuit 5\heartsuit 2\heartsuit$ for two pair.

Ok, so I was in pretty good shape on the turn. In addition to the flush draw, I had three kings, two queens, two tens, three sevens, plus three aces to catch, minus the $J\clubsuit$ that gives my opponent a full house. That's 21 outs on 40 unknown cards, making me a favorite against my opponent's two pair on the turn.

Hand #27: Trips/Underfull, Checking-and-Calling

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$109.35) raise to \$3.50. The cutoff folds. The button (\$126.95) calls. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$66.90) calls.



Flop (\$11): The BB checks. I bet \$5.50. The button raises to \$16.50. The BB folds. I call.

This is actually a pretty marginal spot because I was the pre-flop raiser. It's not a given that the button has a full house here. He may just put me on AA or c-bet air, and/or he might be bluffing.



Turn (\$44):

Well, that's a good card, so long as my opponent doesn't have 5-5-x-x.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$23. I call.

Small pot poker with a small pot hand. If I raise, it will be tough to get much action from a hand other than 5-5-x-x – maybe 5-4-x-x if I am extremely lucky.



River (\$90): I check. My opponent bets \$45. I call. Opponent shows A♠ Q♥ 8♠ 4♣ for trip fours.

It looks like my opponent gave me credit for bare A-A-x-x, otherwise he probably does not bet the river with bare trips.

Hand #28: Underfull

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The first two players fold. I limp. The button folds. The small blind calls. The big blind raises to \$4. I call. The small blind folds.

This is a pretty marginal hand without any suits in it, and I probably could have folded. That said, I probably would have raised had I had any suits in my hand.



Flop (\$9): BB checks. I check.

No need for heroics. If my opponent has a full house, I am not going to bet it for him.



Turn (\$9): BB checks.

Now I have the underfull myself. This can be a pretty tricky spot, but the bottom line is that you are not going to get more than one bet out of your opponent when ahead, and if you are in fact ahead, you are not likely to get outdrawn. Checking behind is the right play.



River (\$9): BB checks.

Now I should put in a value bet.

Action: I bet \$4.50. My opponent calls, showing $Q\heartsuit Q\clubsuit 8\heartsuit 2\heartsuit$ for a straight.

Hand #29: Combo Float, Wrap, Bluff

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), four-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$96.90) open with a raise to \$3.50. The button folds. The small blind (\$149.15) calls. The big blind folds.



Flop (\$8): My opponent bets \$8. I call.

Standard call of first bet. I may have the best hand, and I have draws to top set or two pair, plus backdoor straight draws. I also have the dry King and position.



Turn (\$24): My opponent bets \$24. I call.

Now I have a wrap as well.



River (\$72): My opponent checks. I bet \$34, and my opponent folds.

Dry king and position. The river fills both the flush and the straight draws. I might have had enough to showdown with my kings, but sometimes it is a safer play just to make the bluff in case I am behind.

Hand #30: Flopping the Nut Straight

The game: \$5-\$10, five-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Only the cutoff (\$800) – a bad player -- calls. The small blind folds. I (\$2,000) check.



Flop (\$25): I bet \$15. My opponent raises to \$70. I call.

I have the bare nut straight. I don't normally make these small bets like this; I just thought I'd try it. My opponent might have the same straight plus a re-draw, or the raise might just be a response to my weak bet. I think because I made the weak stab, I am committed to calling here, as my bet increases the possibility of a bluff.



Turn (\$165):

If my opponent did in fact have the straight, this is a good time to represent having flopped top two pair.

Action: I bet \$60 and my opponent folds.

Hand #31: Playing with the Pre-flop Initiative

The game: \$5-\$10-\$20, five-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$2,200) raise to \$75. The button folds. The small blind (\$3,500) calls. The big blind folds. The straddler (\$1,500) calls.



Flop (\$235): Both players check in front of me. I bet \$150. The small blind calls. The other player folds.

Not what I was hoping for. I am most likely beat here.



Turn (\$535): My opponent checks. I check.

I have four outs to a full house.



River (\$535):

No such luck.

Action: My opponent checks. I check. My opponent shows KK for a bigger two pair.

Hand #32: Raising Pre-flop, Taking Free Card, Bluff Raise

The game: \$5-\$10-\$20, three-handed

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



Pre-flop: Both opponents limp. I raise to \$75, and both opponents call.



Flop (\$225): Both opponents check. I check.

I'd rather not bet this somewhat coordinated board, especially since I have two backdoor flush draws with the overcards.



Turn (\$225): The first player checks. The next player now bets \$125.

The bettor might have a seven, or he might just be taking a stab at the pot.

Action: I raise to \$300 and both opponents fold.

Hand #33: Combo Hand

The game: \$5-\$10, six-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Three players limp. The small blind limps. I check.



Flop (\$50): The small blind checks. I bet \$50, and two players call behind me. The small blind folds.

This was a somewhat loose bet into a field with top pair/no kicker, a weak open-ended straight draw, and weak clubs. But I do have blocker draws, too!



Turn (\$200): I bet \$125. The next player folds, but the last player -- a fairly loose player post-flop -- calls.

The Betting Machine...but not the result I was looking for. I've gotta think my opponent has at least a five here.



River (\$450):

That's a good card. Maybe a value bet is in order?

Action: I bet \$175 and my opponent folds.

Funny thing is that, as he was folding, the other player -- a friend of mine who shall go unnamed -- shook his head at how lucky I got. After he mucked he said he folded 7-7 for the underfull, in which case I got extremely lucky. And I believe him, too -- I've seen him fold the underfull on a number of occasions, which is kind of ironic compared to his otherwise lack of drawing standards.

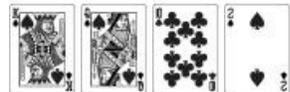
Sometimes it pays to just keep betting.

Hand #34: Flopping the Overfull

The game: \$5-\$10-\$20, six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$2,000) raise to \$50. All five opponents call.

It was kind of a loose raise to begin with, and I was just hoping to get the button.



Flop (\$300):

That's a miracle.

Action: The small blind checks. The big blind (\$1,500) bets \$300, and the next player folds to me.

There's no question that I need to raise here with the overfull, because the money needs to go in now. My opponent has at least a queen; hopefully, I have some of his cards duplicated in that case.

Action: I raise to \$1,200. It gets folded back to the BB, who re-raises all-in. I call.

What the big blind actually had was 2-2-x-x for the underfull, and so he was actually drawing dead. In this case it would have been a huge mistake to just smooth call, as any turn card may have scared him into slowing down.

