

TIGHT 
POKER

TIGHT POKER ORIGINAL

100 **PLAYS**

THE STRATEGIES BEHIND POKER'S GREATEST HANDS



Paul Seaton

A Tight Poker eBook · 2026 Edition

tightpoker.com

100 PLAYS

CONTENTS

PART ONE • PREFLOP

01	The Power of Position	5
02	Small Ball	6
03	Stealing the Blinds Is Not Optional	7
04	The Light 3-Bet Revolution	8
05	Three-Betting for Value in Position	9
06	The 4-Bet Bluff as a Weapon	10
07	Knowing When to Fold Kings Preflop	11
08	Defending the Big Blind Wide	12
09	The Danger of Over-Defending	13
10	Isolation Raises Against Limpers	14
11	Know Your Stack	15
12	Open-Shoving Short	16
13	Satellite Strategy: When to Fold Aces	17
14	The Squeeze Play	18

PART TWO • POSTFLOP

15	The Continuation Bet	20
16	When NOT to C-Bet	21
17	Reading the Board	22
18	Dry Boards Are Your Friend	23
19	Thin Value on the River	24
20	Maximum Value with a Monster	25
21	Value Betting Against Calling Stations	26
22	The Bluff of the Century	27
23	The Three-Barrel Bluff	28
24	Bluffing Into a Capped Range	29
25	The Overbet Bluff	30
26	The Check-Raise as a Weapon	31
27	Check-Raise Bluffing with Equity	32
28	The Polarising Overbet	33
29	Betting When It Feels Too Thin	34
30	The Jack-High Hero Call	35
31	The Ten-High Hero Call	36
32	Range Elimination	37
33	Hellmuth Folds Queens Face-Up	38
34	Folding the Second Nuts	39
35	The Controversial Fold	40
36	Pot Control with Medium Hands	41
37	When Pot Control Is Wrong	42
38	The Art of the Slow-Play	43
39	When Table Talk Replaces Strategy	44
40	The Power of the Semi-Bluff	45
41	Small Bets, Big Edge	46
42	What Your Bet Size Says About You	47

PART THREE • TOURNAMENT STRATEGY

43	AA vs. KK vs. KK: The Ultimate Bubble Hand	49
44	Exploiting the Bubble as the Big Stack	50
45	Surviving the Bubble as a Short Stack	51
46	The ICM Punt	52
47	ICM Isn't Just for the Bubble	53
48	Final Table Aggression Pays	54
49	Pay Attention to Table Dynamics	55
50	The Final Table Ladder	56

PART THREE • TOURNAMENT STRATEGY

51	Heads-Up Aggression	57
52	The Limping Strategy	58
53	The Art of Shoving Light	59
54	Chip and a Chair	60
55	The Big Stack Bully	61
56	Satellite Mentality vs. Tournament Mentality	62
57	The Early Levels: Speculate Cheaply	63
58	The Middle Levels: Tighten and Steal	64
59	Doyle Brunson's 10-2: When Results Don't Equal Strategy	65
60	Matt Affleck's Aces Cracked	66

PART FOUR • CASH GAMES

61	Playing Deep: Implied Odds Reign	68
62	The Biggest Pot in Televised Poker History	69
63	Adjusting to Recreational Players	70
64	Reading the Table, Not Just Your Cards	71
65	The Most Important Decision Happens Before You Sit Down	72

PART FIVE • READING OPPONENTS

66	Trusting Physical Reads	74
67	The Speech Play	75
68	The Speed of Decision	76
69	Online Timing Tells	77
70	When the Size Tells the Story	78
71	Using Your Image	79
72	Rebuilding Your Image After Getting Caught	80
73	The Eye to the Sky	81
74	Reading Strength vs. Reading Weakness	82

PART SIX • PSYCHOLOGY AND MENTAL GAME

75	The Tilt Trap	84
76	Inducing Tilt in Your Opponents	85
77	The Discipline to Quit a Session	86
78	Playing Within Your Bankroll	87
79	Active Patience	88
80	Waiting Through a Downswing	89
81	Playing Your Game, Not Theirs	90
82	Overconfidence Is a Leak	91
83	Process Over Results	92
84	The One-Decision Mindset	93
85	The \$0 to \$10,000 Challenge	94
86	Knowing When to Walk Away	95

PART SEVEN • ONLINE POKER

87	Exploiting Population Tendencies	97
88	The Multi-Tabling Decision	98
89	The Review That Wins You Money Tomorrow	99
90	The Live-to-Online Transition	100

PART EIGHT • ADVANCED CONCEPTS

91	Thinking in Ranges, Not Hands	102
92	Using Blockers to Bluff	103
93	When to Abandon the Solver	104
94	The Long Game: Metagame Adjustment	105
95	Becoming Dangerous in Every Game	106
96	Accepting Variance	107
97	Nash Equilibrium in Practice	108
98	The Player Who Never Stops Evolving	109
99	The Hand That Broke the Internet	110
100	Poker Is a Lifetime Game	111

Introduction

This book exists for one reason:

TO MAKE YOU A BETTER POKER PLAYER

Every chapter is built around a real hand or decision from professional poker. From Stu Ungar's dominance in the 1997 WSOP Main Event to a \$3.1 million pot on *Hustler Casino Live*, these 100 poker plays span five decades of the game's most instructive moments.

But this is not a history book. Every story leads to a lesson. Every lesson leads to something you can use at the poker table tonight.

The format is simple. Each play gives you the situation, the action, the strategy behind it and a practical example you can apply with your own game right away. There is no filler. If a section does not help you win more pots, it has been folded preflop like seven-deuce off.

You don't need to read this book from start to finish. Jump to the section that matters most to your game right now. Struggling with bluffs? Start at Play #22. Leaking chips in tournaments? Go to Play #43. Want to crush the calling stations at your local \$1/\$2 game? Play #21 has your answer.

But one last thing; famous hands are not always well-played hands. Several chapters feature plays that looked brilliant on camera but were actually mistakes. When a play was bad strategy, this book says so. The lesson always matters more than the result, and you can learn from the good, the bad and the downright ugly at the poker felt.

Disclaimer: This book is for educational and entertainment purposes only. It is not financial or gambling advice. The strategic analysis reflects the authors' interpretation of publicly documented hands and events, not the confirmed reasoning of the players involved. The inclusion of any player's name or likeness does not imply their endorsement of this book or its contents.

PART ONE



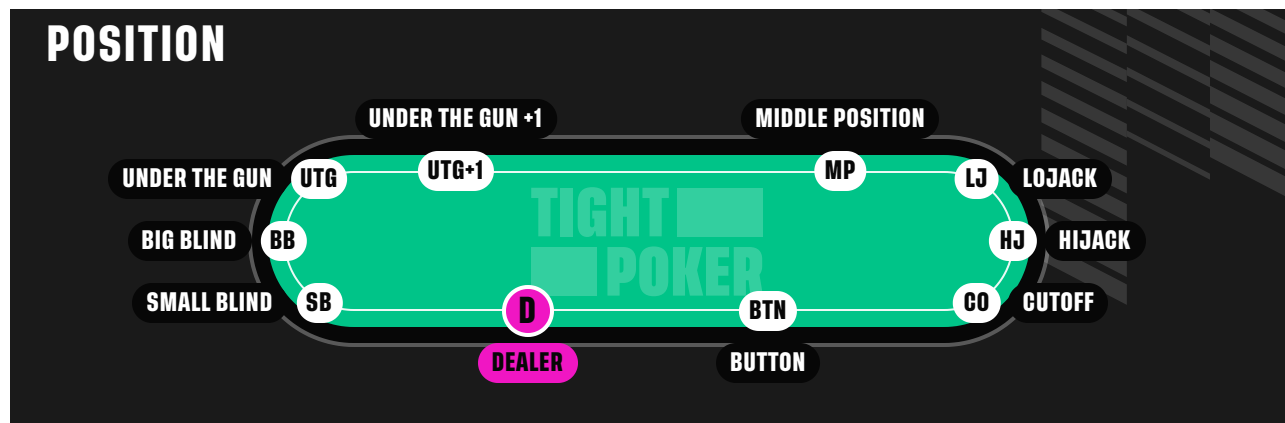
01

PREFLOP

01

THE POWER OF POSITION

Stu Ungar walked into the 1997 WSOP Main Event outside at Binion's in the only 'al fresco' World Championship final table and dominated without needing to get lucky. Hand-for-hand records later showed that Ungar opened around 30% of hands with raises always sized between 3x and 3.5x the big blind. This was decades before solvers confirmed consistent sizing was optimal.



By never varying his raise size, Ungar gave nothing away. His opponents could not tell whether he held aces or king-ten. That edge compounded over hundreds of hands and produced one of the most commanding final table performances in Main Event history.

AT THE TABLE

You're on the button with $K\spadesuit T\heartsuit$. Raise to 2.5x. With $A\spadesuit A\clubsuit$, raise to the same 2.5x. When opponents cannot read your hand through your sizing, every pot becomes harder for them to play.

THE PLAY

Pick one raise size and stick to it. Consistency is your first line of defense.

02 **SMALL BALL**

Daniel Negreanu won the 2004 WPT Five Diamond Classic by playing more hands than anyone at the table while risking less in each one. His approach was straightforward: open wider with smaller raises, keep pots small and outplay opponents after the flop.

Where most players of that era raised to 4x with premium hands only, Negreanu raised to 2x or 2.5x with hands like Q♠J♥ and 8♠7♠ from late position. The small raise risked little when he missed and still won the blinds when everyone folded.

AT THE TABLE

From the cutoff or button, raise to 2.5x with any reasonable hand. You will win the blinds often enough to profit, and the hands you play postflop will cost less when they do not work out.

THE PLAY

You do not need premium hands to win tournaments. You need position and postflop skill.

03 STEALING THE BLINDS IS NOT OPTIONAL

Fedor Holz achieved one of the most dominant tournament runs in history across 2016. His \$3.5M finish at the Super High Roller Bowl and \$4.98M win at the One Drop were powered by one relentless habit: stealing blinds from late position with marginal hands.

THE STEAL

SB 500	BB 1,000	Ante 1,000	=	Dead money 3,500	VS	Raise 2,200
-----------	-------------	---------------	---	---------------------	----	----------------

Every orbit, the blinds and antes create dead money. At blinds of 500/1,000 with a 1,000 big blind ante, that is 3,500 chips sitting unclaimed. Holz attacked this money constantly from the cutoff and button, raising with holdings most players would fold.

AT THE TABLE

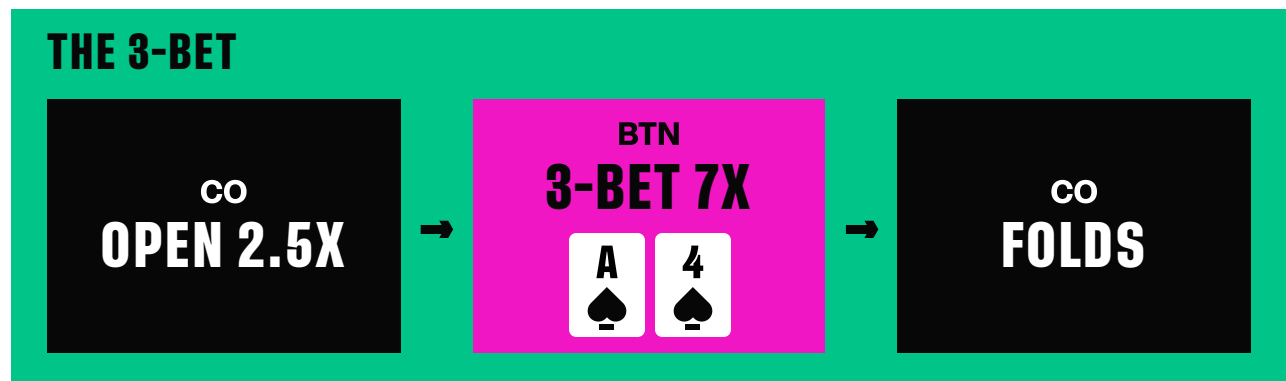
If you raise to 2,200 from the button three times per orbit and everyone folds twice, you win 7,000 chips while risking 6,600. Even if you get called once and give up, you profit. Stealing blinds is not gambling. It is rent collection.

THE PLAY

Failing to steal from late position is a slow leak that drains your stack orbit by orbit.

04 THE LIGHT 3-BET REVOLUTION

Tom Dwan changed poker during Seasons 5 and 6 of *High Stakes Poker*. In 2008 and 2009, Dwan routinely 3-bet with hands like suited connectors and small suited aces, a strategy that baffled the old guard and forced every player at the table to rethink their opening ranges.



A 3-bet is a re-raise before the flop. Before Dwan, most players only 3-bet with aces, kings, queens or ace-king. Dwan 3-bet with hands like A♠5♠ and 7♠6♠, knowing most opponents would fold to the re-raise. When they did call, he had position and a hand that could flop well.

The cutoff raises to 2.5x. You are on the button with A♠4♠. You 3-bet to 7x. He folds. You win 4.5 big blinds without seeing a card. Do this three times per session and you have added a meaningful edge to your game without ever needing to get lucky.

THE PLAY

A balanced 3-bet range that includes bluffs makes your entire game harder to play against.

05 THREE-BETTING FOR VALUE IN POSITION

Phil Ivey 3-bet with A-K against a loose opener on Season 2 of *High Stakes Poker* and then extracted maximum value postflop through patient, street-by-street betting. The hand demonstrated why 3-betting with premium holdings from position is so profitable.

You hold A♠K♦ on the button. A loose player opens to 3x from middle position. You 3-bet to 9x. Now you are heads-up, in position, with a premium hand and a swollen pot. If the flop comes K-7-2, you can bet confidently because the 3-bet has already told you where you stand.

AT THE TABLE

When you just call a raise with A-K, you keep the pot small and invite other players to join cheaply. When you 3-bet, you build a bigger pot and thin the field to one opponent. If you also have position, you can dictate the pace across all three streets.

THE PLAY

With a premium hand and position, 3-betting builds the pot and simplifies your decisions on each street.

06

THE 4-BET BLUFF AS A WEAPON

Stephen Chidwick demonstrated the power of blocker-based play at the 2019 PCA \$100K Super High Roller. Holding A-J from under the gun, Chidwick made a river bluff for his entire stack minus a single 5K chip, a sizing that represented the nuts and gave his opponent an almost impossible decision.

A blocker is a card in your hand that reduces the chance your opponent holds a specific strong hand. Chidwick's A♠ meant there was one fewer ace in the deck and he knew that his opponent didn't have the nut flush on a three-spade board.

AT THE TABLE

You do not need to understand blockers at a solver level. The simple version: when you hold the ace of a suit and three cards of that suit are on the board, your opponent is less likely to have the flush and cannot have the nut flush. That makes your bluff more credible, because you are holding one of the cards they might need to make that crucial call.

THE PLAY

Advanced bluffing is about the calling hands you block, not the cards you hold.

07 KNOWING WHEN TO FOLD KINGS PREFLOP

Nicolas Manion folded pocket kings to a 5-bet shove on the 2018 WSOP Main Event final table bubble, one day before the legendary AA versus KK versus KK hand. It was one of the most disciplined plays in Main Event history.

A 5-bet shove means the pot has been raised four times already. By that point, the all-in player's range is highly likely to be aces or kings. If you hold kings and face a 5-bet, you are either well ahead against ace-king or crushed by aces. In a cash game, you call every time. But when busting costs you a million-dollar pay jump, the math changes completely.

AT THE TABLE

On the final table bubble of any major tournament, ask yourself: is the money I gain from winning this pot worth the money I lose if I bust? With kings against a 5-bet shove, the answer can be no.

THE PLAY

In extreme tournament spots, even kings can be a fold. Trust the math, not your ego.

08 DEFENDING THE BIG BLIND WIDE

Doug Polk won 59.4% of hands at showdown from the big blind during his 25,000-hand heads-up challenge against Daniel Negreanu. That is a remarkable number from a position most players consider hopeless.

The key is the discount. When you are in the big blind and someone raises to 2.5x, you already have 1 big blind invested. You only need to call 1.5x more to see a flop. At that price, hands like J♠8♠, Q♥7♥ and 9♦8♦ become profitable calls.

Most recreational players fold far too much from the big blind and bleed chips as a result. If you are folding 70% or more of your big blinds to a single raise, you are giving away money. Start defending wider with hands that play well postflop. Suited cards, connected cards and any pair are all reasonable.

THE PLAY

The big blind gets a discount. Use it. Defending wider heads-up plugs one of the most common leaks in poker.

09

THE DANGER OF OVER-DEFENDING

Sammy Farha's call with $\heartsuit Q \spadesuit 9$ from the big blind against Moneymaker during the 2003 WSOP Main Event heads-up match created the postflop nightmare that became known as the 'Bluff of the Century'. The hand Farha chose to defend with left him stuck on every street.

Defending your blind is important, but not with every hand out of position. Q-9 offsuit flops top pair with a bad kicker, second pair, or nothing useful. Every postflop decision becomes a guess.

Compare $\heartsuit Q \spadesuit 9$ with $\spadesuit J \heartsuit T$. Same discount, same position, but J-T suited can flop straights, flush draws and two-pair combos much easier. When deciding which hands to defend with, ask yourself whether they make easy postflop decisions. If you will face three streets of uncertainty, fold preflop and save yourself the trouble.

THE PLAY

Defend your blind with hands that flop well, not just hands that look decent.

10 ISOLATION RAISES AGAINST LIMPERS

On *High Stakes Poker*, Jennifer Harman repeatedly punished Phil Hellmuth's fondness for limp-trapping. Hellmuth loved limping in with premium hands, hoping to reraise when someone raised behind him. Harman's counter was a textbook isolation raise. By sizing it large enough to thin the field but small enough that Hellmuth's trap became awkward, she seized control of the pot. It was, as one commentator noted, a “measured, no-nonsense” destruction of a fancy play.

An isolation raise works like this: a player limps for one big blind. You are in the cutoff with A♠T♥. Instead of limping behind and inviting three more callers, raise to 4x. The players behind fold and you are heads-up in position against the limper.

Isolation turns a messy multiway pot into a clean, profitable heads-up spot. The key is raising big enough to fold out the players behind you, then using your position to control the hand postflop.

THE PLAY

When a player limps in, raise to isolate. Passive preflop play invites punishment... so punish them.

11

KNOW YOUR STACK

Mikita Badziakouski made one of the costliest miscounts in high-stakes history at the 2025 Triton \$250K Invitational. On the final table bubble, with 10 players remaining and \$7.7 million up top, Badziakouski 3-bet jammed **A♦T♥** against Norwegian chip leader Kayhan Mokri, thinking he had 12 big blinds. He actually had 16.2 bigs.

That difference matters enormously.

GTO Wizard analysis showed that with 12 big blinds, jamming A-T is the solver-approved play. With 16.2 big blinds, jamming is the worst option. The correct play was a standard 3-bet to five big blinds, which would have preserved the option to fold if Mokri shoved. Badziakouski muttered “what a stupid jam” before the cards were even revealed. Shortly after, he was eliminated.

Before every hand, count your stack in big blinds. Not approximately. Exactly. At tournaments, keep your chips in neat, countable piles. With 12 big blinds, the correct strategy is completely different from when you have 16 bigs. A few extra chips can change everything.

THE PLAY

Know your exact stack at all times. Miscounts turn winning plays into expensive losses.

12

OPEN-SHOVING SHORT

Dara O'Kearney's satellite strategy is built around one principle: when your stack is between 10 and 20 big blinds, open-shoving is often better than making a standard raise.

The logic is clean. You have 15 big blinds and A♠J♦ on the button. If you raise to 2.5x and the big blind shoves 25 big blinds, you must call 12.5 more with A-J, a miserable spot. But if you shove all 15, the big blind has to risk their tournament life to look you up. They will fold most hands. You collect the blinds and antes with no further risk.

Open-shoving removes the possibility of facing a reshove. It puts the difficult decision on your opponent. With 10 to 20 big blinds and a decent hand in late position, going all-in as your first action is frequently the highest-value play.

THE PLAY

With a short stack, open-shoving eliminates awkward reshove spots and puts the pressure on your opponents.

13 SATELLITE STRATEGY: WHEN TO FOLD ACES

Staying with the Irishman O'Kearney, the live and online poker pro has demonstrated through ICM analysis that on a satellite bubble with a comfortable stack, folding pocket aces against a short stack's shove can be the mathematically correct play.

A satellite awards 10 seats to a \$10K event. Eleven players remain. You have 50 big blinds. A short stack with 8 big blinds shoves from early position. You look down at A♠A♣. In a regular tournament, you call instantly. But in a satellite, if you fold, you will almost certainly win a seat worth \$10K. If you call and lose (roughly 18% of the time), you are crippled and might bubble for nothing but a bad beat story.

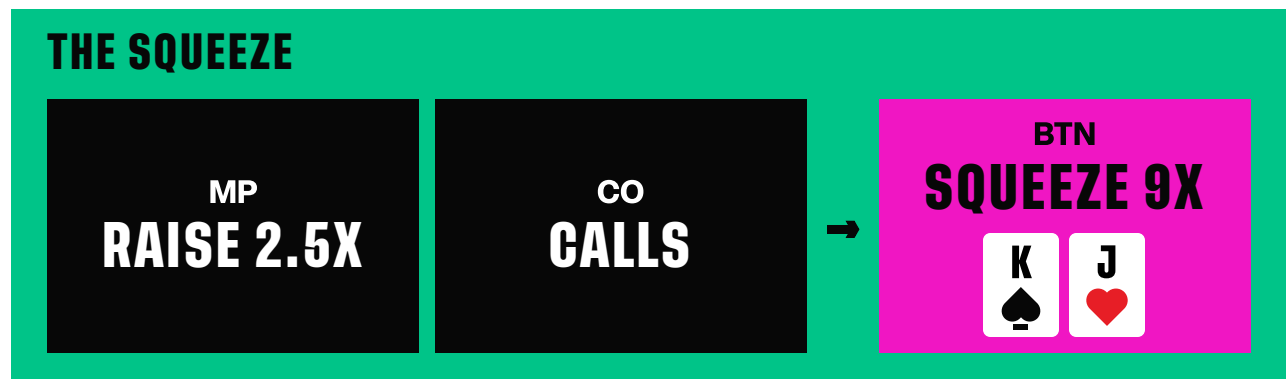
This only applies to satellites, where first and last qualifying spots pay the same prize. In a normal tournament, you should always call with aces. But in a satellite near the bubble, survival matters more than chips. The \$10K seat is worth more than the small pot you would win.

THE PLAY

In satellites near the bubble, survival outweighs everything. Even aces can be a fold.

14 THE SQUEEZE PLAY

Dan Harrington popularized the squeeze play in *Harrington on Hold'em* and it remains one of the most profitable preflop weapons available.



The setup is specific: one player raises and a second player calls. The caller's range is capped because with a premium hand, they would have re-raised. From late position, you 3-bet big. The original raiser folds because two players behind them now have position and aggression. The caller folds because their hand was never strong enough to continue against a 3-bet.

A player in middle position raises to 2.5x. The cutoff calls. You are on the button with K♠ J♥. You 3-bet to 9x. Both players fold. You collect six big blinds without seeing a flop. The squeeze works because you are attacking two ranges that have both shown moderate strength and neither can comfortably continue.

THE PLAY

When there is a raise and a cold call, a re-raise from late position wins the pot very often.

PART TWO

02

POSTFLOP

Plays 15–42

28 Plays

15

THE CONTINUATION BET

On *High Stakes Poker*, Phil Ivey c-bet nearly every dry flop after raising preflop, whether he held aces or nine-high. His opponents could never tell. On a board like K♠7♦2♣, Ivey fired a third of the pot regardless of his holding. Over six seasons, that consistency made his c-bets impossible to read. The preflop raiser owns the story on these boards, and Ivey told it every time.

A continuation bet is simply betting the flop after you raised preflop. You raised with A♦Q♣ and the flop comes K♠7♦2♥. You missed completely, but your opponent does not know that. You bet a third of the pot. Your opponent, holding 8♠8♦, sees a king on the board and a bet from the preflop raiser. They fold. The c-bet worked because the board confirmed the story you told preflop.

Not every flop deserves a c-bet. But on dry, high-card boards that favor your range as the preflop raiser, betting is often correct regardless of your cards.

THE PLAY

A c-bet works because your opponent expects it. On boards that favor your range, bet.

16

WHEN NOT TO C-BET

On *Poker After Dark*, Patrik Antonius 3-bet with $A\heartsuit K\spadesuit$ and saw a flop of $10\heartsuit 7\diamondsuit 7\clubsuit$. He fired a c-bet of \$16,000. Tom Dwan, holding $5\clubsuit 3\spadesuit$ with nothing but air, check-raised to \$43,300 and Antonius folded. Dwan later explained the raise worked precisely because the board favored the caller's range far more than the 3-bettor's. Antonius' c-bet into a board full of trips, pairs and straight draws was the mistake Dwan was waiting for.

When the flop clearly connects with your opponent's range better than yours, checking back is the strongest play. You preserve your stack, take a free card that might improve your hand, and avoid building a pot you cannot win.

AT THE TABLE

You raised with $A\spadesuit Q\heartsuit$ and the flop comes $8\heartsuit 7\heartsuit 6\clubsuit$. This board is drenched in draws and connected cards. Your opponent, who called from the big blind, is far more likely to have hands like 9-8, 7-6, or a heart draw. Betting ace-high into this board is donating chips.

THE PLAY

Not every flop deserves a bet. When the board favors the caller's range, check back and save your chips.

17

READING THE BOARD

Daniel Negreanu folded a king-high flush (the third nuts) against a tight opponent in the 2019 WSOP Main Event. The fold looked insane. But Negreanu recognized that his opponent's betting line, check-calling the flop then leading the turn, only made sense with the top two flushes.



Daniel Negreanu, 2019 WSOP Main Event. AP Photo/John Locher

Board texture refers to how the community cards connect. $K\spadesuit 7\heartsuit 2\clubsuit$ is dry: few draws, few two-pair combinations. $J\heartsuit T\spadesuit 9\heartsuit$ is wet: straights, flush draws and two-pair possibilities everywhere. Your hand's value changes dramatically based on which type of board you are looking at.

Top pair on K-7-2 is strong. Top pair on J-T-9 is vulnerable. Before every postflop decision, ask: how many hands in my opponent's range beat me on this specific board? That question matters more than whether your hand is good in isolation.

THE PLAY

Your hand does not exist in isolation. The board texture determines its real value.

18

DRY BOARDS ARE YOUR FRIEND

Johnny Chan flopped the nut straight against Erik Seidel in the 1988 WSOP Main Event final. Holding J-9 on a Q-T-8 board, Chan checked every street and let Seidel bet into him with top pair. It is one of the most famous slow-plays in poker history.

On dry boards where your opponent cannot have many draws, checking with a monster lets them catch up or bluff. If you bet, they fold everything except strong hands. If you check, they might fire with a hand they would never call a bet with.

This only works when free cards are safe. On Q-T-8 with no flush draw, another card is unlikely to beat Chan's straight. But on a wet board with flush and straight draws everywhere, giving a free card is dangerous. Slow-play only when the board is dry enough that checking does not risk your hand.

THE PLAY

On dry boards, checking a monster lets opponents bluff or catch up. Only slow-play when free cards are safe.

19

THIN VALUE ON THE RIVER

Jonathan Little has built an entire coaching philosophy around one idea: most players leave money on the table by not betting the river with marginal hands.