Hand #35: 3-Betting Pre-flop, C-Betting

The game: \$5-\$10-\$20, three-handed

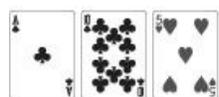
My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The small blind (\$3,000) raises in the dark to \$40. I (\$2,200) re-raise to \$100, and the button (\$1,500) and small blind both call.

3-betting seemed like a good idea at first glance. But knowing that the button is actually a very loose player and would call with virtually any four cards, I would have taken that raise back.



Flop (\$300): The small blind checks.

I've got a gutshot and the nut flush draw. This should be bet here.

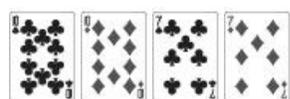
Action: I bet \$300 and both opponents fold.

Hand #36: Middle Set, Low SPR

The game: \$5-\$10, six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$12K) limps. I (\$2,200) raise to \$50. The cutoff folds. The button (\$1,500) calls. Both blinds call (\$825, \$1,200). The limper calls. Five players see the flop.



Flop (\$250): The small blind (\$775) bets \$125, and it gets folded to me.

At this point we have a low-SPR situation, as the small blind only has a \$775 stack and there was \$250 in the pot before the flop, for an SPR of just over 3. This dictates a raise; my only real concern is if the button has Q-Q-x-x, but I'll take my chances here.

Action: I raise to \$600. The button folds. The small blind goes all-in for \$775. I call.

The small blind actually had a set of threes.

Hand #37: Playing With the Initiative

The game: \$5-\$10, four-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I raise to \$40. Everybody calls.



Flop (\$160): Both blinds check. I check. The button checks.

This is not the spot for a c-bet against three opponents. A free card would be preferable, as there are a lot of cards that could vastly improve my hand on the turn in addition to a diamond.



Turn (\$160):

That was one of them. Now I have the 13-card nut wrap with the nut club draw and a queen-high diamond draw.

Action: Both blinds check. I bet \$160. The button and small blind call. The big blind folds.



River (\$640): The small blind checks. I bet \$500, and both opponents fold.

I might have bet too much, as the button said he folded jack-high clubs. But who knows? On another day, he might have called.

Hand #38: Overpair and Nut Flush Draw, High SPR

The game: \$5-\$10, four-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The button (\$3,000) limps. The small blind (\$8,000) calls. I (\$3,500) raise to \$35, and both opponents call.



Flop (\$105): The small blind checks. I bet \$105. The button folds. The small blind raises to \$375.

I know the small blind to be a very tough player. The bet amount is kind of odd. In either case, I can't fold the overpair with the nut flush draw here.

Re-raising is an option, but with an SPR around 33, I will take the more conservative route.

Action: I call.



Turn (\$855):

I have the nuts.

Action: The small blind checks. I bet \$800. My opponent calls.



River (\$2,455): The small blind checks.

Obviously I am going to bet it, the only question being how much. If my opponent has a dry set, he is probably not going to call any amount unless he thinks I have the dry ace. My guess is he has something like a set or two pair with a smaller flush. Maybe if I bet small, he'll call with a smaller flush, but if I bet big and make it look like a dry ace, he might call with a set.

I dunno. I'll settle on a middling bet.

River: I bet \$1,200. My opponent hemmed and hawed for about a minute, and finally folded.

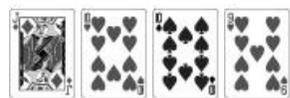
Oh well.

Hand #39: Overpair with the Pre-flop Initiative

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I open with a raise to \$2. Only the small blind calls.



Flop (\$5): The small blind checks. I bet \$5, and my opponent calls.



Turn (\$15): SB checks. I check.

No need to bet here. If my opponent has a four, he might call another bet. Meanwhile, checking behind mimics slowplaying AA, so I may be able to get a free showdown if I don't improve.



River (\$15): SB checks. I check. My opponent has $7\heartsuit 7\heartsuit 6\clubsuit 5\clubsuit$, having flopped an open-ended straight draw.

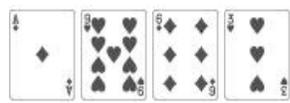
The positional advantage helped enable me to get a free showdown and win the hand. I think had the roles been reversed and I had checked the turn and the river, my opponent likely would have bet one of those streets, and I would have been bluffed out.

Hand #40: Top Pair, Trips, Straight

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack (\$80.85) raises to \$2. The cutoff (\$30) calls. The small blind folds. I (\$134.90) call.

A loose call, but I do have a suited ace.



Flop (\$6.50): I bet \$6.50. The hijack calls. The button folds.

Just thought I'd take a stab with top pair, top kicker.



Turn (\$19.50): I bet \$13. My opponent raises to \$26.

My guess is he either has a bare six or is just making a play. I think if he had 6-5-x-x he'd probably raise more to protect his hand, and if he had 5-5-x-x, 2-2-x-x, or 5-2-x-x he'd probably just smooth call. My A-6 is likely best.

Action: I call.



River (\$71.50):

I now have a straight. The play is to put in a small value/blocking bet. I don't want to have to face a big bet here, while I may get my opponent to call with a bare six where he might have checked behind.

Action: I bet \$20 and my opponent folds.

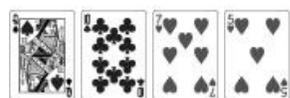
He was probably just making a play.

Hand #41: Big Blind vs. Small Blind

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), three-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The button folds. The small blind raises to \$3. I call.

This is trash – but it would take worse trash than this for me to fold heads up with the positional advantage.



Flop (\$6): My opponent checks. I bet \$6. My opponent calls.

Standard procedure.



Turn (\$18): My opponent checks. I bet \$18. My opponent folds.

Standard procedure – The Betting Machine.

Hand #42: Small Ball

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack raises to \$3.50. I call. Everybody else folds.



Flop (\$8.50): My opponent bets \$7. I call.

Stopping call/float.

 **Turn (\$22.50):** My opponent checks. I bet \$14 and he folds.

One of the interesting things about this game is that I don't really know if I am calling on the flop because I think I have the best hand or if I am drawing to a bluff -- I just know that calling is the right play in aggregate. And that's really the thing about PLO: You can't put your opponent on a specific hand based on just one bet; you just call and let the positional advantage sort things out.

Hand #43: Pair Plus Flush Draw, Low SPR

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$181.20) limp. The next player folds. The cutoff (\$100.85) and button (\$54.20) both call. The small blind (\$31.50) raises to \$6. The big blind folds. I call. The cutoff calls. The button folds.

Loose call.

 **Flop (\$20):** The small blind checks.

This looks like a clean flop to bet at with my pair and flush draw.