If you had checked, you would have won the same pot but missed the extra bet. Over hundreds of sessions, those missed bets represent thousands of dollars. Thin value means betting a hand that is only slightly ahead of what your opponent might call with. The question is simple: does your hand beat more calling hands than it loses to? If yes, bet.

AT THE TABLE

You hold J♠9♦ on a board of J♥8♣4♦2♠5♣. Your opponent checked the flop and turn. Their range is capped. They probably do not have anything big, or they would have bet. You bet a third of the pot on the river. They call with A♠8♠. Your pair of jacks wins.

THE PLAY

Missing one thin value bet per session can cost you thousands over a year. When you are likely ahead, bet.

20 MAXIMUM VALUE WITH A MONSTER

Scotty Nguyen flopped a full house against Kevin McBride in the 1998 WSOP Main Event final hand and built the pot with the patience of a craftsman. His famous line, “[If] you call, it's going to be all over, baby!” came only after he had sized every bet to look perfect to call off.

AT THE TABLE

When you have the nuts, your job is to grow the pot without scaring your opponent away. You flop a set of nines on 9♠6♣3♦ with 10 big blinds in the pot. Betting 8 big blinds might protect against draws, but on this dry board there are almost no draws to protect against. Bet 3 big blinds instead. It looks like a standard c-bet. Your opponent calls with top pair, middle pair or even ace-high. Then bet the turn for the same proportion. By the river, the pot has grown naturally, and your opponent is committed.

THE PLAY

Small bets that get called beat big bets that get folds when you have the best hand.

21 VALUE BETTING AGAINST CALLING STATIONS

Garrett Adelstein exploited Dylan Gang in a \$390,000 pot on *Hustler Casino Live* by raising the flop with top pair and a weak kicker, a line that would be far too thin against a balanced opponent. Adelstein had reviewed previous sessions and identified that Gang called too wide and pushed marginal hands too aggressively. He trusted the read and value bet three streets to stack him.

A calling station is a player who rarely folds. Against them, bluffing is pointless because they call anyway. The adjustment is to bet for value with hands you would normally check. You hold K♠8♦ on a K♥7♣2♠4♦9♣ board. Against a good player, king-eight might not be worth three streets. Against a calling station, bet the flop, the turn and the river. They will call with worse kings, queens, even jacks.

Identify the calling stations at your table. Sit to their left if possible. Then value bet relentlessly and cut your bluffs to near zero. Your profit comes from their inability to fold.

THE PLAY

Against players who call too much, bluff less and value bet more. Let their weakness become your edge.

22

THE BLUFF OF THE CENTURY

Earlier we told you about Sammy Farha's role in the 'Bluff of the Century'. What about the winner in that hand? Chris Moneymaker held K♠7♥ heads-up against Sam Farha's Q♠9♥ in the 2003 WSOP Main Event. The board ran out 9♠2♦6♠8♠3♥. Moneymaker missed every draw and shoved all-in with king-high on the river. Farha tanked for several minutes and folded top pair.

THE HAND

Moneymaker



Farha



Board



The bluff worked because every action across every street told a consistent story. Moneymaker raised preflop, checked a spade-heavy flop (consistent with a made hand or a big draw), raised the turn when the third spade hit, and shoved the river. From Farha's perspective, the line screamed flush.

Before bluffing, ask yourself one question: if I actually had the nuts, would I have played the hand exactly this way? If every action across every street makes sense for a strong hand, your bluff will be believable. If there is a gap in the story, your opponent will find it.

THE PLAY

Great bluffs tell a believable story from start to finish. Every action must be consistent.

23

THE THREE-BARREL BLUFF

Tom Dwan fired three streets with 9♠8♠ against Phil Ivey on *High Stakes Poker* Season 6. The board ran K♦Q♣10♦3♠6♣. Dwan bet \$45,800 on the flop, \$123,200 on the turn and \$268,200 on the river with nothing but nine-high. Ivey paired his six on the river but folded after tanking for over two minutes.

THE HAND

Dwan



Board



A three-barrel bluff requires full commitment. Most players bluff the flop, sometimes the turn, then lose their nerve on the river. The problem with stopping on the river is that you have already invested heavily in the bluff. Giving up wastes everything.

Before bluffing the flop, ask yourself: am I willing to fire all three streets? If the answer is no, do not start. A bluff that stops halfway is worse than no bluff at all because you have donated chips without getting the payoff of fold equity on the final street.

THE PLAY

Commit to the bluff or do not bluff at all. Half measures waste chips.

24 BLUFFING INTO A CAPPED RANGE

Fedor Holz bluffed the river with $6\heartsuit 4\clubsuit$ against Viktor Kudinov at the 2022 Triton Poker Cyprus \$30K final table. The board showed $K\heartsuit Q\heartsuit 2\clubsuit K\spadesuit A\clubsuit$. Holz bet 390,000 targeting the weakest hands in Kudinov's range. Kudinov called with $10\clubsuit 9\spadesuit$ (ten-high) in one of the most remarkable hero calls ever broadcast.

A capped range means your opponent's actions have ruled out their strongest hands. If someone calls preflop, checks the flop and checks the turn, they probably do not have a set, two pair or a big overpair. Their range tops out at weak top pair or worse. That makes a river bluff theoretically sound.

But good players know when you should be bluffing and adjust accordingly. Kudinov read the spot perfectly. The lesson runs both ways: bluffing into capped ranges is profitable, but if your opponent recognizes the setup, they might call you down with almost nothing.

THE PLAY

Bluff when your opponent's range is capped but remember, sharp opponents will adjust.

25

THE OVERBET BLUFF

At the 2019 Super High Roller Bowl London, four players remained and only two would be paid. Stephen Chidwick defended his big blind with A♣2♦ against Christoph Vogelsang's A♦5♠. The board ran out 3♦2♣J♥Q♦10♦, putting three diamonds on the table. Chidwick had flopped bottom pair and nothing else. On the river, he check-raised for most of his stack, representing a flush he did not have. Vogelsang, holding only ace-high, folded.

The bluff worked because the board did the heavy lifting. Three diamonds meant Chidwick's check-raise credibly represented the flush. And the ICM pressure was enormous: calling and losing meant bubbling a seven-figure payday.

Use overbets and large check-raises on boards that polarize your range, meaning your line only makes sense with a monster or a bluff. Against opponents under tournament pressure, those big bets become almost impossible to call with a marginal hand.

THE PLAY

On polarized boards with ICM pressure, a big bluff becomes nearly impossible to call. Let the situation do the work.

26 THE CHECK-RAISE AS A WEAPON

Erik Seidel entered the 2015 EPT Monte Carlo €100K Super High Roller heads-up match as a 3-to-1 underdog in chips against 22-year-old Dzmitry Urbanovich. Over a grueling four-hour session, Seidel erased the deficit largely through relentless check-raising from the big blind. His range was impossible to pin down: sometimes he had the goods, sometimes a draw, sometimes nothing. Urbanovich could never bet comfortably.

A check-raise means checking to your opponent, letting them bet, then raising. You are in the big blind with 9♠8♠ on a 7♣6♦2♠ board. You have an open-ended straight draw. Your opponent c-bets. Instead of calling, you check-raise to three times their bet. Now they need a strong hand to continue. If they fold, you win immediately. If they call, you still have eight outs to hit your straight.

The check-raise turns a defensive position into an aggressive one. Used with both strong hands and draws, it gives you control of the pot from out of position.

THE PLAY

A balanced check-raising range from out of position forces opponents to think twice before betting.

27 CHECK-RAISE BLUFFING WITH EQUITY

During the Galfond Challenge against Chance Kornuth, Phil Galfond trailed by \$350,000 before mounting a comeback over 25,000 hands. A key weapon was check-raising the flop with equity-heavy hands: flush draws, open-enders, gutshots with overcards. Kornuth had to choose between folding and letting Galfond chip away or calling and facing further aggression on the turn with a bloated pot.

Not all check-raise bluffs are equal. The best ones have equity, meaning even if your opponent calls, you can still improve. You hold $A♥5♥$ on a $K♥8♥3♣$ flop. You check-raise. If they fold, you win. If they call, you have nine outs to the nut flush, roughly 35% equity. That is a check-raise with a safety net.

Compare that with $9♦4♣$ on the same board: no draw, no equity, pure air. If your opponent calls, you are stuck bluffing the turn with nothing behind you. When choosing hands to check-raise as a bluff, always prefer hands with draws.

THE PLAY

Check-raise bluff with draws, not with air. Equity gives you a fallback when called.

28

THE POLARISING OVERBET

Tom Dwan tank-called Wesley Fei's river shove with $Q\spadesuit Q\clubsuit$ on *Hustler Casino Live* in May 2023, winning the biggest pot in televised poker history: \$3.1 million. Fei had shoved ace-high as an overbet bluff on a $3\diamondsuit 8\spadesuit 8\diamondsuit 5\heartsuit 6\clubsuit$ board. Dwan calculated that Fei's value range was narrow and his bluffing range was wide enough to justify the call.

When facing a big river overbet, ignore the dollar amount and focus on pot odds. Your opponent shoves 100 big blinds into a 50 big blind pot. You need to call 100 to win 250, which means you need to be right just 40% of the time. If your opponent bluffs more than 40% of the time in that spot, calling is correct, regardless of how scary the bet looks.

Emotion scales with money. Correct decisions do not. Do the math first and feel the feelings later.

THE PLAY

When facing an overbet, calculate pot odds before reacting. The math stays the same no matter the stakes.

29 BETTING WHEN IT FEELS TOO THIN

At the 2018 Triton Poker Montenegro cash game, Jason Koon shoved the river with $A♥Q♣$ on an $A♠5♦3♥6♠T♣$ board against Kane Kalas, who held $T♠T♥$ for a set of tens. The shove looked reckless. Upswing Poker's analysis showed it was only profitable if Koon had enough bluffs in his range that Kalas had to call with worse, which a world-class player like Koon indeed does.

The deeper lesson: thin value bets require you to think about your entire range, not just your hand. If you only bet the river with the nuts, opponents fold everything except hands that beat you. If you bet with a mix of strong hands and bluffs, opponents have to call wider, which makes thinner value bets profitable.

AT THE TABLE

You hold $A♠T♦$ on a $T♣7♠3♦9♥2♣$ board. Your opponent has checked twice. Bet a third of the pot. Their checking range includes 8-7, J-9, and worse. Your hand beats most of what calls.

THE PLAY

Thin value bets only work if your range includes bluffs. Balance your river betting and your value bets print money.

30

THE JACK-HIGH HERO CALL

Erik Seidel called Dzmitry Urbanovich's river bet with jack-high during the heads-up match at the 2015 EPT Monte Carlo €100K Super High Roller. The board showed A-A-x-K-5. Urbanovich had bet 525K into 1.28M with 4♠2♠. Seidel tanked for over five minutes before making one of the greatest calls in tournament history.

A hero call is not about bravery. It is about range analysis. The question is never "Do I have a good hand?" It is "Does my opponent's story make sense?" If someone checked the flop, checked the turn and then suddenly bet big on the river, ask yourself what value hand would play that way. If you cannot name many, they are probably bluffing.

AT THE TABLE

Your actual cards almost do not matter in a hero call situation. You just need to beat their bluffs. Even jack-high works when their range is mostly air.

THE PLAY

Hero calls come from range analysis, not courage. If the story does not add up, your opponent is likely bluffing.

31

THE TEN-HIGH HERO CALL

Viktor Kudinov called Fedor Holz's river bluff with 10♣9♠ at the 2022 Triton Poker Cyprus \$30K final table. The board read K♥Q♥2♣K♠A♣. Holz bet 390,000 with 6♦4♣ and Kudinov found the call. Holz later confirmed the call made strategic sense.

THE HAND

Kudinov



Holz



Board



A bluff-catcher is any hand that only beats bluffs. If the board is K-K-Q-A-2 and you hold T-9, you beat nothing except a bluff. But that is the point. You are not calling because T-9 is strong. You are calling because your opponent's line looks more like a bluff than value.

If the pot offers you 3-to-1 and your opponent bluffs more than 25% of the time, calling with ten-high is mathematically correct. The question is always about their bluffing frequency, not your hand strength.

THE PLAY

In hero call spots, you are not calling because your hand is good. You are calling because your opponent's range contains enough bluffs.

32

RANGE ELIMINATION

Davidi Kitai called Andrew Chen's all-in shove with a pair of fives to win a pivotal pot during the 2012 EPT Berlin Main Event heads-up. Kitai held $K\clubsuit 5\clubsuit$. Chen held $K\spadesuit J\clubsuit$. The board ran $2\spadesuit Q\spadesuit 8\heartsuit 4\spadesuit 5\diamondsuit$. Chen had bet every street, escalating from 615,000 on the flop to 1,480,000 on the turn to a river shove of 11,190,000. Kitai tanked for three minutes and called.

THE HAND

Kitai



Chen



Board



Range elimination is why. Chen's line told a story of maximum strength, but what value hands play this way? With top pair or better, Chen would likely check at least one street to control the pot. Three escalating bets followed by a shove on a board that changed very little looked more like a player trying to push Kitai off a hand than one trying to get paid. The few value hands that fit the line, like a set or two pair, were unlikely given preflop action.

When an opponent's betting line tells a story that only a narrow set of hands would play, and most of those hands are bluffs, you have your answer.

THE PLAY

Track the story street by street. When the line only makes sense as a bluff, trust your read.



HELLMUTH FOLDS QUEENS FACE-UP

Phil Hellmuth folded pocket queens face-up to Art Papazyan's 4-bet shove at the 2017 WPT Legends of Poker, eight players from the final table. Papazyan showed only the 4♦. Hellmuth was almost certainly ahead. He preserved his 27 big blind stack, made the final six and finished second for \$364,370.

A hero fold means letting go of a strong hand because the tournament situation demands it. In a cash game, you snap-call queens against a 4-bet shove. But on the final table bubble with pay jumps of \$50K between places, busting costs far more than winning gains.

There are strong arguments on both sides. Papazyan won the event. Being "too tight" on the bubble can also be a mistake. That tension between survival and aggression is the real lesson.

THE PLAY

In tournament poker, the situation can override your cards. Balance survival with aggression.

34

FOLDING THE SECOND NUTS

Doug Polk folded the second-nut straight against Phil Hellmuth on Season 9 of *High Stakes Poker*. Polk held T-7 for J-T-9-8-7 on a J♠9♠8♥ board. Hellmuth had Q-T for the nut straight. The fold was only possible because Hellmuth's table talk had narrowed his range to exactly Q-T.

Folding a strong hand is only correct when you have a specific, concrete reason. Polk did not fold on instinct. He folded because Hellmuth's words and actions made his holding transparent. "Something feels wrong" is not good enough. You need an identifiable reason.

The lesson is narrow: do not fold strong hands because of vague anxiety. Fold them because specific evidence, like bet sizing, verbal leaks or an opponent's physical behavior, points unmistakably to a hand that beats yours.

THE PLAY

Only fold strong hands when you have concrete evidence you are beaten. Vague worry is not a reason.

35

THE CONTROVERSIAL FOLD

Maria Ho folded a set of tens on a **J♥T♥7♥** monotone flop at the 2017 WSOP Europe Main Event with 21 players remaining. Niall Farrell had open-shoved with **A♥K♣**, the nut flush draw. Ho folded despite holding the best hand at that moment. She finished 6th for €174,365.

Solver analysis from Upswing Poker concluded the fold was a mistake. A set of tens on that flop has roughly 35% equity even against a made flush and over 60% against a flush draw. The board looked scary, but the math supported a call.

This hand shows the tension between feeling beat and calculating equity. Scary boards create fear, but equity does not care about feelings. When you have a set, you almost always have enough equity to continue, even on wet boards. Run the numbers before giving up a strong hand.

THE PLAY

Do not let a scary board scare you out of a profitable call. Calculate your equity first.

36 POT CONTROL WITH MEDIUM HANDS

On *High Stakes Poker*, Patrik Antonius routinely checked back the turn with one-pair hands on coordinated boards, even when he had bet the flop. Against opponents like Dwan and Ivey who could check-raise the turn with both monsters and bluffs, firing a second barrel with a vulnerable hand risked turning a manageable pot into a disaster.

Pot control means deliberately keeping the pot small when your hand is medium-strength. You hold A♠J♦ on a J♣9♠8♥ board. Top pair, but the board is connected with straight and two-pair possibilities. You bet the flop. The turn is a 7♦, making the board even more dangerous. Instead of betting again, you check.

If your opponent bets small, you call. If they bet big, you can fold without losing much. By checking one street, you kept the pot at a size where top pair is still comfortable, rather than building a pot where only better hands continue.

THE PLAY

Not every top pair deserves three streets of value. Check a street to keep the pot manageable.

37

WHEN POT CONTROL IS WRONG

Jonathan Little has argued that many players use pot control as a default rather than a strategy. In a teaching hand, a player checked back top pair on the turn out of fear, then faced a large river bet they could not call.

Pot control works on wet, coordinated boards with medium hands. On dry boards where you have a strong top pair, keep betting. Checking gives your opponent a free card to improve and costs you a bet they would have paid.

AT THE TABLE

You hold K♠Q♦ on K♥4♣2♠. Top pair, good kicker, dry board. Your opponent called your flop bet. The turn is a 6♦. Checking here for "safety" costs you money. On this dry board, your opponent likely has a weaker king, a middle pair or a draw. All of those hands would have called another bet.

THE PLAY

Pot control is a tool, not a default. On dry boards with strong top pair, keep betting.

38

THE ART OF THE SLOW-PLAY

Johnny Chan trapped Erik Seidel in the 1988 WSOP Main Event final with one of the cleanest slow-plays ever recorded. Holding J-9 on a Q-T-8 flop, Chan had flopped the nut straight. He checked every street and let Seidel hang himself betting top pair.

Slow-playing works when three conditions are met: your opponent is aggressive enough to bet if you check, the board is dry enough that free cards will not beat you, and your hand is strong enough to survive another card. Chan's straight on Q-T-8 with no flush draw met all three.

On a wet board with flush draws, slow-playing is dangerous. Giving a free card on 8♥7♥6♣ could easily let your opponent complete a draw and beat you. Save slow-plays for dry boards where you are confident the next card will not change anything.

THE PLAY

Slow-play when the board is dry, your opponent is aggressive and free cards are safe. Otherwise, bet.

39

WHEN TABLE TALK REPLACES STRATEGY

Jamie Gold won the 2006 WSOP Main Event and its \$12 million first prize using a strategy no one has successfully replicated: telling opponents the truth about his hand. His reverse psychology worked so well that the WSOP banned hand disclosure the following year, introducing the 'Jamie Gold Rule'.

Gold would say things like “I have ace-king” while actually holding ace-king. His opponents assumed he was lying and called with worse hands. It worked against a field of 8,773 mostly recreational players. Against regulars who would figure out the pattern within an hour, it would fail.

The broader lesson is that any strategy which relies on your opponent making a specific mistake has a shelf life. Build your game on position, bet sizing and range analysis. Table talk can be a supplement. It should never be a foundation.

THE PLAY

Gimmicks have a shelf life. Build your strategy on fundamentals that work against every opponent type.

40 THE POWER OF THE SEMI-BLUFF

Moneymaker's turn raise against Farha in the Bluff of the Century hand was textbook semi-bluffing. On the 8♠ turn, Moneymaker had both a flush draw and a straight draw. His raise could win two ways: Farha folds immediately, or Moneymaker hits his draw on the river.

A semi-bluff is a bet or raise with a hand that is currently behind but has outs to improve. You hold 8♥7♥ on a 6♠5♣K♦ board with an open-ended straight draw. Any four or nine completes it, giving you eight outs. If you just call, you win only by hitting. If you raise, you can win by fold equity alone and still have backup equity if called.

Semi-bluffs are the backbone of aggressive poker. They combine the immediate profit of fold equity with the fallback of drawing equity.

THE PLAY

Semi-bluffs give you two ways to win: your opponent folds, or you improve. Pure bluffs only give you one.

41

SMALL BETS, BIG EDGE

Adrian Mateos used a small-sizing strategy at the 2026 Triton Montenegro \$200K Invitational, where he won \$6.37 million. Throughout the event, Mateos consistently deployed 25-33% pot c-bets, putting opponents in spots where folding felt wasteful but calling felt uncertain.

The math explains why. A third-pot bet only needs to work 25% of the time to break even. A three-quarter pot bet needs to work 43%. By using smaller sizings, you can c-bet a wider range of hands profitably. The pot is 10 big blinds. You bet 3 with K♠4♣ on K♥7♦2♣. Your opponent folds 40% of the time. You profit. The same fold with a larger bet would risk 7.5 big blinds for the same result.

Modern poker rewards small bets at high frequency over big bets at low frequency. Less risk, same pressure.

THE PLAY

Small bets allow higher c-bet frequency, lower risk and the same fold equity. Size down and bet more.

42 WHAT YOUR BET SIZE SAYS ABOUT YOU

Daniel Negreanu's hand-reading on televised poker often looked like magic. It was not. On *High Stakes Poker*, he routinely announced opponents' exact holdings before showdown, piecing together their range from one clue above all: how much they bet relative to the pot. A large bet from one opponent meant weakness. A small bet from another meant strength. The patterns were consistent, and Negreanu exploited them ruthlessly.

Track your opponents across a session. When a hand goes to showdown, note what they bet and what they held. After a few hours, patterns emerge. Seat 5 bets big with weak hands and small with strong ones. Once you spot that, fold to their big bets and raise their small ones.

To protect yourself from the same exploit, use consistent sizing. Bet the same proportion of the pot regardless of your hand. If you c-bet a third of the pot with a set, also c-bet a third of the pot with air. Consistency prevents leaks and makes you harder to read.

THE PLAY

Your bet sizing is a signal. Keep it consistent and you will stop giving away information for free.



03

TOURNAMENT STRATEGY

43 AA VS. KK VS. KK: THE ULTIMATE BUBBLE HAND

The 2018 WSOP Main Event final table bubble produced a hand that still haunts ICM theorists. Nicolas Manion looked down at A♠A♥. Yueqi Zhu shoved with K♠K♥, Manion reshoved, and Antoine Labat called with K♦K♣. Aces held. Zhu finished 10th for \$850,000. Labat was crippled and went out 9th.

THE HAND

Manion



Zhu



Labat



Labat's call with pocket kings cost him roughly \$350,000 in equity. That sounds absurd. Kings are the second-best hand in poker. But ICM, the Independent Chip Model, means chips aren't worth face value in a tournament. Tenth paid \$850,000. Ninth paid \$1 million. By folding kings, Labat almost certainly makes the final table and locks up seven figures. By calling and losing, he goes home with less.

ICM can turn an obvious call into a clear fold. When the pay jump is enormous and another player is already all-in, even kings deserve a second thought. Run the numbers before you trust your instincts.

THE PLAY

When ICM pressure is at its peak, even pocket kings can be a fold.

44

EXPLOITING THE BUBBLE AS THE BIG STACK

The chip leader on the bubble has a license to steal. Medium stacks, those with 25 to 40 big blinds, are trapped. They cannot call a raise and risk busting before the money. They cannot shove without a premium hand because elimination costs them a guaranteed payday. So they fold.

You are the chip leader with 80 big blinds on the bubble. 55 players remain, 54 get paid. The player in the big blind has 25 big blinds. Raise every hand from late position. They simply cannot afford to play back without the top of their range. Big-stack pressure uses ICM dynamics to print free chips while everyone else tightens up.

AT THE TABLE

On the very first hand of the 2016 WSOP Main Event final table, Qui Nguyen raised to 1.25 million with A♠4♦ from the hijack. Chip leader Cliff Josephy 3-bet to 3.2 million with Q♦9♣. Nguyen 4-bet to 8.25 million. Josephy folded. One hand, zero showdowns, and Nguyen had seized the chip lead. He went on to win \$8 million.

THE PLAY

On the bubble, playing a big stack doesn't rely on good cards but willing victims. ICM creates them.

45 SURVIVING THE BUBBLE AS A SHORT STACK

Chris Ferguson built a bankroll from zero to \$10,000 using strict bankroll management and disciplined short-stack play. His approach to the bubble was pure survival: shove or fold... and pick your moments with care.

You have 10 big blinds on the bubble. Two players at your table have six and seven big blinds. Fold everything unless you're in late position with a strong holding. Let the shorter stacks collide with each other. When one of them busts and you're safely in the money, open up your game. Survival first, accumulation second. The pay jump from bubbling to cashing is the biggest percentage leap in any tournament.

AT THE TABLE

With a short stack on the bubble, your strategy shrinks to two options. Shove with a hand worth committing on, or fold. No limping. No calling raises. Timing matters more than cards. The key is identifying shorter stacks at your table who might bust before you do. Let them take the risk while you stay alive.

THE PLAY

On the bubble with a short stack, patience is profit. Let shorter stacks bust first.

46

THE ICM PUNT

At the 2021 WSOP Main Event final table, Alejandro Lococo held pocket tens on a J-J-9-8-3 board. Koray Aldemir bet with pocket nines. Lococo, second in chips, called quickly. The call was widely debated as a massive ICM mistake, even though tens beat nines.

Being second in chips at a final table creates enormous pressure. You have the most to lose from busting and the least to gain from doubling up. The pay jumps above you are huge and calling off your stack risks dropping from second to out. The math often shows that folding strong hands as the second stack preserves more real-money equity than calling.

An 'ICM punt' is making a play that's correct in chips but catastrophic in real-money equity. At a final table with \$2.5 million pay jumps, think of ICM as a brake pedal. Slow down with medium-strength hands when you're the second stack. The money you save by folding can be worth more than the pot you'd win.

THE PLAY

Second in chips is the worst position for big confrontations. ICM rewards caution at the top of the leaderboard.

47 ICM ISN'T JUST FOR THE BUBBLE

Dara O'Kearney, one of poker's sharpest tournament minds, demonstrated something counterintuitive using ICMizer analysis. Two players shoving all-in on the very first hand of a large MTT both lose expected value. Even the player holding aces.

ICM effects exist from hand one. In a 1,000-player tournament with a \$100 buy-in, your starting stack is worth \$100 in equity. If you double up on the first hand, your stack isn't worth \$200. It's worth maybe \$170. The player who lost has \$0. Combined, both players lost \$30 in equity. That's "ICM tax," and every all-in pot pays it.

This doesn't mean you should fold aces preflop. It means you should avoid unnecessary big pots in the early stages of a tournament. That marginal all-in with ace-king against queens? In a cash game, it's automatic. In a tournament, you're paying ICM tax on a coin flip. Factor tournament equity into your decisions from the first shuffle.

THE PLAY

ICM tax applies from hand one. Every all-in costs both players equity, so avoid unnecessary big pots early.



FINAL TABLE AGGRESSION PAYS

Stu Ungar entered the 1997 WSOP Main Event final table with over a third of the chips in play. Hand-for-hand records show how he used them. In one hand against John Strzemp, Ungar raised from the cutoff. Strzemp defended his big blind and donk-bet 120,000 into 150,000 on a J♣J♦7♣ flop. Ungar raised to 420,000. Strzemp folded. No showdown needed. Ungar chipped away, pot by pot, until his lead was insurmountable.

Controlled aggression means raising often but keeping pot sizes manageable. Open to between double and 2.5 times the big blind. If you get 3-bet, fold your weaker opens without hesitation. The goal is to accumulate chips through many small victories, not one dramatic showdown.