Action: I bet \$20. The cutoff folds, but the small blind calls.

 **Turn (\$60):** SB bets \$5.50 all-in.

I'm not sure what the small blind thinks he's doing, but I can't fold the flush here for \$5.50.

Action: I call.

 **River (\$71):** SB shows A♠ A♣ 7♣ 6♥ for a pair of aces. I win.

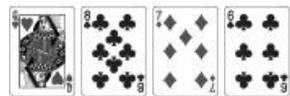
I'm not sure what the SB was thinking, but with just a little over a bet left, he should have bet the flop himself, or otherwise have raised all-in after I bet (not that he would have won the hand if he had).

Hand #44: Second-Nut Straight

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$95) call. The button and small blind both fold. The big blind (\$72) checks.

On another day, I might have raised.



Flop (\$2.50): The big blind bets \$1.25. I call.

I'm not folding for one bet heads up, nor am I raising with the second-nut straight.



Turn (\$5): My opponent checks. I bet \$2. My opponent calls.

If my opponent has a straight, my bet may win the pot. If not, I prefer to bet the turn and check and showdown the river than give a free card. Or if he has a full house, I prefer to bet and fold to a raise now or a bet on the river rather than check and have to call a bigger bet on the river.



River (\$9): My opponent checks. I check. My opponent shows $K♥ J♠ 8♣ 7♠$ for a smaller straight.

Hand #45: Small Ball/Position Play

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack (\$105.35) raises to \$3.50. The cutoff folds. I (\$154.25) call. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$105.45) calls.

This is a fairly loose call with really just a suited ace.



Flop (\$11): The big blind checks. The hijack bets \$7. I call. The big blind folds.

This is a weak stab c-bet. I have top pair and a gutshot and backdoor hearts. I'll call and see what happens.



Turn (\$25):

Nice. Now I've got the nut flush draw too.

Action: My opponent checks.

If my opponent really flopped a straight and checked here, then good for him.

Action: I bet \$25 and he folds.

Hand #46: Reverse Float

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I limp in. The next player calls. The cutoff and button both fold. The small blind calls. The big blind checks.



Flop (\$8): Both blinds check. I bet \$8, and only the player behind me calls.

I took a stab at it with a double-gutter, though only one way to the nuts. I got called.



Turn (\$24):

That fills a straight.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$12.

That's an odd bet for a straight. I decide to call here with the intention of possibly firing a bet on the river if I don't improve.

Action: I call.



River (\$48):

The K♣ puts a possible flush out. Odds are that it didn't hit my opponent. I'll take a shot here as planned.

Action: I bet \$26 and my opponent folds.

Hand #47: Whoops

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max, deep), six-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I (\$488.30) raise to \$7. The small blind (\$251.40) calls. The big blind folds.



Flop (\$16): My opponent checks. I check.

I decided to mix it up and check. I have a gutshot and weak flush draw; I also hit the pivot card, and a lot more help could arrive on the turn.



Turn (\$16): My opponent checks. I bet \$10. My opponent calls.



River (\$36): My opponent bets \$36.

This looks like a reverse float.

Action: I raise to \$88. My opponent calls, and shows T♦ 9♦ 6♠ 6♣ for a full house.

Whoops.

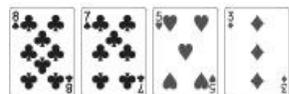
Well, it looked like he was making a play, but it turns out that I foiled his check-raise attempt (I think) on the flop. You see a play, you make a play; sometimes you fail and it hurts. It's true, however, that if my opponent intended to bluff, that he more likely would have raised on the turn rather than flat call and then lead out with a pot-sized bet on the river.

Hand #48: Small Blind vs. Big Blind, Flush

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max, deep), five-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I call. The big blind checks.

I'd like to see the flop. I know raising from the small blind sounds like the aggressive thing to do, but you are going to feel stupid every time you raise with marginal hands and get called (which will happen a lot).



Flop (\$4): I check. The big blind checks.

I have a flush draw, but I can't bet every flop. The free card is a good result.



Turn (\$4):

I have the flush, but there is no need to bet here. If I bet, I am unlikely to be called by a worse hand here, while a worse hand might be willing to bet if I check. And even if I did get called, it is unlikely that a worse hand would call a bet on both the turn and river, and so I am likely getting at most one street of value. Moreover, if I am ahead, I am unlikely to be outdrawn; this is in contrast to hold'em, where you only need one card in your hand to have a flush draw.

Checking with the intention of calling is the best play.

Action: I check. The big blind checks.



River (\$4):

In this spot, it is still unlikely my opponent has anything to call me with. I prefer to check again with the intention of calling any bet.

Action: I check. The big blind checks. My opponent has Q♣ Q♠ 9♥ 2♦ and my flush is good.

Hand #49: Small Ball

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

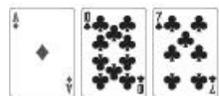
My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack (\$157.25) opens with a raise to \$7. The cutoff folds. I (\$336.05) call, and both blinds fold.

This hand is not ideal with the third heart, but I do have the positional advantage.



Flop (\$17): My opponent checks. I bet \$17, and my opponent folds.

The positional advantage made this one easy.

Hand #50: Reverse Semi-Bluff Float

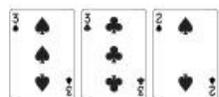
The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$293.75) call. The cutoff (\$287.10) calls. The button (\$886.90) raises to \$8. Both blinds fold. I call. The cutoff folds.



Flop (\$21): I check. My opponent bets \$14. I call.

This is a semi-bluff reverse float against a standard c-bet. I will bet virtually any turn unimproved.



Turn (\$49):

Now I have the straight, and there is no need to bet as a bluff. My best bet is to check and give my opponent a chance to fire another shot.

Action: I check. My opponent checks.



River (\$49):

Now I don't want my opponent to check behind here if he has something to show down. I should put in a value bet.

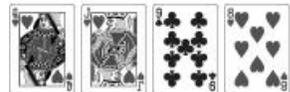
Action: I bet \$12 and my opponent folds.

Hand #51: Getting Raised

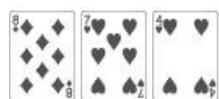
The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$647.15) calls. I (\$182.80) raise to \$6. The button (\$276) calls. Both blinds fold. The UTG player calls.



Flop (\$21): The UTG player checks. I bet \$21. The button raises to \$84. The UTG player folds.

I think there was no question that I was gonna bet this flop with top pair, a gutshot, and a flush draw. But now I am facing a raise in a mid-high-SPR situation (SPR 8.4).