With 9 players and blinds of 2,000/4,000 with 4,000 in antes, each orbit has 42,000 in dead money. Steal that pot twice per orbit and you net 84,000 chips without seeing a flop. Over ten orbits, that is 840,000 chips. Final tables are won in the margins, not at showdown. Most of your opponents are playing scared.

THE PLAY

Controlled aggression at a final table accumulates chips without unnecessary risk. Win small pots, avoid big ones.

49

PAY ATTENTION TO TABLE DYNAMICS

Qui Nguyen didn't play 'correct' poker at the 2016 WSOP Main Event final table. He played bizarre poker. Wide opens, strange bet sizes, frequent overbets, and a general willingness to ignore the solver playbook. His opponents had prepared for a standard strategy. Nguyen gave them chaos. He won \$8 million.

If every player at the table has studied the same GTO charts, they're all playing a similar style. That creates an opportunity. By deviating deliberately, opening to 4x sometimes and limping other times, mixing in overbets and min-bets, you force opponents to think. Thinking leads to mistakes.

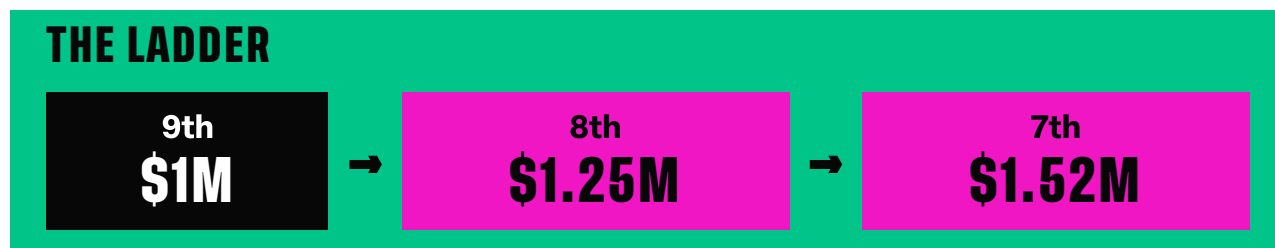
But unpredictability only works against opponents who are paying attention and trying to adjust. Against recreational players who aren't tracking your bet sizes anyway, fancy plays are wasted. Stick to fundamentals against weak opponents. Save the chaos for tables full of competent regulars who expect a predictable strategy.

THE PLAY

Against prepared opponents, deliberate unpredictability is a weapon. Against recreational players, stick to solid fundamentals.

50 THE FINAL TABLE LADDER

At the 2019 WSOP Main Event final table, several players with medium stacks deliberately avoided confrontation. They folded strong hands, ducked marginal spots, and waited for others to bust. Each elimination meant a significant pay jump, and they climbed the payout ladder by doing nothing.



Laddering means moving up one finishing position by letting other players fight. At the WSOP Main Event final table, 9th pays \$1 million, 8th pays \$1.25 million, 7th pays \$1.52 million. Each elimination earns you \$250,000 or more. That's real money for folding.

AT THE TABLE

You have a medium stack and pick up A♠Q♦. Two other players are already all-in. Fold. Your pay jump from watching them fight is worth more than the chips you'd win. One of them will bust, and you move up a spot for free. Laddering isn't cowardice. It's math. When eliminations are happening around you, sometimes the most profitable play is no play at all.

THE PLAY

Each elimination at a final table is a pay jump. Sometimes it is best to fold and ladder up.

51

HEADS-UP AGGRESSION

Phil Hellmuth sealed bracelet number thirteen at the 2012 WSOP Europe Main Event with a commanding heads-up performance against Sergii Baranov. Commentator Antonio Esfandiari called Hellmuth's style "completely unexpected": he played loose-aggressive, calling out of position with marginal hands and firing large bets to keep Baranov guessing. When Baranov tried to counter with aggression, Hellmuth tightened up and trapped. The final hand saw Hellmuth's A♠10♥ hold against Baranov's A♦4♣.

Heads-up poker is a different game. With only two players, ranges widen dramatically. Hands like K♠4♦, Q♠7♣, and 8♠6♠ become playable. You should be contesting about 70 to 80% of hands from the button.

If your opponent is tight, raise every button and take their blinds. If they are aggressive and playing back at you constantly, tighten your opening range and let them bluff into your strong hands. The player who adjusts faster usually wins.

THE PLAY

Heads-up poker rewards adjustment above all else. Read your opponent and change gears accordingly.

52

THE LIMPING STRATEGY

Late in the Polk vs. Negreanu 25,000-hand heads-up challenge, Doug Polk held a \$1.2 million lead. Rather than pressing for more, he shifted strategy. He started limping his button, just calling the big blind instead of raising. Pots stayed small. Variance dropped. Negreanu couldn't find the big pots he needed to mount a comeback.

Button limping in heads-up keeps pot sizes manageable. If you're winning by a significant margin, small pots protect your lead. Your opponent needs big pots to catch up, and by limping, you deny them the inflated pots that raising creates.

The reverse applies if you're behind. When you're losing, raise bigger, 3-bet more, and inflate pots to increase variance. You need swings to close the gap. Your approach should change based on your position in the match. A winning player wants calm seas. A losing player wants storms. Polk understood this perfectly and adjusted his strategy to protect what he'd built.

THE PLAY

Adapt your strategy to your position in the match. Protect a lead with small pots. Chase a deficit with big ones.

53

THE ART OF SHOVING LIGHT

Liv Boeree managed a short stack early at the final table of the 2010 EPT San Remo Main Event. She didn't wait for premium hands. She picked her spots based on position, opponent tendencies, and fold equity. She doubled up, then doubled again, and went on to win the title.

Short-stack poker is about timing, not cards. Shove when you have fold equity, meaning your opponents are likely to fold, not when you happen to look down at aces in the wrong spot.

With 12 big blinds, you pick up A♠3♦ on the button. Both blinds are tight players with medium stacks. You shove. They fold 70% of the time. When they do call, A-3 has roughly 35 to 40% equity against their calling range. Fold equity plus hand equity makes this shove profitable. A-3 on the button against tight blinds is a better shove than A-J under the gun against five active players. Position and opponent matter more than hand strength.

THE PLAY

Short-stack success comes from timing and fold equity, not from waiting for premium hands.

54

CHIP AND A CHAIR

Jack 'Treetop' Straus was down to a single chip at the 1982 WSOP Main Event. One chip. He'd accidentally left it under a napkin when he thought he was all-in. He sat back down, doubled up, doubled again, and won the whole tournament. "All you need is a chip and a chair" became a famous poker saying.

The lesson is straightforward: never give up. Once you're short-stacked, passive play guarantees elimination. Aggression is your only path back.

AT THE TABLE

You're down to three big blinds. Most players sit and wait for a hand. That's wrong. With 3 big blinds, every orbit costs you 1.5 in blinds. You'll be blinded out in two orbits. Shove any ace, any king, any pair, any suited connector. One double puts you at 6 big blinds. Another puts you at 12, and suddenly you have fold equity again. You're back in the game. Straus had one chip and won the Main Event. You have three big blinds. That's plenty.

THE PLAY

Never give up in a tournament. A double-up restores playability. Passive play guarantees elimination.

55

THE BIG STACK BULLY

Phil Hellmuth entered the 2012 WSOP Europe Main Event final table as chip leader and used that advantage to suffocate the table. He raised medium stacks' blinds relentlessly, 3-bet their opens, and forced them to make decisions for their tournament lives with marginal hands. Players who fought back ran into traps. Players who folded bled out. Hellmuth won bracelet number thirteen without needing to get lucky.

THE BIG STACK

15 bb · avoid

25–35 bb · target

100 bb · you



A big stack is a weapon, not a cushion. Medium stacks, those with 25 to 35 big blinds, are the most vulnerable. They are too deep to shove comfortably and too short to play postflop with ease. Every raise you put in forces them into an ugly decision.

AT THE TABLE

You have 100 big blinds at a table where everyone else has 20 to 40. Target the 25 to 35 big blind stacks every time they are in the blinds. Avoid the 15 big blind stacks, because they will shove on you. Avoid other big stacks, because they can hurt you. Pick on the middle. That is where the easy chips live.

THE PLAY

Target medium stacks with your big stack. They're trapped between shoving and folding, and both options favor you.

56 SATELLITE MENTALITY VS. TOURNAMENT MENTALITY

Dara O'Kearney, co-author of *Poker Satellite Strategy* has written extensively about the mental switch required in satellites. In a tournament, you're trying to win. In a satellite, you're trying to survive. That distinction changes every single decision.

In a satellite to a \$10,000 event, 20 seats are awarded. 25 players remain. In a regular tournament, you'd play for first place. In a satellite, first and 20th place win the same prize: a seat. Your only goal is not finishing 21st through 25th. Avoid coin flips, fold marginal spots, and let shorter stacks bust.

The switch from ChipEV to survival mode should happen when you're within 5 to 10 players of the bubble. Once you're in the survival zone, stop trying to accumulate chips. A chip lead in a satellite is worthless. One seat is one seat whether you have 10 big blinds or 100. Fold your way to the finish line if you can. Save the aggression for the tournament you're trying to win entry into.

THE PLAY

In a satellite, first and last qualifying place win the same prize. Play to survive, not to accumulate.

57

THE EARLY LEVELS: SPECULATE CHEAPLY

Doyle Brunson advocated playing small suited connectors and small pairs in deep-stacked early tournament levels. His logic in *Super/System* was simple: when stacks are deep relative to blinds, the cost of seeing a flop is tiny compared to what you can win.

Implied odds measure how much you stand to win on future streets when you hit. Blinds are 25/50, you have 15,000 chips, or 300 big blinds. Someone raises to 125. You call with 5♣5♦ on the button. You'll flop a set about 12% of the time. When you do, you'll often win your opponent's entire stack: 15,000 chips for a 125 investment. That's 120-to-1 implied odds.

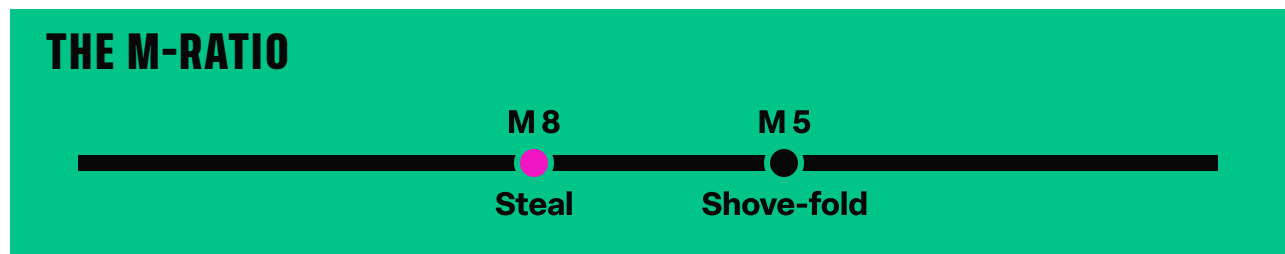
When stacks are deep, small pairs and suited connectors are gold. They cost little to play but can win enormous pots. The key word is "cheaply." Don't call large raises with speculative hands. Don't chase when the price is wrong. See cheap flops, hit big hands, and stack opponents who can't fold their overpairs.

THE PLAY

In deep-stacked early levels, speculative hands offer enormous implied odds. See cheap flops and aim to stack opponents.

58 THE MIDDLE LEVELS: TIGHTEN AND STEAL

Dan Harrington's "M-ratio" concept from *Harrington on Hold'em* gave tournament players a simple framework for deciding their strategy. Your M is your stack divided by the cost of one orbit: small blind plus big blind plus total antes. As M shrinks, your strategy must simplify.



The middle stages demand a gear shift. Stop speculating with suited connectors. Start stealing with high-card holdings that can win pots uncontested.

Blinds are 200/400 with 400 in antes. You have 8,000 chips. Your M is 8,000 divided by 1,000, which equals 8. At M of 8, stop calling raises hoping to hit. Instead, open-raise or shove with hands like A-J, K-Q, and any pair. At M of 5, your strategy is shove-or-fold only. No limping, no calling, no postflop play. Every orbit that passes eats into your stack. The middle levels are where tournaments are won or lost. Players who don't shift gears get ground down.

THE PLAY

As your M-ratio drops, simplify your strategy. At M of 8, steal aggressively. At M of 5, shove or fold.

59

DOYLE BRUNSON'S 10-2: WHEN RESULTS DON'T EQUAL STRATEGY

Doyle Brunson won the 1976 and 1977 WSOP Main Events both times holding ten-deuce, or as it is now known, the 'Texas Dolly'. In 1976, Doyle's 10♠2♠ made a full house on a board of A♥J♠10♥2♣10♦ against Jesse Alto's A♣J♥. In 1977, his ten-deuce did it again against Gary Berland's eight-five. Two titles, one legendary hand.

THE HAND

Brunson



Alto



Board



But here's what the legend obscures: Brunson got his money in as a significant underdog both times. He got lucky. Twice. The fact that ten-deuce is now called the Doyle Brunson hand doesn't make it a good hand. It's still the 160th-best starting hand out of 169.

AT THE TABLE

You see a player win a huge pot with 7♠2♣ after hitting two pair. Don't copy them. Results-oriented thinking means judging decisions by outcomes instead of process. A good decision can lose, and a bad decision can win on any given hand. Over thousands of hands, correct decisions compound. Judge your play by whether the decision was right, not whether you won the pot.

THE PLAY

Winning a hand doesn't mean you played it well. Process beats results over the long run.



MATT AFFLECK'S ACES CRACKED

Matt Affleck held pocket aces against Jonathan Duhamel's pocket jacks at the 2010 WSOP Main Event. Affleck got his money in as an 80% favorite. A jack on the river gave Duhamel a straight. Affleck was eliminated, losing the difference between roughly \$500,000 and a shot at \$8.9 million. His reaction, head in hands at the table, became one of poker's most replayed clips.