For starters, this is essentially a re-raise or fold situation, as if I call here, I am committed to going the whole way with only another half-pot sized bet left. Moreover, the only nut draw I have is the gutshot, so if I do choose to contest the pot, I am doing so based on the totality of the hand. So calling is out of the question. That said, I suppose it is possible that my opponent has complete air here, but let's assume that he is not bluffing:

Opponent's Hand	Comment	Equity (Me/ Opp.)
A♥ J♠ T♥ 9♦	13-card nut wrap and nut flush Draw	(39.8%/60.2%)
9♠ 9♦ 8♠ 8♣	Top set	(37.3%/62.7%)
6♥ 6♣ 5♥ 5♣	Straight with flush draw	(38.0%/62.0%)
A♥ K♥ 8♠ 8♣	Top set and nut flush draw	(11.8%/88.2%)
A♥ K♥ 6♣ 5♣	Nut straight, nut flush draw	(16.1%/83.9%)
T♥ 9♥ 8♠ 7♠	Top two pair, nut open-ended Straight Draw, Flush Draw	(48.1%/51.9%)
J♠ T♥ 9♥ 8♠	Top pair, 13-card nut wrap and flush draw	(70.8%/29.2%)

Note that in a low-SPR situation (SPR ≤ 4), I should definitely call, as I would only need at most 33.3% equity to justify calling the raise, and I am well above 33.3% against anything except a hand that includes both a made hand – a set or a straight – and a bigger flush draw, both of which would have me smoked. And for an SPR of 4, my opponent's range could include a lot of hands as weak as one pair, and the set/nut straight plus nut flush draw combination is a remote enough possibility that there is no way I have less than 33.3% equity in aggregate (meaning that if we accounted for all of the possibilities and took a weighted-average equity).

However, facing a raise with an SPR of 8.4, I need better than 47% equity to justify re-raising here and playing for stacks (this is accounting for the \$21 I already bet on the flop). Moreover, my opponent's range is much stronger; we can, for the most part, throw out bare one-pair hands, for example. And so you can just eyeball the table and see the problem: I am nowhere near 47%.

In fact, the only way I can be better than 47% is if my opponent has a made hand worse than a set and a smaller or no flush draw. And unfortunately, these possibilities are now the outliers.

Action: I fold.

Hand #52: Overfull Against a Floater

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), four-handed

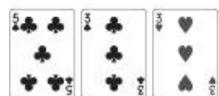
My position: Small Blind

My hand:



The UTG player – the pre-flop raiser in this hand – seems like a fairly sophisticated opponent.

Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$197.15) raises to \$4.50. The button folds. I (\$722.70) call. The big blind (\$200) calls.



Flop (\$13.50):

I flopped the overfull. I could check-raise, but I'd like to lead out this time. Against truly bad opponents, I would lean towards check-raising and trying

to play for stacks, or just betting the full pot the whole way.

Action: I bet \$8. The big blind folds. The UTG player calls.



Turn (\$29.50):

At this point, I have to figure my opponent either called with a three, an overpair, or air. That said, I expect him to bet if I check unless he has specifically A-A-x-x, with which he might check behind.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$14.75.

My opponent bets as expected, and now the decision is between either raising or calling and betting the river. I think the latter choice is the superior option, because if I raise, my opponent will probably fold if he has nothing or just a three, meaning that I only rate to get action from KK.

Action: I call.



River (\$59): I bet \$34. My opponent raises to \$97.50.

Re-raising in this spot would be terrible because my opponent is not going to call without KK or 33 (or I guess JJ if he is that lucky). On the other hand, I don't think folding is viable option here without a truly strong read, because it is possible my opponent puts me on a bluff, or maybe a sort of half-pot blocking bet.

Action: I call. My opponent shows 9♦ 9♥ 7♠ 7♣ on a bluff, and I win.

Hand #53: Bluff

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The first two players fold. The cutoff (\$68.25) calls. The button (\$73.85) calls. The small blind (\$87.10) calls. I (\$100) check.



Flop (\$4): The small blind checks. I check, and it gets checked around.



Turn (\$4): The small blind checks.

If either of the last two players had a queen or better, they likely would have bet the flop.

Action: I bet \$3 and everybody folds.

Hand #54: A-A-5-5-5

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$114.80) raise to \$3.50. The cutoff (\$164.80) calls. The button (\$100) calls. The small blind (\$413.35) calls. The big blind (\$60.80) calls.



Flop (\$17.50): The small blind bets \$8.75. The big blind calls. I call, and both players behind me call.

I hate this. I had to call the one bet, but then the other two players called behind me, too. What do you think the chances are that nobody has the case five?



Turn (\$61.25): Everybody checks.



River (\$61.25): Both blinds check. I bet \$13. The cutoff folds. The button raises to \$54. Both blinds fold. I fold.

I was just looking for a cheap way to get out of this hand. I probably could have check-folded.

Hand #55: The Betting Machine

The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$50.75) raise to \$1. The next player folds. The button (\$21.25) calls. Both blinds fold.

Now I am heads up, out of position, and with the pre-flop initiative. I would have just limped if I had known that was going to happen.



Flop (\$2.75): I bet \$2.75. My opponent calls.

C-bet with the inside wrap.



Turn (\$8.25):

Now I have a flush draw, too. Fire away.

Action: I bet \$8.25. My opponent calls.



River (\$24.75): I bet \$10. My opponent folds.

The Betting Machine.

Hand #56: Small Ball

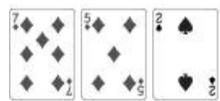
The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$68.95) call. The cutoff and button both fold. The small blind (\$45.60) calls. The big blind (\$26.30) raises to \$1.25. I call. The small blind calls.



Flop (\$3.75): The small blind checks. The big blind bets \$3.75. I call. The small blind folds.

Stopping call.



Turn (\$11.25): The big blind checks. I bet \$7.50, and my opponent folds.

Positional bet with dry king.

Hand #57: Nut Straight

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max, deep), five-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The cutoff (\$196) and button (\$50) both limp in. The small blind (\$146.35) raises to \$5. I (\$291) call, and both players call behind me.



Flop (\$20): Everybody checks.



Turn (\$20): The small blind bets \$20.

I have the nut straight with a straight re-draw, but no flush draw, and with nearly 2 1/2 bets left to play vs. the bettor (SPR 7). The play is to smooth call and keep it a small pot.

Action: I call. Both players behind me fold.



River (\$60): The small blind bets \$48. I raise to \$204. My opponent folds.

Note that I probably do not get that extra bet if I raise the turn.

Hand #58: Bottom Pair and Nut Flush Draw, Check-Raising

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$95.10) limp in. The next two players fold, but the button (\$122.30) raises to \$4.50. The small blind (\$70.70) calls. The big blind folds. I call.

Probably a loose call from UTG.



Flop (\$14.50): The first player checks. I check. The button bets \$9. The first player folds. I call.

I have bottom pair and the nut flush draw against a weak stab c-bet.



Turn (\$32.50):

I have two options: I could either lead out with a bet, or I can check and see what my opponent does. One of the advantages of checking is that I could benefit from a free card as well should my opponent check behind.

Action: I check. My opponent bets \$16.25.

A second weak stab looks weak.

Action: I raise to \$81.25. My opponent requests time, and then folds.

Hand #59: Middle Set/Full

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max, deep), four-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The button (\$109.75) raises to \$3.50. The small blind (\$197) calls. I (\$486.65) call.



Flop (\$10.50): The small blind checks. I check. The button checks.



Turn (\$10.50): The small blind bets \$7.

The one possibility that might concern me is if the small blind slow-played a set of kings. That said, I will raise a weak bet here.

Action: I raise to \$31.50. The button folds. The small blind calls.



River (\$73.50): The small blind bets \$60.

I think if the small blind had KK, he likely would have re-raised on the turn.

Action: I set my opponent all-in for \$102 more. My opponent calls, showing A♣ 5♦ 3♣ 3♥ for a smaller full house.

Hand #60: Small Ball, Blind vs. Blind

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

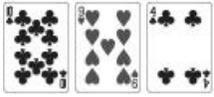
My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to the small blind (\$71.25), who raises to \$3. I (\$104.80) call.

Heads up against the small blind, I will call with just about any four cards. It doesn't hurt to be double-suited.



Flop (\$6): The small blind bets \$3. I call.

Standard Small Ball call with top pair against weak stab c-bet. The flush draw is a bonus.



Turn (\$12): The small blind checks. I bet \$12 and the small blind folds.

I picked up a gutshot, too.

Hand #61: A-K-High

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), four-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: It gets folded to the small blind (\$62.10), who calls. I (\$145.85) raise to \$3. The small blind calls.



Flop (\$6): The small blind checks. I bet \$6, and the small blind calls.



Turn (\$18): The small blind checks. I check.

Pot control check with kings up.



River (\$18): The small blind bets \$6.

There are a lot of hands my opponent could have, but he needs to have a seven or a pair in his hand to beat my A-K-high. That said, it would be a little more difficult for my opponent to call a bet on the flop with a hand that contains a pair. Moreover, his bet – while a little on the small side – may be a reaction to my checking behind on the turn.

I'm inclined to look him up.

Action: I call. The small blind shows K♥ 9♠ 8♣ 5♠ for K-9-high, and I win.

Hand #62: Straight

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), four-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$137.35) call. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$111.70) checks.

This is a bottom-end Small Ball hand.



Flop (\$2.50): My opponent checks. I bet \$2.50. My opponent calls.

Standard stab. I guess my opponent has something.



Turn (\$7.50): My opponent checks. I check.

I have a straight now. The check here is more of a pot control check, as I don't want to put more than one bet in with the straight on a paired board.



River (\$7.50): My opponent bets \$7.50.

I will call this bet, however. Note that the way the hand has played out, I could have any four cards in my opponent's eyes, and it is also possible that he has air himself, though he more likely would have bet the turn if he was going to bluff.

Action: I call. My opponent shows J♣ 9♥ 8♠ 2♠ for trip deuces.

Hand #63: Top Pair, Trips

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max, deep), five-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: It gets folded to the button (\$85.05), who opens with a raise to \$2. I (\$174.95) call. The big blind (\$57.25) calls.



Flop (\$6): I bet \$6. The big blind folds. The button calls.

I decided to bet out with my top pair in this three-way pot, and picked up a caller.



Turn (\$18): I bet \$13. My opponent calls.

My play here is flexible. I could have checked, or I could have bet the pot. This time I chose a roughly 2/3 pot bet to mimic a follow through bet.



River (\$44):

At this point, I give my opponent credit for trips here as well. The problem with checking is that my opponent may check behind with bare trips – which I can probably beat with my ace kicker, while he might have T-9-x-x or 6-6-x-x and make a big value bet to which I may or may not be able to fold.

In contrast, the advantage of betting out myself is that it gives me a chance to set the price while allowing me to potentially extract value from bare trips. My opponent may not raise with T-6-x-x or 6-6-x-x even if he has it, and if he actually has T-9-x-x for the nuts and raises, I can get away from

the hand for the price I set with my bet.

Action: I bet \$18. My opponent calls with Q♣ Q♥ 6♦ 4♦ for queens up.

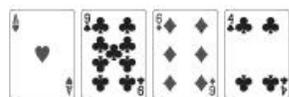
Sometimes your opponents are worse than you give them credit for.

Hand #64: Undertrips

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$64.15) limps in. The cutoff (\$342.20) limps in. The button and small blind both fold. I (\$97) check.



Flop (\$3.50): I check. The UTG player bets \$3.50. The button folds. I call.

I prefer checking-and-calling over betting out, as checking may induce a bluff, while keeping the pot small.



Turn (\$10.50): I check. My opponent bets \$10.50. I call.

I can stand one more bet with my A-4-x-x in this unraised pot.



River (\$31.50): I check. My opponent checks, showing 8♥ 6♥ 4♥ 2♣ for trip fours.

I should note that had my opponent made a legitimate bet on the river, I probably would have folded.

Hand #65: Betting Machine

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), five-handed, one blind

My position: Button

My hand:



Note: There is no small blind in this hand.

Pre-flop: The first two players fold. The cutoff (\$59.40) limps in. I (\$179.40) call. The big blind checks.



Flop (\$3): Both players check in front of me. I bet \$3, and both opponents call.

Button bet with a triple-gutter.



River (\$36): My opponent checks. I bet \$19 and my opponent folds.

The Betting Machine.

Hand #66: Playing with the Initiative

The game: \$2-\$5, six-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to me. I raise to \$15, and both blinds call.



Flop (\$45): Both opponents check. I bet \$45. The small blind folds, but the big blind calls.

Well, I tried a c-bet.



Turn (\$135): My opponent checks.

Now I have a heart draw.

Action: I check.



River (\$135): My opponent checks.

If my opponent has an ace, he is probably not going to fold to a bet. I have enough to show down with my nines.

Action: I check. My opponent shows Q-9-6-5 (no diamonds or hearts) for the straight.