Affleck made the correct play. He got his chips in with the best hand and the best equity. The river card didn't change that. You can't control outcomes. You can only control decisions.

After a bad beat, ask yourself one question: did I play the hand correctly? If you got your money in with 80% equity, you made a great play. You'll win that spot four out of five times. This was the one out of five. Over 10,000 tournaments, correct decisions compound into massive profit. The best mental exercise after a bad beat is simple. Say "I played it correctly. I'd do it again." Then move on to the next hand.

THE PLAY

You cannot control outcomes, only decisions. Process over results is the single most important mindset skill in poker.

PART FOUR



04

CASH GAMES

Plays 61–65

5 Plays

61 PLAYING DEEP: IMPLIED ODDS REIGN

In November 2009, Patrik Antonius and Viktor 'Isildur1' Blom played the largest pot in online poker history on Full Tilt Poker. At \$500/\$1,000 Pot-Limit Omaha, the two traded four rounds of preflop raises until the pot ballooned to \$1,356,946. Antonius won with a five-high straight, a hand that looked unremarkable before the flop but played beautifully on later streets.

DEEP STACKS

100 bb
PREMIUM
A♠ K♦

VS

300 bb
GOLDMINE
7♠ 6♠

When stacks are extremely deep, implied odds take over. You aren't trying to win the pot preflop. You're trying to build one postflop with a hand that can make the nuts. Suited connectors, wraps and coordinated holdings gain value. Big unpaired cards lose it.

"Deep-stacked" means 200 or more big blinds. With 100 big blinds, A♠K♦ is premium. With 300 big blinds, ace-king becomes awkward because it makes one pair. Meanwhile, 7♠6♠ becomes a goldmine: straights, flushes, two-pair combos. The deeper the stacks, the more you want hands that play well after the flop.

THE PLAY

The deeper the stacks, the less your cards matter preflop and the more they matter postflop.

62 THE BIGGEST POT IN TELEVISED POKER HISTORY

In May 2023, Tom Dwan and Wesley Fei played a \$3.1 million pot on Hustler Casino Live, the largest in televised poker history. Dwan held $Q\spadesuit Q\clubsuit$. Fei held $A\heartsuit K\heartsuit$. Fei fired three barrels and shoved \$786,000 on the river with ace-high. Dwan called with just a pair of queens.

THE HAND

Dwan



Fei



The call looked reckless. It was anything but. Dwan reasoned that Fei's value range was narrow on this board, while his bluffing range was wide. The math supported calling even when every instinct screamed fold.

AT THE TABLE

Don't let the dollar amount scare you. Think in pot odds. Your opponent shoves \$200 into a \$400 pot. You need \$200 to win \$600, so you need to be right 33% of the time. Does your opponent bluff more than one in three here? If yes, call. Whether the pot is \$600 or \$3.1 million, the math is identical. Discipline with pot odds separates winning players from losing ones.

THE PLAY

In deep-stacked cash games, calling large bets with one pair is often correct. Trust the math over your gut.

63

ADJUSTING TO RECREATIONAL PLAYERS

Alan Keating has netted over \$2.2 million on *Hustler Casino Live* playing a range that would cause any solver to crash. He opens hands most pros would muck. He overbets with middle pair. He calls river shoves with marginal holdings. Against a table full of GTO regulars, this would be catastrophic. Against lineups packed with recreational players who call too wide and fold too rarely, it is devastatingly effective.

In live cash games, strict GTO leaves money on the table when your opponents have exploitable leaks. The correct adjustment is simple: value bet thinner, bluff less, play more hands in position against the weakest players.

Sit down at \$2/\$5. Identify the recreational players: they talk a lot, buy in short and call too much. Against them, do not bluff because they will call anyway. Value bet wider: three streets with top pair, good kicker. Position yourself to their left and isolate them with raises when they limp. Against the regulars, play tighter and more balanced. You need one strategy per opponent, not one for the whole table.

THE PLAY

Adjust to the player, not the textbook. Exploit recreational players with relentless value betting.

64 READING THE TABLE, NOT JUST YOUR CARDS

On *High Stakes Poker* Season 6, Jason Mercier squeezed to \$22,100 with $A♥4♥$ and fired a \$28,700 c-bet on a $7♥3♦2♠$ flop. Phil Ivey, holding $9♠9♦$, check-raised to \$78,700. Mercier shoved his remaining \$185,100. Ivey stared him down and called. "Welcome to the Ivey world," said Eli Elezra. Ivey had read the player, not just his cards. Against the aggressive newcomer, he picked the perfect spot to trap.

Table dynamics change every time a player sits down or leaves. The best cash game players deploy the right approach for the current lineup, not a fixed strategy.

Before you play a hand, look around. A calling station in the big blind? Open wider and value bet more. A tight regular on your left? Open tighter because they will 3-bet you. A maniac two seats to your right? Tighten up and let them donate chips. Your two cards matter, but the person sitting across from you matters more.

THE PLAY

Your strategy should change every time the table composition changes. Adapt constantly.

65

THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION HAPPENS BEFORE YOU SIT DOWN

Jennifer Harman spent over 20 years grinding in the Bellagio's legendary Big Game. She didn't simply sit in the biggest game available. She chose games where she had an edge. Her seat selection was as deliberate as any bet she ever made, and it was central to her long-term profitability.

Game selection is the most underrated skill in poker. The best hand you'll ever play is choosing to sit in a game where you have an advantage. If the table is full of strong players and no soft spots, get up and leave.

Walk into the poker room. Don't sit at the first open seat. Watch the tables for 10 minutes. Look for a table with two or three recreational players, big stacks, laughing, playing lots of hands. Find a seat to the left of the weakest player so you act after them. If every table is full of pros, leave and come back another night. Your win rate depends more on who you play against than how you play.

THE PLAY

The most profitable decision in poker is picking the right game. Only sit down with an edge.

05

READING OPPONENTS

66

TRUSTING PHYSICAL READS

Phil Hellmuth held pocket tens on a Q-8-4 flop against Dave ‘Devilfish’ Ulliott at EPT Monte Carlo. Devilfish had flopped top pair with Q-2. Hellmuth folded, citing "extreme strength" he picked up from Devilfish's bet sizing and demeanor. It was a remarkable laydown, and it was right.

Physical tells are most useful as confirmation of what your analysis already suggests. Hellmuth's fold was partly intuitive but grounded in logic and pattern recognition.

AT THE TABLE

You have pocket tens on $\heartsuit Q \heartsuit 8 \clubsuit 4 \spadesuit$. You bet, and your opponent raises immediately with confident body language. Logic says they could have A-Q, K-Q, a set, or a bluff. Physical demeanor, sitting upright, placing chips firmly, making eye contact, suggests genuine strength. That tips a borderline call into a fold. Never rely on tells alone because good players fake them. But use them as a tiebreaker when your decision is close.

THE PLAY

Use physical tells to confirm what the action already suggests. They are a tiebreaker, not a strategy.

67

THE SPEECH PLAY

Back to the Poker Brat, as we recall when Phil Hellmuth tried to use verbal pressure against Doug Polk on *High Stakes Poker* in 2021. The tactic backfired completely. His table talk helped Polk narrow Hellmuth's hand to exactly Q-T, leading to Polk's legendary fold of the second-nut straight. Hellmuth talked Polk out of paying him \$90,000.

Table talk is a double-edged sword. If you're going to speak during a hand, have a plan and a specific goal. Random speech gives away information. Hellmuth's chatter was spontaneous, and it cost him a pot he should have won.

When you're in a big pot and your opponent tries to get you talking, asking “What do you have?” or “Are you bluffing?”, the safest response is silence. Say nothing. Look at the same spot. Make your decision based on the math. If you want to use speech, be strategic and only talk with a clear objective. Random chatter almost always helps your opponent more than it helps you.

THE PLAY

Silence is the safest play. If you talk during a hand without a plan, you're giving away free information.

68

THE SPEED OF DECISION

During a three-barrel bluff against Phil Ivey on *High Stakes Poker* Season 6, Tom Dwan answered Ivey's question, "How much do you have behind?", with a noticeably shaky voice. Dwan later acknowledged that Ivey was likely reading his vocal tone and timing patterns. Even one of the greatest bluffers in history leaked information through speed and delivery.

How quickly you act is information. A snap-call signals confidence. A long hesitation before a raise broadcasts uncertainty. Your opponents are watching, and the best ones are cataloging every timing pattern you display.

Develop a default 'tank'. Wait five to ten seconds before every significant action, regardless of your hand. This prevents timing tells. Without it, you'll snap-call with strong draws, giving away your hand type. You'll tank before bluffing, broadcasting doubt. You'll act fast with the nuts, revealing strength. A consistent rhythm masks all of this. The goal is to make every decision look exactly the same from the outside.

THE PLAY

Develop a consistent timing pattern for every decision. Predictable speed leaks information.

69

ONLINE TIMING TELLS

Lex Veldhuis, one of Twitch's most popular poker streamers, has explained online timing tells to thousands of viewers. His core insight: you can't see faces online, but you can see the clock. Quick calls typically indicate draws or medium-strength hands. Long pauses followed by raises usually indicate a polarized range, either the nuts or a bluff, rarely something in between.

Even without physical tells, timing patterns exist in every online game. The information is there if you know where to look.

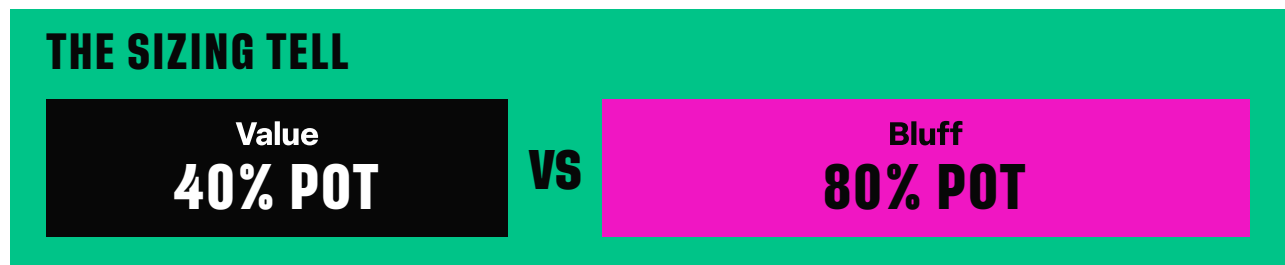
Common online patterns: a snap-call on the flop usually means a draw or a medium pair. A long tank followed by a raise means a polarized holding, either calculating odds on a bluff or deciding how much to raise for value. A snap-check signals weakness, often from the auto-check button. Track an opponent's timing patterns over 50 or more hands before drawing conclusions. Small samples are misleading, but over a session, reliable data emerges.

THE PLAY

Online tells live in the timing. Track how long opponents take to act and patterns will reveal themselves.

70 WHEN THE SIZE TELLS THE STORY

Daniel Negreanu has long explained his hand-reading process on televised poker. One of his most useful observations: recreational players often bet large with bluffs, trying to scare opponents, and small with value, trying to get called. It is one of the most exploitable patterns in live poker.



Pay attention to sizing patterns across a session. If a player consistently bets 80% of the pot with strong hands and 40% with weak ones, you can fold to big bets and call small ones profitably. The pattern is simple, but spotting it requires discipline and patience.

Keep a mental tally. Every time a hand goes to showdown, note what your opponent bet and what they held. After two or three hours, patterns emerge. Seat 5 bet \$75 into \$100 with a flush but bet \$150 into \$100 with a missed draw. Now you know: when Seat 5 bets big, they're probably bluffing. When they bet small, they probably have it. Sizing tells are free money if you pay attention.

THE PLAY

Track your opponents' bet sizes at showdown. Patterns emerge that turn guesswork into profit.

71

USING YOUR IMAGE

Chris Moneymaker entered the 2003 WSOP Main Event as a complete unknown. No tournament record. No televised appearances. No reputation. That anonymity was a weapon. His image as an amateur allowed him to pull off bluffs that a known pro simply couldn't. Opponents gave him credit for strong hands because they had no reason not to.

You've folded 25 hands in a row. Everyone has noticed. Pick up T♠9♠ and raise from late position. When you continuation bet the flop, everyone folds because they *know* you only play premium hands. That's spending your tight image. Conversely, if you've been raising every hand, stop bluffing and start value betting. Opponents will pay you off. Your image is a currency. Spend it wisely, then rebuild it.

AT THE TABLE

Your table image is a resource you spend and rebuild throughout a session. If you've been playing tight, use that image to steal. If you've been caught bluffing, switch to value betting because opponents will call you light.

THE PLAY

Your table image is a resource. Spend it on well-timed bluffs, then rebuild it with strong hands.

72 REBUILDING YOUR IMAGE AFTER GETTING CAUGHT

After Dwan's legendary triple-barrel bluff against Ivey on *High Stakes Poker* (see Play #23), the cameras broadcast the hand to every player at the table. Everyone now knew Dwan was capable of firing three streets with nine-high. Rather than tightening up, Dwan weaponized the exposure. Over subsequent hands, he value-bet thinner, knowing opponents would pay him off with weaker holdings. They had seen the bluff. They wanted to catch him. The bluff was an investment in future value.

After being caught bluffing, your opponents will call you lighter. They remember the bluff. They want to catch you again. This is the perfect time to shift gears and start value betting aggressively.

AT THE TABLE

You just got caught bluffing and the whole table saw it. For the next 30 minutes, value bet three streets with top pair. Make big bets with two pair. They will pay you off because your bluff is fresh in their memory. Once you have extracted value from three or four hands, your image resets and you can mix in bluffs again. Think of it as a cycle: bluff, get caught, value bet, repeat.

THE PLAY

Getting caught bluffing is an investment. Collect the return by value betting while opponents still remember.