Hand #67: Taking Free Cards, Wrap, Bluff Raise

The game: \$5-\$5, six-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$800) and hijack (\$1,900) limp in. The cutoff folds. I (\$1,700) raise to \$30. The small blind (\$1,200) calls, but the big blind folds. Both limpers call.



Flop (\$125): Everybody checks to me.

I hit the pivot card, and have a plethora of backdoor possibilities.

Action: I check.



Turn (\$125): The first two players check. The player in front of me bets \$115.

I have a pair and a Broadway wrap against an odd bet. If not for the two diamonds on the board, I would consider raising. But in this spot, I should

call.

Action: I call. The small blind calls, but the other player folds.



River (\$470): The first player checks. The player in front of me bets \$350.

My thought here is that the bettor either has K-K-x-x or Q-Q-x-x, or that he has missed his draw and is following through with another shot. The odd turn bet has me leaning toward a missed draw.

Action: I raise* to \$900. The small blind folds. The bettor goes into the tank and talks to himself for a couple of minutes, saying that it would be “sick” if I played queens (Q-Q-x-x) that way. He finally calls with Q-8-7-4 for a full house.

I actually made a huge mistake here (hence the asterisk on raise), and it wasn't so much with the read, but rather with the fact that if I thought he was bluffing, I had enough to call him with my pair of queens and ace kicker. Because I was right – the bettor was fairly weak on the turn, with the middle two pair. But if I thought he was bluffing, I probably could have just called.

I think it was really a heat-of-the-moment thing. In my mind, I thought I was probably drawing on the turn, and then on the river, my focus was on the thought that the bettor had missed his draw. And when you execute a bluff raise, you usually can't spend a whole lot of time deliberating over it, otherwise your play may become transparent.

As it turned out, the bluff raise almost worked.

Hand #68: Floating

The game: \$5-\$5-\$10, four-handed

My position: Straddle UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: The button (\$1,000) raises blind to \$25. The small blind (\$800) – a fairly weak player – calls. The big blind folds. I (\$1,500) call.



Flop (\$80): The small blind bets \$60. I call. The button folds.

Float against a weak bet. I have the second-nut flush draw and a set draw...



Turn (\$200): The small blind checks.

I'll represent the straight here.

Action: I bet \$200 and my opponent folds.

Hand #69: Overpair and Flush Draw Out of Position

The game: \$5-\$5-\$10, five-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The cutoff folds. The button (\$1,500) raises to \$40. I (\$1,500) call. The big blind and straddle both fold.



Flop (\$95):

I have an overpair and a flush draw. I should probably bet this.

Action: I bet \$95, and my opponent calls.



Turn (\$285):

This is a tough spot, because if my opponent was on a straight draw (such as 9-8-7-x or 8-7-5-x), then he probably hit it. But on the other hand, my opponent might just have a pair or a flush draw. So now my choice is between betting out and risk getting raised out of the pot, or checking and either giving up the free card or allowing myself to get bluffed out.

I don't like either choice, but I decide that the risk of the straight is low enough that I should bet out and try to end the pot here.

Action: I bet \$275, and my opponent calls.



River (\$835):

This is probably a good card, giving me queens up and missing the flush draw if my opponent had it. I could put in a small blocking bet, or I can check and try to showdown the hand.

Action: I check. My opponent checks, and shows J♥ 9♦ 7♥ 5♥ to win the pot with trip sevens on the river.

Hand #70: Top Two Pair

The game: \$2-\$5

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



The small blind is unknown to me. We've played a few rounds, but he hasn't done anything crazy, and seems pretty typical.

Pre-flop: Only the cutoff (\$500) and small blind (\$700) call. I (\$2,500) check.



Flop (\$15): The small blind bets \$15. I call, and the cutoff folds.

Standard call with top two pair.



Turn (\$45): The small blind checks. I bet \$45, and my opponent calls.

Standard line, only my opponent called, presumably on the draw.



River (\$135): My opponent bets \$135.

This is an either/or type bet – either my opponent has the nuts – 6-5-x-x – or he has nothing. On the one hand, I've shown strength; on the other hand, it's possible that he was on the higher straight draw (T-8-x-x) and is just taking a shot at the pot. But without knowing anything about this opponent, I am inclined to give him credit for the straight.

Action: I fold.

Hand #71: Checking-and-(Calling)

The game: \$2-\$5, six-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: The button (\$600) opens with a raise to \$20. I (\$2,500) call. The big blind (\$800) calls.



Flop (\$60):

This is a check-and-call situation. If I bet, I only rate to get action from another ace or better; but if I check, I may induce a bluff from the pre-flop raiser.

Action: I check, and both opponents check.



Turn (\$60):

While I don't necessarily want to give a free card to a heart draw, this is essentially the same deal.

Action: I check, and both opponents check.



River (\$60):

I could bet and pray I get called by a four or less. Or...

Action: I check, and both opponents check behind. I win.

Doesn't anybody steal anymore?

Hand #72: Overfull

The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$38.35) calls. The hijack (\$54.50) calls. I (\$44.25) call. The button folds. The small blind (\$42.85) calls. The big blind (\$62.65) checks.



Flop (\$2.50): Everybody checks to me. I bet \$2.50. Both blinds fold. The next player calls, and the last player folds.



Turn (\$7.50): My opponent checks. I bet \$7.50. My opponent calls.



River (\$22.50): My opponent checks.

My opponent obviously has at least jack, but my J-6-x-x is probably still best. My guess is my opponent would have bet J-T-x-x by now, and probably the only hand he could have that both beats me and is weak enough to check is J-8-x-x. That said, I can safely put in a value bet here, as I am unlikely to get raised by anything but J-T-x-x. The trick is to bet an amount that my opponent can call with bare trips.

Action: I bet \$7.50. My opponent calls, showing A♥ J♥ 7♥ 4♠ for trip jacks.

Hand #73: Pair, Turned Wrap and Flush Draw

The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$19.75) calls. The hijack (\$4.40) raises to \$2.25. I (\$140.70) call. The button (\$25.25) calls. The small blind folds. The big blind folds. The UTG player calls.



Flop (\$9.75): The UTG player checks. The hijack bets \$2.15 all-in.

I kinda have to call with any pair getting 5.5:1 against an all-in player.

Action: I call. The button calls, and the other player folds.



Turn (\$16.20):

I now have a pair with a wrap and a flush draw. I should bet here and try to isolate the all-in player and improve my chances of winning the pot.

Action: I bet \$16.20. The button raises to \$20.85 all-in. I call. The hijack shows A♠ 8♣ 6♥ 5♣. The button shows A♠ K♠ K♣ 4♦.

Well, nice play by the button, I guess.



River (\$16.20 main pot, \$41.70 side pot): I scoop with the flush.

Hand #74: Blocker Play, Semi-Bluff Raise

The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Cutoff, posted \$0.50 blind

My hand:



I posted a \$0.50 blind in the cutoff to come in.

Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$13.65) calls. I (\$50) check. The button folds. The small blind (\$109.55) calls. The big blind (\$48.55) checks.

I'm not raising with weak kings.



Flop (\$2): Everybody checks to me. I check.

I decided to take the free card with the nut flush draw this time.



Turn (\$2): The first two players check. The next player bets \$0.50.

I have KK blockers against the straight, and that looks like a weak stab.

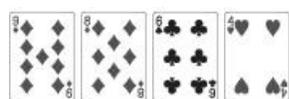
Action: I raise to \$3.50. Everybody folds.

Hand #75: Second-Nut Straight on Paired Board, Heads Up Out of Position

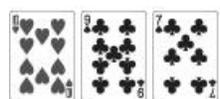
The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Hijack

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$50.75) call. The cutoff (\$110.40) raises to \$1.35. The button and both blinds fold. I call.



Flop (\$3.45):

I have a bare second-nut straight. I'd like to play it slow, keep the pot small, and give my opponent a chance to c-bet. I don't want to bet here, get called, and then be lost on the turn because there aren't a lot of clean cards for me.

Action: I check. My opponent checks.



Turn (\$3.45):

That's not the prettiest card. That said, my opponent would have bet J-8-x-x if he had it, and I am through giving free cards to flush draws and bigger straight draws.

Action: I bet \$2. My opponent raises to \$5.70.

I don't know that I believe him yet. I think if my opponent had T-T-x-x or 9-9-x-x, he probably would have bet the flop after I checked to him. I don't know that he wouldn't raise here with the underfull like T-7-x-x or 9-7-x-x, but I'm guessing he probably would have bet the flop with that, too.

Action: I call.



River (\$14.85): I check. My opponent bets \$14.85.

You know what? I am going to call him this time.

Action: I call. My opponent shows A♦ Q♣ J♥ T♣ for two pair, tens and sevens.

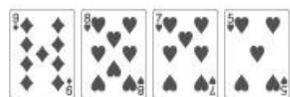
I'm surprised he didn't bet the flop with that.

Hand #76: 9-8-7-5 against AA, Ultra-low SPR

The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



I posted a dead \$0.25 small blind in the cutoff.

Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack (\$83.95) calls. I (\$70.70) raise to \$2.50. The button (\$87.75) calls. The small blind (\$17.90) re-raises to \$11.25. The big blind folds. The hijack folds. I call, and the button calls.

I'll give the small blind credit for A-A-x-x here.



Flop (\$35): The small blind bets \$6.65 all-in.

I definitely can't fold with one pair getting better than 6:1 against A-A-x-x all-in.

Action: I call. The other player folds. The small blind shows A♦ A♠ 5♦ 2♦.



Turn (\$48.30):



River (\$48.30): I win.

Hand #77: A-3-3-4, Turn Wheel

The game: \$0.25-\$0.50 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$83.45) calls. I (\$98.45) call. The button folds. The small blind (\$45.45) calls. The big blind checks.



Flop (\$2): Everybody checks to me. I bet \$2. Both blinds fold, but the UTG player calls.

Standard bet in late position.



Turn (\$6): My opponent bets \$3.

I now have a wheel (plus blockers), but no flush draw. Had my opponent bet the full pot, I might be inclined to smooth call. But I don't think he has the straight. And given that, I should raise.

Action: I raise to \$15. My opponent re-raises to \$51.

It's possible I was wrong.

Action: I re-raise all-in. My opponent calls for \$29.95. My opponent shows A♦ A♠ Q♦ 4♥ for a set of aces.



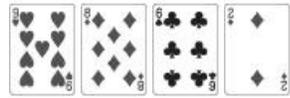
River (\$167.90): I win.

Hand #78: Flush, Heads Up with Position

The game: \$1-\$2 with \$5 bring-in, five-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$300) limps in. The cutoff folds. I (\$900) limp in. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$600) – a somewhat loose-aggressive player – raises to \$25. The UTG player folds. I call.

Standard limp from the button. Super standard call of the raise when I am guaranteed to see the flop heads up with the positional advantage on the pre-flop raiser.



Flop (\$56): My opponent checks.

The play is to check behind and make this a two-street affair. Doing so may encourage a bluff, whereas betting may end the pot prematurely.



Turn (\$56): My opponent announces “pot” and bets \$60. I call.

Standard. You can't really fold a flush heads up for one bet against normal opponents – especially after you've checked the previous street and shown weakness.



River (\$176): My opponent announces “pot” again and bets \$180.

This one is more of a judgment call. To bet the full pot here, my opponent basically either has the nuts (or maybe second nuts) or nothing. That said, I think my opponent probably bets the flop with the nuts. I am also a little more inclined to call in a heads-up pot.

Action: I call, and take the pot with the flush.

Hand #79: Floating

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The cutoff (\$307.25) raises to \$7. I (\$180.70) call. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$183) calls.



Flop (\$22): The big blind checks. The cutoff bets \$22.

This is not a bad spot for a float, with a gutshot and backdoor hearts on a dry board.

Action: I call. The big blind folds.



Turn (\$66): The cutoff checks. I bet \$40 and my opponent folds.

Hand #80: 3-Betting Pre-flop

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$53.65) and hijack (\$112.25) both call. The cutoff (\$130) raises to \$5.50. I (\$163.45) re-raise to \$10. Both blinds and the UTG player fold. The hijack calls, as does the cutoff.

I was really just experimenting with the min re-raise. I could just as easily have flat called, or raised more. That said, we now have a low-SPR, Pump-and-Shove situation.



Flop (\$32.50): Both opponents check. I bet \$32.50, and both opponents fold.

Hand #81: 3-Betting Pre-flop

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. The hijack (\$632.50) raises to \$7. I (\$213.40) re-raise to \$12. The button and both blinds fold. The hijack calls.



Flop (\$27): My opponent checks. I bet \$20, and my opponent folds.

Standard c-bet.

Hand #82: Floating

The game: \$1-\$2 online (6-max), six-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$227.05) limp in UTG. The hijack (\$208.20) raises to \$9. The cutoff folds. The button (\$206.40) calls. The small blind folds. The big blind (\$620.50) calls. I call.



Flop (\$37): The big blind bets \$24. I call, and the other two players fold.