73

THE EYE TO THE SKY

Johnny Chan held the nuts during the 1988 WSOP Main Event final against Erik Seidel. As he waited for Seidel to act, Chan glanced up at the ceiling, a subtle piece of body language that has been analyzed for decades. Whether deliberate or instinctive, the moment captured a fundamental truth about live poker: your eyes give away more information than any other part of your body. Chan used it to insinuate that he was bluffing, and Seidel bought the bait, although the now 10-time WSOP bracelet winner Seidel, who joined Chan on that number in 2023, admitted recently that he was thinking more about his hand than watching *The Orient Express*.

Strong players train themselves to maintain a consistent gaze. They look at the same spot every hand, every decision, every street. The goal is to eliminate patterns that opponents can read. Pick a spot on the table and look there during every decision. Don't look at your opponent when you bet. Don't look at the pot when considering a call unless you already have been.

Many recreational players glance at their chips when they hit a big hand, subconsciously planning to bet, or look away when bluffing to avoid confrontation. Eliminate these patterns in yourself and watch for them in others.

THE PLAY

Your eyes are your biggest tell. Pick one spot and look there every hand.

74 **READING STRENGTH VS. READING WEAKNESS**

Mike Caro, the ‘Mad Genius of Poker’, spent decades cataloguing live poker tells. His most famous observation became a rule: strong means weak, weak means strong. Players who act tough are usually bluffing. Players who seem uncertain usually have a monster. The performance reveals the opposite of the truth.

Most recreational players are amateur actors. They overcompensate. When they bluff, they sit up straight, make eye contact and try to project confidence. When they have the nuts, they sigh, shake their head and feign reluctance before betting big. The act is involuntary and remarkably consistent.

AT THE TABLE

Your opponent bets the river, sighs dramatically and says, “I guess I’ll put you all-in”. That sigh is performance. They almost certainly have a monster. Conversely, trembling hands while stacking chips to bet isn’t nervousness about bluffing. It is excitement about a huge hand. The adrenaline is involuntary. Caro’s rule is simple: staged weakness equals strength, staged strength equals weakness.

THE PLAY

Strong means weak, weak means strong. The performance often reveals the opposite truth.



06

PSYCHOLOGY AND MENTAL GAME

75

THE TILT TRAP

Phil Hellmuth has won seventeen WSOP bracelets, more than anyone in history. He's also poker's most famous tilter. After bad beats, Hellmuth berates opponents, storms from the table, and plays loose in subsequent hands. His talent is undeniable. His tilt is his most documented leak.

Tilt doesn't announce itself with a warning bell. It starts as frustration, escalates through poor decisions, and ends with chip dumping. The pattern is predictable: bad beat, anger, loose calls, oversized bluffs, more losses. Most players don't recognize they're tilting until the damage is done.

Create a tilt protocol before you sit down. If you lose a big pot unfairly, stand up. Walk to the bathroom. Splash water on your face. Return only when you're thinking clearly. If you can't reset in five minutes, leave the table entirely. One tilted hour can erase twenty hours of winning play.

THE PLAY

The best tilt strategy is prevention. Build your protocol before you need it, because once tilt arrives, rational thinking has already left.

76 INDUCING TILT IN YOUR OPPONENTS

Tony G made a career of verbal provocation at the poker table. His needling on televised cash games and tournaments pushed opponents into emotional play. Their mistake frequency went up. His profit went up with it.

When an opponent is visibly tilting, raise their blinds more often. They'll call too wide out of frustration. A tilted player makes two to three times more mistakes per hour than a composed one. Exploit this with wider value bets and fewer bluffs. They're calling too much already, so let them pay you off. You don't need to bluff someone who won't fold.

AT THE TABLE

You don't need Tony G's theatrics. Subtler methods work just as well. After winning a big pot, stay calm. Don't celebrate. This frustrates opponents who want a reaction. When someone berates you for a "bad call", say nothing. Stack your chips slowly. Silence is more infuriating than any comeback.

THE PLAY

Stay composed, let them spiral. A tilted opponent is the most profitable seat at the table.

77 THE DISCIPLINE TO QUIT A SESSION

Phil Galfond trailed significantly during the Galfond Challenge against VeniVidi1993. The temptation to extend sessions, to chase losses, must have been enormous. Instead, Galfond stuck to his schedule. He played his best poker, then stopped. Over 25,000 hands, he won by just €1,472.

Before you sit down, set two limits: a time limit and a loss limit. Four hours maximum. Three buy-ins maximum. If you hit either one, leave. No exceptions. The voice saying "just one more orbit" is almost always wrong. Decision quality degrades after three to four hours of focused play, even when you feel sharp.

AT THE TABLE

You hold K♠Q♠ in late position after four hours at the table. You're down two buy-ins. A tight player 3-bets from early position. Fresh, you fold this easily. Tired and chasing, you call. Then you chase a flush draw on a dry board and lose another stack. Galfond won his challenge because he never chased. Play your best, then stop.

THE PLAY

Set your limits before the session starts. When you hit them, leave without negotiation.

78 **PLAYING WITHIN YOUR BANKROLL**

Stu Ungar won three WSOP Main Events. Many consider him the greatest poker player who ever lived. He died at forty-five in a Las Vegas motel room with virtually nothing. His inability to manage money away from the table destroyed everything his talent built.

Bankroll management sounds boring. It is boring. It also determines whether you survive as a poker player. For cash games, keep at least twenty buy-ins for your stake. That means \$10,000 for \$2/\$5 with a \$500 maximum buy-in. For tournaments, keep fifty to one hundred buy-ins. If your bankroll drops below these thresholds, move down in stakes.

AT THE TABLE

You're a winning \$2/\$5 player who runs bad for a month. Your bankroll drops from \$12,000 to \$7,000. The correct play: move to \$1/\$2 until you rebuild. Moving down feels embarrassing. But playing above your bankroll turns a downswing into a disaster. Ungar's story proves that talent without discipline is worthless.

THE PLAY

Skill at the table means nothing without discipline away from it. Size your games to your bankroll, not your ego.

79

ACTIVE PATIENCE

Erik Seidel played the first hour of his 2015 EPT Monte Carlo heads-up match against Dzmitry Urbanovich without contesting a single large pot. He folded, observed, and waited. When he found his spot, he attacked. He never looked back.

Patience without purpose is just folding. Active patience means using your quiet hands productively. While you fold, observe everything. Which player raises the most from the cutoff? Who folds to 3-bets? Who calls too wide from the big blind? After an hour, you should have a detailed mental map of every opponent at the table.

You've folded for forty minutes. You pick up A♠K♥ in the hijack. The player on the button has 3-bet five times this orbit. You flat-call, knowing he'll squeeze. He does. You 4-bet. He folds, because you've shown nothing but strength for an hour. Your patience made this play work. Without observation, you're just waiting. With observation, you're building a weapon.

THE PLAY

Patience without observation is lazy. Patience with observation is a strategy.

80 WAITING THROUGH A DOWNSWING

Chance Kornuth led by \$350,000 during his Galfond Challenge match. Then variance arrived. He lost over \$1 million in a brutal downswing before conceding. Despite world-class ability, the sample size wasn't large enough for his edge to overcome the swing.

A winning \$2/\$5 player earning ten big blinds per hundred hands can still experience a 30,000-hand downswing. That's roughly a thousand hours of play, six months of regular sessions. During that stretch, every decision feels wrong. Your confidence erodes. You start questioning everything.

The question during a downswing is simple: are you playing badly, or just running badly? Review your hands honestly. If you're calling river bets too wide or missing value, fix the leaks. If your decisions are sound and the results are just ugly, stay the course. The math will catch up. Kornuth's problem wasn't his play. It was that 25,000 hands aren't always enough for skill to overcome variance.

THE PLAY

Downswings are inevitable. Survive them with bankroll, honest self-review, and the knowledge that correct decisions produce long-term profit.

81 **PLAYING YOUR GAME, NOT THEIRS**

Qui Nguyen won the 2016 WSOP Main Event and its \$8 million first prize playing a style that made commentators wince. He ignored GTO principles, overbetting with marginal hands, calling in spots theory would forbid. Critics called it reckless. The bracelet on his wrist said otherwise.

Confidence in your own approach, when built on genuine understanding of opponents and situations, can outperform theoretical perfection. Nguyen's unorthodox style worked because he understood it completely. He knew why he was making each play, even when observers didn't.

AT THE TABLE

You're a tight, aggressive player. A training video says you should be 4-betting light from the small blind at higher frequencies. You try it. You feel uncomfortable. You size your bets wrong because you're unsure. An imperfect strategy executed with confidence beats a perfect strategy executed with hesitation. Play the style that fits your personality and skill set. Refine it over time. But own it fully.

THE PLAY

Confidence in a well-understood strategy beats uncomfortable imitation of someone else's approach.

82

OVERCONFIDENCE IS A LEAK

Sammy Farha reflected on losing the 2003 WSOP Main Event to Chris Moneymaker with unusual honesty. "The reason I lost is because I underestimated my opponent." Farha assumed an amateur couldn't execute a big bluff at that level. Moneymaker proved him wrong on the final hand.

The moment you assume someone can't make a play against you, you've blinded yourself to reality. Assumptions replace observation. You stop reading their actions and start reading your own story about who they are.

The recreational player in Seat 3 sits down with a hoodie and headphones. Easy money, right? Then they check-raise you on the river with a perfectly timed bluff and you lose a hundred big blinds. The problem wasn't their play. It was your assumption. Every opponent is capable until their actions prove otherwise. Base your decisions on what they do in the hand, at the exact moment they do it, not on how they look or how long they've been playing.

THE PLAY

Treat every opponent as capable until their actions prove otherwise.
Assumptions are expensive.

83

PROCESS OVER RESULTS

Daniel Negreanu lost \$1.2 million in his heads-up challenge against Doug Polk. He played competitively, studied extensively, and improved throughout the match. By most result-based measures, he failed. By process-based measures, he demonstrated exactly how a professional approaches a difficult challenge.

Results lie in the short term. A terrible all-in call that hits a two-outer looks brilliant. A perfect fold that saves your tournament life feels like weakness. The only honest question after any decision: did I make the best choice with the information I had?

After every session, ask three questions. Did I make any decisions I regret? Were those decisions bad because of flawed logic, or because of bad luck? What would I change? If you lost \$500 but every decision was correct, you had a great session. If you won \$500 but made three awful calls that happened to work out, you had a terrible session. Track decision quality, not chip counts.

THE PLAY

Judge every session by your decisions, not your results. Process is the only thing you control.

84

THE ONE-DECISION MINDSET

Dara O'Kearney teaches a simple principle: every hand is one decision at a time. The pot you lost two hands ago doesn't exist anymore. The bad beat from last orbit is irrelevant. Only this decision, right now, matters.

But your brain wants revenge. You open wider than you should. You call a 3-bet you should fold to. You chase a draw without proper odds. That's contaminated decision-making, where the previous hand poisons the current one. Reset between every hand. Take a breath. Close your eyes for one second. Each decision exists in isolation. The moment you let the past infect the present, you've already made your first mistake.

AT THE TABLE

You just lost a 200 big blind pot with aces cracked by a flush draw. The dealer pushes you new cards. You look down at Q♠ J♦ in middle position. The correct decision depends on position, stack sizes, and table dynamics. It does not depend on what happened thirty seconds ago.

THE PLAY

Each hand is independent. Reset between decisions. The past is irrelevant to this moment.

85

THE \$0 TO \$10,000 CHALLENGE

Chris Ferguson started with zero dollars on Full Tilt Poker and built his bankroll to \$10,000 using freerolls and strict money management. His rule was simple: never risk more than 5% of your bankroll in a single tournament. The challenge took months, but he never went broke along the way.

Ferguson's sliding scale works at every level. With a \$1,000 bankroll, your maximum tournament buy-in is \$50. If you lose and drop to \$800, the maximum drops to \$40. As you grow to \$2,000, you can play \$100 events. The system ensures you never go broke from a bad run, no matter how prolonged.

You've been winning at \$20 tournaments and your bankroll hits \$1,200. You see a \$109 event with a massive guarantee. You enter. You bust. Now your bankroll is \$1,091 and your confidence is shaken. That single decision, playing above your bankroll threshold, is the number one reason skilled players go broke. Size your games to your money, not your ambition.

THE PLAY

Never risk more than 5% of your bankroll in a single event. The sliding scale keeps you in the game forever.

86 KNOWING WHEN TO WALK AWAY

Patrik Antonius won the largest pot in online poker history, \$1.35 million against Isildur1. After scooping that monster, Antonius continued playing methodically. No wild celebration, no reckless loosening up. He finished the session up \$2.1 million because his decision-making stayed sharp throughout.

After a huge win, the temptation is to keep playing while 'hot'. But there is no such thing as being hot. Each hand is independent. The real danger after a big win: you loosen up and give chips back because the money feels like house money. It isn't. Every chip has the same value regardless of when you won it.

AT THE TABLE

You're up \$2,000 for the session. You feel invincible. The question isn't whether you're winning or losing. The question is whether you're still making good decisions. If the adrenaline is affecting your judgment, if you're playing looser because you feel bulletproof, book the win and leave.

THE PLAY

The only reason to stay or leave is decision quality. Everything else is superstition.



07

ONLINE POKER

87 EXPLOITING POPULATION TENDENCIES

Doug Polk prepared for the Negreanu heads-up challenge by studying population data for online heads-up no-limit hold'em. He identified measurable leaks: most players under-defend their big blind and over-fold to 3-bets. He built his entire strategy around punishing these tendencies before he even knew his specific opponent.

THE FIELD

Fold to 3-bet



Fold to river



C-bet flop



Online populations have consistent, exploitable patterns. At low stakes, most players fold to 3-bets roughly 65% of the time. They fold to river bets about 55% of the time. They c-bet the flop 70% but give up on the turn half the time. These numbers point to clear exploits.