I have a pair, a gutshot, and flush draw against a weak stab. This is a somewhat risky float with two players left to act behind me.



Turn (\$85):

Now I've got a double-nut gutter with the flush draw.

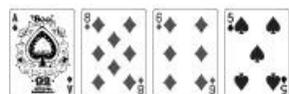
Action: The big blind checks. I bet \$85 and my opponent folds.

Hand #83: Top Two Pair, Underfull

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), five-handed, one blind

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player (\$92.10) limps in. The next two players fold. I (\$228.90) raise to \$4. Both the big blind (\$62.25) and limper call.



Flop (\$12): Both opponents check. I bet \$12, and only the big blind calls.



Turn (\$36): The big blind checks. I check.

In this spot, you should sometimes check to try to induce action on the river, and sometimes bet. The fact that I am unlikely to get outdrawn (a player with bare trips can't make a bigger full house) pushes the needle towards checking.



River (\$36): The big blind checks. I bet \$21, and the big blind calls. The big blind shows $K\clubsuit 8\heartsuit 4\spadesuit 3\clubsuit$ for trip eights, having flopped the nut flush draw.

Hand #84: Playing with the Initiative, Bluff Raise

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), five-handed

My position: Cutoff

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$357.75) raise to \$3.50. The button and small blind both fold. The big blind (\$37.05) calls.



Flop (\$7.50): The big blind checks. I check.

I can't bet every flop. I could go either way with this one. I do have overcards and some backdoor wrap/combo potential.



Turn (\$7.50): The big blind bets \$5.

This is a good spot for a bluff raise. Basically, my opponent either has a nine or he doesn't, and I think he would take a stab here with any four cards

(wouldn't you?).

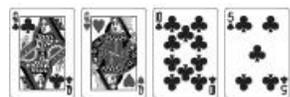
Action: I raise to \$14, and my opponent folds.

Hand #85: Queens Up

The game: \$0.50-\$1 online (6-max), four-handed

My position: Button

My hand:



Pre-flop: The UTG player folds. I (\$420.70) raise to \$3.50. The small blind (\$36.50) calls. The big blind (\$347.40) calls.

I'm not a big fan of raising with what is basically a dry pair.



Flop (\$10.50): Both blinds check. I check.

I am probably not going to get an ace to fold by betting. I might have the best hand, and I have clubs and a full house draw. I don't mind checking this hand through unimproved.



Turn (\$10.50): Both blinds check. I check.



River (\$10.50): Both blinds check. I check. Small blind shows 9♥ 9♣ 8♥ 6♥. Big blind shows Q♦ Q♠ 4♦ 3♥ for queens up, and we split the pot.

Hand #86: Underpair, Sucker Gutshot, Second-Nut Flush Draw

The game: \$2-\$5, four-handed

My position: UTG

My hand:



Pre-flop: I (\$900) limp in. The button (\$575) – a fairly loose raiser pre-flop, but a fairly competent player post-flop – raises to \$25. Both blinds (\$400 and \$375, respectively) call. I call.



Flop (\$100): The small blind checks. The big blind – a very loose/bad player -- bets \$50.

Ok, so I have an underpair, a sucker gutshot, and the second nut flush draw. I think the big blind could have a lot of things – including some kind of straight draw, with or without clubs. This is a scary board against a pre-flop raiser and two cards in the middle range – 7-6. Given this particular player in the big blind, I would like to isolate with my flush draw, gut shot, and set draw. If I raise, I may be able to get the button to fold an ace and maybe even two pair.

This is a mid-high-SPR situation (SPR of 7 with the big blind, SPR 11 with the button), and so this is judgment territory. I could fold pretty easily here, but I want to take a shot at isolating the big blind and whatever he is holding.

Action: I raise to \$250. The button ponders for literally a minute or two, and then finally shoves all-in for \$550. The small blind and big blind both fold.

I don't believe the button thinks that long if he has the nut flush draw to go with whatever else he has. And so, as long as I think my flush draw is live, I have to call.

Action: I call.



Turn (\$1,250):



River (\$1,250): I win with a flush. The button didn't have an ace, and so he likely had some kind of straight draw – probably with a flush draw – which I am well ahead of with my overpair to the draw and high flush draw.

Hand #87: Second-Nut Straight, Value-Betting the River

The game: \$2-\$5-\$10 with Mississippi Straddle, five-handed

My position: Button Straddle

My hand:



Pre-flop: Both blinds call. The next player folds. The cutoff (\$700) calls. I (\$1,500) check.



Flop (\$40): Both blinds check. The cutoff (\$700) bets \$40. I call. Both blinds fold.

I know, Bad Jeff. Reflex float with a double-sucker gutter (plus blocker draws!).



Turn (\$120): My opponent checks.

I have to think my straight is good.

Action: I bet \$120, and my opponent calls.



River (\$360): My opponent checks.

Well, unless my opponent checked the nut straight twice, then I have the best hand. My problem is that the 7♦ on the turn filled the obvious straight, so it will be a little difficult to get value if I make anything bigger than a piddling bet.

Action: I bet \$100, and he calls with A-A-7-6 for a set of aces.

Hand #88: Checking-and-Calling, Check-Raising

The game: \$2-\$5, three-handed

My position: Small Blind

My hand:



The big blind is an older guy, and a relative newbie to Omaha.

Pre-flop: The button (\$500) limps. I (\$2,100) call. The big blind (\$540) raises to \$20. The button folds. I call.



Flop (\$45): I check.

Standard check-and-call situation with top pair out of position against the pre-flop raiser.

Action: My opponent bets \$45. I call.



Turn (\$135): I check. My opponent bets \$100.

I can go ahead and raise this weak stab turn bet. My opponent only has a \$475 stack, so the penalty for being wrong at this point isn't steep; I also picked up a gutshot for backup.

Action: I raise to \$400. My opponent goes all-in for \$475 total. I call. My opponent has A♣ Q♣ T♣ T♦ for an underpair and the nut flush draw.



River (\$1,085): I win.

Hand #89: Overpair and Gutshot, Blind vs. Blind

The game: \$2-\$5, six-handed

My position: Big Blind

My hand:



Pre-flop: Everybody folds to the small blind (\$500), who raises to \$15. I (\$2,000) call.



Flop (\$30): My opponent bets \$30. I call.

Standard Small Ball call with an overpair, a nut gutshot draw, and position.



Turn (\$90): My opponent bets \$70.

I have enough to raise against a weak stab turn bet. It helps that the penalty for being wrong is not so steep with my opponent sitting on just \$455.

Action: I raise to \$300, and my opponent folds.