AT THE TABLE

You don't need tracking software to use this. 3-bet more from the button against players you haven't profiled yet. Bluff rivers more often against unknowns. Float flop c-bets and take the pot on the turn when they check. These are default exploits that work until a specific player proves they're different. Start with population reads, then adjust for individuals.

THE PLAY

Know the average player's leaks and exploit them by default. Adjust only when someone proves they're different.

88

THE MULTI-TABLING DECISION

Lex Veldhuis shifted from mass-multi-tabling to streaming just a few tables with commentary. He discussed publicly how reducing his table count improved his decision quality. His results per table went up even as his volume went down.

The math matter here. If you win eight big blinds per hundred hands playing one table, that's your baseline. Playing four tables at three big blinds per hundred each gives you twelve big blinds total per hundred hands of real time. Better hourly rate. But at eight tables, if your win rate drops to one big blind per hundred each, your total is only eight. More tables actually reduced your earnings.

Find your personal breakeven point. For most recreational players, two to four tables is optimal. If you're studying and trying to improve, play one or two so you can think through every decision. The goal isn't maximum hands per hour. The goal is maximum profit per hour. Those numbers look very different depending on how many tables you can handle without your play deteriorating.

THE PLAY

More tables means more volume but worse decisions. Find the count where your hourly profit peaks, not your hand count.

89

THE REVIEW THAT WINS YOU MONEY TOMORROW

Phil Galfond reviewed hands between sessions during his challenges using solver tools. He identified spots where he deviated from optimal play and adjusted for the next session. This process of play, review, correct, repeat is what allowed him to overcome significant deficits and win challenges most people expected him to lose.

The most productive poker work happens away from the table. After every session, review three to five of your biggest pots. For each one, ask: what was my decision? What were my alternatives? Which option was most profitable and why?

Over time, patterns emerge. “I keep calling river bets and losing” means you're calling too wide. “I keep missing value on the river” means you're checking back too much with strong hands. “I keep getting check-raised on the turn” means your c-bet frequency is too high on certain board textures. One hour of honest review is worth more than one extra hour of play. The table earns you money today. The review earns you money every session after.

THE PLAY

Post-session reviews improve every future session. Find your leaks and fix them.

90 THE LIVE-TO-ONLINE TRANSITION

Daniel Negreanu's struggle against Doug Polk exposed the gap between live and online poker. Despite being one of the greatest live tournament players in history, Negreanu was outclassed in a format demanding faster decisions, zero physical reads, and precise range-based thinking. Six million dollars in losses proved that live greatness doesn't transfer automatically.

Online poker runs at sixty-plus hands per hour versus twenty-five to thirty live. You have seconds to decide, not minutes. Physical tells are gone. Timing tells and bet sizing are your only reads. Players are generally tighter, more aggressive, and more studied online. The average \$1/\$2 online player is significantly tougher than the average \$2/\$5 live player.

If you're transitioning from live to online, start at lower stakes than your live equivalent. A winning \$2/\$5 live player should begin at \$0.25/\$0.50 or \$0.50/\$1 online. Give yourself time to adjust to the speed, the aggression, and the absence of physical information. The games reward different skills. Respect that difference or pay for it.

THE PLAY

Live and online poker are different games. Start lower than you think you should and adjust to the speed and aggression.

PART EIGHT



08

ADVANCED CONCEPTS

Plays 91–100

10 Plays

91 THINKING IN RANGES, NOT HANDS

Erik Seidel lost the 1988 WSOP Main Event when Johnny Chan bluffed him off the best hand. Seidel was a backgammon player at his first World Series of Poker, reacting to instinct rather than logic. Twenty-seven years later, Seidel made a jack-high hero call that stunned the poker world. The difference between those two moments is range thinking.



Don't try to guess your opponent's exact hand. Instead, assign them a range of possible holdings and narrow it with each action. He raised preflop: strong range confirmed. He c-bet on $K\spadesuit 7\diamondsuit 2\clubsuit$: that fits A-K, K-Q, overpairs, and some bluffs. He bet big on the turn: weak bluffs drop out. He shoved the river: now you're looking at A-K, K-K, sets, and a few stubborn bluffs. Against that range, your Q-Q is behind most value hands. Fold.

Range thinking replaces guessing with structured logic. Seidel's 27-year arc proves that poker mastery is a lifetime pursuit, and the willingness to keep learning separates good players from great ones.

THE PLAY

Assign your opponent a range, then narrow it street by street. Structured logic beats guesswork every time.

92

USING BLOCKERS TO BLUFF

At the 2019 PCA, Stephen Chidwick fired a river bluff with A♠J♥ on a board showing three spades. He didn't have a flush. But the ace of spades in his hand meant his opponent could not hold the nut flush. Chidwick wasn't bluffing blind. He was bluffing with information.

Blockers are cards in your hand that reduce the number of strong combinations your opponent can hold. When three spades land on the board and you hold the A♠, your opponent cannot have A-x of spades, the single strongest flush possible. That makes your bluff more likely to succeed because you've removed their best holding from the equation.

When choosing which hands to bluff with on the river, prefer hands that block the nuts. On a three-spade board, A♠4♣ is a far better bluffing hand than 9♦8♦. Both miss the flush entirely, but one removes a key combo from your opponent's range. The other removes nothing.

THE PLAY

When you hold a card that blocks your opponent's strongest hands, your bluffs carry more weight.

93 WHEN TO ABANDON THE SOLVER

Alan Keating has become one of the most entertaining and profitable players on *Hustler Casino Live* despite playing a style that makes solver purists wince. He calls too wide, bets too big, and shows up with hands that no algorithm would approve. And he wins, consistently, because the game conditions reward his approach: deep stacks, recreational players, and opponents who fold too often to pressure.

GTO, or Game Theory Optimal play, is the strategy that can't be exploited. Think of it as the defensive baseline, the safe play against strong opponents. But most opponents aren't strong. If the solver says to bluff 30% of the time on the river and your opponent calls 90% of river bets, the correct adjustment is to bluff 0% and value bet wider. That's exploitative play.

Use GTO as your default against unknowns and good regulars. Against recreational players with obvious leaks, deviate aggressively. Learn the theory first. Then learn when to break it.

THE PLAY

GTO keeps you safe against strong players. Exploitation makes you rich against weak ones.

94 THE LONG GAME: METAGAME ADJUSTMENT

Phil Galfond trailed Chance Kornuth for most of the first half of their Galfond Challenge heads-up match. Kornuth had found a winning formula and was pressing his advantage. But Galfond didn't panic. He studied Kornuth's tendencies between sessions, made small strategic tweaks, and waited for them to compound. Over weeks, the adjustments stacked up. Galfond flipped the match and won \$726,500.

The metagame is adjusting your strategy based on your opponent's perception of you. If you've been 3-betting aggressively for two sessions, your regular opponent starts 4-betting you light. Now you tighten your 3-bet range and trap with aces when they 4-bet. They adjust again. You re-adjust.

Against regulars you play with weekly, think one level ahead. They think you're bluffing too much, so you bet for value when they expect a bluff. The turning point in the Galfond Challenge wasn't a single hand. It was cumulative adaptation. The fastest adjuster wins the long game.

THE PLAY

Against regular opponents, the player who adapts fastest holds the edge.

95 BECOMING DANGEROUS IN EVERY GAME

Stephen Chidwick has won WSOP bracelets in \$25K and \$50K PLO events, made final tables in Seven Card Stud, Deuce-to-Seven, 8-Game, and H.O.R.S.E. Players at the Global Poker Awards voted him "Toughest Opponent" because he's elite across formats, not just one.

Specialization has value, but versatility multiplies your edge. Most players only know No-Limit Hold'em. That means mixed game events and PLO tables are filled with weaker competition. Learning even the basics of PLO, Seven Card Stud, or 2-7 Triple Draw gives you access to softer fields and more profitable seats.

At your local casino, if a \$5/\$10 PLO game is running with recreational players and the \$2/\$5 NLH game is packed with regulars, the PLO game might be more profitable even if your skills are weaker. The fish-to-shark ratio matters more than your comfort level.

Versatility opens doors that specialists never see.

THE PLAY

Learn more than one format. Softer fields and better profit margins are waiting outside Hold'em.

96 ACCEPTING VARIANCE

In November 2009, Viktor "Isildur1" Blom won \$6 million on Full Tilt Poker in three weeks. Then he lost \$3.3 million in a single day to Brian Hastings. He immediately reloaded \$200K and kept playing. Blom's career is the purest expression of variance in poker history: extreme swings driven by skill, aggression, and the mathematical reality of the game.

Variance is the gap between your expected results and your actual results over a short sample. Flip a coin ten times and you might get eight heads. That doesn't mean the coin is biased. Poker works the same way. You can play perfectly for a week and lose. Over 100,000 hands, skill dominates. Over 100, luck dominates.

Don't evaluate your play based on a single session or even a single month. Track results over at least 50,000 hands online or 500 hours live before drawing conclusions. Anything less is noise, not signal.

THE PLAY

Short-term results are random. Judge your play over tens of thousands of hands, not tens.

97

NASH EQUILIBRIUM IN PRACTICE

Poker author and satellite specialist Dara O'Kearney posed a quiz that baffled experienced players. On a satellite bubble, the correct reshove range is 'any ace and nothing else' because the chip leader can only profitably call with pocket aces. This means A-2 offsuit is a shove but K-K is a fold. It looks absurd. The math says otherwise.

Nash equilibrium is a strategy where neither player can improve by changing their approach. In push-or-fold spots with short stacks, Nash charts give you mathematically solved ranges. With 10 big blinds on the button, Nash says shove any pair, any ace, K-2 suited and better, K-5 offsuit and better, Q-7 suited and better, Q-9 offsuit and better, and more.

Free Nash charts are available online. Memorize ranges for 8, 10, 12, and 15 big blinds. When you're short-stacked, stop guessing and use the chart. Game theory sometimes produces results that feel wrong. Trust the numbers anyway.

THE PLAY

When the math says A-2 beats K-K in a specific spot, trust the math.

98

THE PLAYER WHO NEVER STOPS EVOLVING

Erik Seidel may have lost the 1988 WSOP Main Event to Johnny Chan in his first World Championship but he won the 2015 EPT Super High Roller at age 55. He won his tenth WSOP bracelet in 2023 at the age of 64. Across four decades, Seidel adapted through every era of the game. Tight-aggressive dominance, the online boom, the solver revolution. He survived them all because he never stopped studying.

Poker strategy changes every few years. In 2005, tight-aggressive was king. In 2010, three-betting light was the new edge. By 2015, solvers had changed everything. In 2020, small-sizing c-bets became standard. If you're still playing the same way you did five years ago, you're leaving money on the table.

Dedicate at least two hours per week to studying: training videos, solver review, strategy articles, or discussing spots with other players. The players who last decades are the ones who never stop being students. Talent gets you started. Commitment to improvement keeps you going.

THE PLAY

The game evolves constantly. The players who evolve with it are the ones still winning decades later.

99 THE HAND THAT BROKE THE INTERNET

In September 2022, Robbi Jade Lew called Garrett Adelstein's all-in shove on Hustler Casino Live with J♣4♥ on a T♥T♣9♣3♥ board. Adelstein held 8♣7♣, an open-ended straight flush draw with no made hand. Lew's jack-high was ahead. The internet erupted. Cheating accusations flew, investigations followed, and nothing was ever proven.

THE HAND

Lew



Adelstein



Board



Don't judge decisions by outcomes. A correct call with jack-high against a specific range is possible, if your opponent's bluffing frequency is high enough. A random call with jack-high is reckless. The difference is range analysis.

Don't make hero calls based on feelings. Build a case with logic, then commit.

AT THE TABLE

When you see a shocking result at the table, resist the urge to judge. Ask yourself whether the decision was correct given the information available? What value hands would play this way? How many bluffs are possible? If someone concludes their opponent bluffs more than 40% of the time, calling with any hand that beats bluffs can be mathematically correct, even jack-high.

THE PLAY

Don't judge a decision by its result. Judge it by the reasoning behind it.

100 POKER IS A LIFETIME GAME

Phil Ivey has won 11 WSOP bracelets, earned tens of millions in cash games, and held the respect of his peers as the greatest all-around player of his generation. He has also endured brutal losing stretches, legal battles, and the humbling reality that even the best player alive can't win every session.

There is no final level of poker mastery. The game is never 'solved' for any individual. Every session teaches something new, and the players who last aren't the most talented. They're the most committed to improving.

Start now. The next 100 plays are yours.

AT THE TABLE

Your study plan starts today. Play two to three sessions per week. Review your three to five biggest pots after each session. Watch one training video or read one strategy article per week. Discuss one interesting hand with a friend who plays. Track your results: hours played, buy-in, cash-out, and one sentence about your biggest mistake. Over a year, this adds up to hundreds of reviewed hands and a clear picture of your leaks.

THE PLAY

The biggest winning players aren't the most talented. They're the ones who never stop learning.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PAUL SEATON

Paul Seaton is Tight Poker's in house poker expert with more than a decade of experience covering the game. He has reported live from some of poker's biggest events, including the World Series of Poker, European Poker Tour and World Poker Tour.

A former Editor of *BLUFF Europe* and Head of Media at partypoker, Paul has also written for PokerNews, 888poker and PokerStake. During his career, he has interviewed some of the world's greatest poker players, including Daniel Negreanu, Erik Seidel and Phil Hellmuth.

His interview with all four members of the legendary Hendon Mob earned him a nomination for a Global Poker Award for Best Written Content.



LEVEL UP YOUR GAME.

The next 100 plays are yours. Keep studying, keep reviewing, and come back to tightpoker.com whenever you need a read, a ranking, or a reminder that the felt is supposed to be fun.

TIGHTPOKER.COM

For informational and educational purposes only. You must meet the legal gambling age in your jurisdiction to participate in real-money poker.